



**NGO Coalition  
of Liberia**



# **Six Prerequisites for a successful EU-Liberia Forest Partnership**



# Why a Voluntary Partnership Agreement and Forest Partnership are complementary

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) is a legally binding trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and timber-exporting countries.

Liberia signed its VPA with the EU in 2011 as it emerged from years of conflict where timber revenues fuelled war. The VPA, a key component of the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, was designed primarily as a governance reform tool, requiring Liberia to establish transparent timber tracking systems, reform forestry laws, and guarantee community rights and participation.

The VPA has resulted in a functioning traceability system to verify that all timber is produced in compliance with national laws. It also created space for multi-stakeholder participation in the forest sector, bringing together government, logging companies, civil society organisations (CSOs), and forest-dependent communities. Although Liberia is not yet issuing FLEGT licenses<sup>1</sup> this inclusive approach has created accountability in the forestry sector. Challenges remain around enforcement, corruption, and ensuring fair benefit-sharing with communities.

The VPA has **already improved transparency and accountability, promoted legal reforms and enforcement** (of the Community Rights Law and the Land Rights Act), and provided communities with both income (US\$4.3 million) and a stronger voice in forest governance.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding, in November 2024, the European Commission informed the Liberian government of its intention to unilaterally terminate the Liberia VPA. This cancellation would follow the unilateral termination of the EU-Cameroon VPA, a long,

damaging process which has not yet resulted in any guarantee of a Forest Partnership.

The NGO Coalition of Liberia - comprising CSOs working in the forest sector and representing forest-dependent communities and Indigenous Peoples - **strongly opposes any move by either the Government of Liberia or the EU to cancel the VPA.**

Cancellation would risk reversing critical gains achieved over the past decade. Moreover, the unilateral character of the cancellation may affect any further engagement in a partnership with the EU.

The VPA and the Forest Partnership should co-exist and be complimentary: the VPA addresses critical legality and trade aspects of forest governance, while **the Forest Partnership**, if well designed and participatory, **could broaden cooperation to address emerging priorities such as climate change, and ecosystem protection, as well as cover more commodities.**

## TRANSPARENCY AND SUPPORT FOR GOVERNANCE ARE EU COMMITMENTS TO PARTNER COUNTRIES.

Per the Samoa agreement (the overarching framework for EU relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) and the Strategic framework on the international cooperation engagement with third countries in relation to the EUDR, **consultation, transparency and governance must be central to the EU's engagement with partner countries.** Expectations from the European Parliament, outlined in a resolution published by the FLEGT rapporteur, stress both the importance of maintaining existing VPAs and safeguarding VPA principles of deliberation and inclusion.

<sup>1</sup> The certification required for timber exports to the EU under the VPA.

<sup>2</sup> See this overview for achievements of the VPA: [https://www.fern.org/fileadmin/uploads/fern/Documents/2025/Fern\\_How\\_the\\_Liberia-EU\\_Voluntary\\_Partnership\\_Agreement\\_has\\_improved\\_forest\\_governance\\_andLaw\\_enforcement\\_in\\_Liberia.pdf](https://www.fern.org/fileadmin/uploads/fern/Documents/2025/Fern_How_the_Liberia-EU_Voluntary_Partnership_Agreement_has_improved_forest_governance_andLaw_enforcement_in_Liberia.pdf)

# Liberian recommendations for a Forest Partnership

CSOs and communities have clear demands regarding both the process used to develop a Forest Partnership and its content. These demands were elaborated over the summer of 2025 through in-depth community consultations both in Monrovia and in Ganta, Nimba County and Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. Close to 100 community and civil society representatives participated in these discussions and informed these asks.



Participants of community consultations in Grand Bassa and Nimba, as well as of national CSO consultation in Monrovia

## 1. Inclusive and accountable governance

One of the key lessons from the VPA process is the indispensable role of multistakeholder processes in fostering transparency, legitimacy, and improved outcomes. **Civil society and communities expect the EU Forest Partnership to make full use of VPA forums to ensure participation of forest-dependent communities, local CSOs, and key government institutions.**

The EU must ensure this structure includes:

- ☐ A National Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Mechanism bringing together representatives from the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Bureau of Concessions (NBC), Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), Ministry of Mines and Energy, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA), the National Legislature, and civil society and community forestry bodies. This must also guarantee formal representation of women and marginalised groups.
- ☐ Clear and public rules of engagement and decision-making authority across all levels, with CSOs and community representatives holding voting rights and oversight roles in strategic decision-making forums.
- ☐ Guaranteed seats for CSOs and communities in the monitoring structures of the Forest Partnership—such as an equivalent of the Joint Implementation Committee under the VPA—to ensure inclusivity and continuous grassroots representation.
- ☐ Consultation of civil society and communities at every stage of drafting, revision, and validation of the Forest Partnership.

The EU should use the VPA multistakeholder forums to negotiate the Forest Partnership. This process should be facilitated through the National Multi-Stakeholders Monitoring Committee (NMSMC).

## 2. Legal coherence and enforcement

The Forest Partnership must:

- ☐ Build on and commit to Liberia's Land Rights Law and Regulations, especially customary land rights, as foundational to forest governance. These laws apply across land-based activities (timber, agriculture).
- ☐ Harmonise with existing instruments such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and carbon legal framework when the policy and legislation have been validated and approved and, or enacted.
- ☐ Include agriculture and mining by promoting legal reform, sustainable agricultural practices and inclusive land use planning that limits agricultural expansion and mining-induced deforestation and degradation.

## 3. Sustained and Inclusive Financing Mechanism for the Forest Partnership

The EU must establish a **transparent, predictable, and inclusive financing framework** with:

- ☐ Direct financial support for community forestry governance structures, which allows for effective benefit sharing, and ensures equitable access to income, with a particular focus on women and vulnerable community members.
- ☐ Support for traceability systems for timber and forest risk commodities. This includes continued support for Liberia's digital Wood Tracking System (developed under the VPA). It also includes support to build national digital traceability systems for other commodities, including cocoa, under the EUDR.
- ☐ Support for climate finance initiatives, in priority those which are not market based. These should only be supported if they enshrine Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), equity in benefit sharing and local ownership.
- ☐ Continued support to civil society given its key role for monitoring, accountability and community capacity building.

To ensure long-term viability, funding should be governed through a new Forest Governance Trust Fund jointly managed by government, civil society, and development partners. Donors and Government of Liberia would contribute. This fund should finance priority areas such as Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM), legal reform implementation, and community land rights support.

## 4. Strong Monitoring and Accountability

Drawing on the VPA experience, civil society stresses the need for **independent, transparent, and enforceable accountability mechanisms**. The Forest Partnership must therefore:

- ☐ Ensure IFM—led by civil society—is mandatory and well-resourced, given its necessity for improving accountability and exposing violations.
- ☐ Support independent third-party monitoring of Forest Partnership implementation, led by civil society, with a formal mandate to report to both the EU and the Government of Liberia. Monitoring should be gender-sensitive, with clear indicators to track participation, benefits, and outcomes for women and marginalised groups.

- ☐ Support national community-based grievance redress mechanisms to guarantee that forest communities have accessible channels to report illegalities in their supply chains.
- ☐ Introduce governance performance indicators and compliance benchmarks, reviewed publicly and annually.
- ☐ Ensure all EU-supported projects and activities are independently evaluated, with findings shared publicly and linked to corrective actions.

**Transparency and anti-corruption measures must be non-negotiable**, including public access to community benefit-sharing agreements, logging contracts, and carbon financing arrangements in consideration of community customary ownership and FPIC.

## 5. Capacity Building for all Stakeholders

The EU must invest in systematic and long-term capacity building for:

- ☐ Government institutions (FDA, EPA, MOJ, MFDP, LLA): enforcement, interagency collaboration, legal compliance, and policy integration. This is foreseen in the Strategic Framework and Article 3 of the EUDR.
- ☐ Civil society and NGOs: legal analysis, forest and land monitoring, gender-sensitive advocacy, traceability systems
- ☐ Community-based structures: forest management, participatory land use planning, contract negotiation, and benefit-sharing.

Capacity-building initiatives must actively promote inclusion—ensuring women, youth, and marginalised groups are front and centre—and must link to existing local management bodies.

## 6. Full-Government Engagement and Policy Coherence

To avoid fragmentation, the Partnership must be a “whole-of-government” effort. Civil society and communities expect the EU and Liberia to:

- ☐ Secure high-level political commitment and cross-sectoral engagement including both the House of Senate and Representatives Committees on (1) Lands, Natural Resources and Environment and (2) Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
- ☐ Involve line ministries responsible for agriculture, mining, climate, finance, justice, and land to align policies, avoid conflicts, and jointly promote forest conservation and community resilience.
- ☐ Ensure that land use planning integrates mining and agricultural expansion, with emphasis on preventing deforestation and safeguarding community tenure.
- ☐ Align activities with Liberia’s national frameworks on gender equality, youth empowerment, and social inclusion, ensuring interventions are socially responsive and do not reinforce existing inequalities
- ☐ Build on and promote donor coordination among the EU, UK, and USA to inform funding decisions and ensure value for money.

The partnership should also be interlinked with national development strategies and climate goals to reinforce its legitimacy and enhance its developmental impact.

# Conclusion

Civil society and communities in Liberia are alarmed that the VPA may be unilaterally cancelled. Following in-depth consultations with rural communities across Liberia, they demands that the Forest Partnership:

- ✓ Maintains and **build on the VPA's inclusive and accountable governance structures**.
- ✓ Continues to support **legal coherence and enforcement** for the whole forest sector.
- ✓ Guarantees continued **long-term and inclusive financing**.
- ✓ Maintains a **strong monitoring and accountability** framework, including through IFM.
- ✓ Provides tailored **capacity-building** to all actors.
- ✓ Ensures cross-sector policy coherence and **full government participation**.

**These prerequisites are fundamental for a Forest Partnership's success.**

Cancelling the VPA without a robust EU Forest Partnership would **undo years of hard-won progress protecting Liberian forests**. Conversely, if these criteria are met, the EU-Liberia Forest Partnership can become a **flagship model for sustainability, equity, and partnership between producer countries and the EU**.