

- ² globalwitness.org/reports/show.php/en.00026.html
- ³ Ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/354/44/IMG/N0435444.pdf?OpenElement
- ⁴ An EU-funded project operated by Fauna and Flora International and Conservation International in conjunction with the FDA.

PILOTING COMMUNAL FORESTS IN LIBERIA IN THE POST-CONFLICT PERIOD

By Jamison Suter

After the recent period of conflict in Liberia, aspects of which are discussed in other papers in this issue (Richards, page 29, Blundell, page 32 and Melnyk et al, page 17), with President Taylor's departure to Nigeria and the arrival of largely Nigerian peacekeepers in August 2003, the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history started in October 2003. Soon thereafter a National Transitional Government took power, the Constitution was suspended for two years and positions in Government were divided among LURD, MODEL, Taylor's supporters and 'Liberian civil society'.

Many development and diplomatic agencies sent in representatives and conducted assessments on the country's reconstruction needs. All of these acknowledged the role of the forest sector in fueling national and regional instability, as well as the sector's potential in providing jobs and funding reconstruction, directly and indirectly (for example infrastructural improvements funded by timber companies improving the national transportation network and port operations).

While the commercial aspects of Liberia's forest sector were frequently highlighted, the community- and conservation-related aspects received much less attention. However, reform of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) was regularly cited as key to meeting the UN Security Council (UNSC) criteria for lifting timber sanctions, even though officially these are limited to the Government regaining control of the timber-producing regions and ensuring that all revenues from the sector are properly managed and used as intended by Liberian law and regulations, and for the benefit of the Liberian public. In response, the FDA prepared a Road Map to Lifting UNSC Sanction[s] on Log and Timber Trade in Liberia: Basic Reforms in the Forestry Industry, which outlined that in addition to reviewing past and all existing concessions and reforming financial management, the country must balance the FDA Managing Director's "three Cs" of forest management: Commercial, Community and Conservation objectives. This has formed the basis for Fauna and Flora International's (FFI's) interventions in Liberia since 2004.

Two of the three Cs have legal and empirical precedents in Liberia, but management of forests by Communities has not yet been pursued by Government. Looking to the future, FFI and the FDA will pilot establishing communal forests (CFs), specifically in the forests and with the villages surrounding Sapo National Park.

The Act for the Creation of a Protected Forest Area Network (October 2003) defines a communal forest as an "Area set aside temporarily by regulation or legally [deeded to communities] for sustainable use of forest products by local communities on a non-commercial basis. No prospecting,

mining, settlement, farming or commercial timber extraction [is permitted]. Other uses [are] regulated by [the] designated local community with assistance from the relevant government authority.”

From this definition, the principal objective of a CF appears to be for communities to use forest products sustainably and on a non-commercial basis in order to improve rural living standards and income, while decreasing vulnerability to crises. However, communal forests contribute to additional objectives. Establishing CFs around the Park should secure a forested buffer zone in perpetuity, and will be integral to maintaining forest connectivity between Sapou Park and other proposed protected areas in south-east Liberia.

Current development models pursued by Government and many INGOs in Liberia view forests as symbolic of a lack of development. By piloting CFs and closely evaluating the results, this initiative will develop and promote nationally an alternative development model that values forest resources in rural communities' economies as a critical component of rural subsistence, income-generation and risk-reduction strategies.

Finally, CFs are intended to improve governance in Liberia. They should render a portion of Liberia's forests off-limits to the Monrovia-based elite that traditionally has hardly considered rural villages' interests or rights in forest management. This should decrease the incentive to both this elite and rebel groups to seek control of these areas for private ends. Removing thus one of the 'prizes' of political office or rebel activity would improve long-term civil stability, improve rural Liberians' welfare and decrease the

discontent that can feed civil conflict.

Future challenges

As the communal forests pilot project begins in Liberia, many major challenges can be predicted, four of which are highlighted below.

- 1 By creating communal forests, Liberia would take forests out of commercial timber production. CFs would represent a revolutionary presence if widely replicated, seriously challenging almost 160 years of Monrovia-centered governance. Thus its acceptance by the current elite will likely be a struggle, especially after the incentive of lifting sanctions is removed.
- 2 Successful communal forests will depend upon, among other things, vastly improved governance and a reliable court system. Can CFs be established without comprehensively addressing the overarching problems of weak governance and deeply rooted poverty?
- 3 Successful establishment of CFs requires that the basic institutional unit – the 'community' – be a clearly defined, functional entity or grouping. However, traditional authority structures are weakened after nearly 15 years of civil instability. Can they be relied on, especially in a context of such fluid demographics?
- 4 Four different agendas are to be pursued through the communal forest mechanism: (i) securing rural Liberians' rights to forest resources and improving their livelihoods and livelihood security, (ii) conserving biological diversity, (iii) elaborating a new development model fully valuing forest resources, and (iv) reforming and strengthening governance nationally. While all four objectives may currently be met via CFs, in time these agendas will inevitably diverge. When this happens, different stakeholders will pull in different directions for CFs to favour their agenda. For example,

once communities are confident of their formal ownership of a CF, they could exert pressure for the forest to be used mostly for income-generation (cash crop production, timber sales, NTFP and bushmeat export) in a manner that might compromise its biodiversity conservation function or would require a liberal re-interpretation of the phrase “on a non-commercial basis” from a CF’s legal definition. Also, CFs could become highly politicised if they end up playing a large role in changing the governance and balance-of-power landscape in Liberia.

References and further reading on request from jamison.suter@fauna-flora.org

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THE CAUSES OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN FOREST REGIONS

By Jean-Richard Mutombo

For several decades, armed conflicts have menaced stability and natural resources in a number of African countries. Each African country has been torn apart by different armed conflicts. In this context it is difficult to establish a uniform model that explains the causes and consequences of what is referred to as ‘the new wars’. We will speak of the conflicts in the Democratic Republic

of Congo, a country where the forest constitutes the ‘second lung of the world’, after the Amazon. The causes of this conflict include:

1 The unequal allocation of lands (in the neighbouring countries)

Land problems are severe in Congo’s small neighboring countries, most notably in Rwanda and Burundi. Due to this, these two states wage a merciless war against the Republic of Congo. They do so under the pretexts of protecting the Rwandan speakers and hunting down those responsible for the genocide. These neighbours cross the Congolese border in order to take control of pastures and arable lands. Armed conflicts arise between native populations and the intruders in the eastern regions of the country; areas which are celebrated for their diversity.

2 Other, well known causes

These deal with the illegal extraction of raw materials (COLTAN and diamonds); instability, acuteness of poverty and its consequences: housing and food supply crises, and the weakening of local power.

The impacts of armed conflicts and post-conflict situations on the forest-dwellers

General consequences of armed conflict are the following: disruption of democracy, economic activities, agricultural production and trade; increased dependence on natural resources; a plethora of circulating weapons, massive population movements, raised taxes, drop in financing.....

The negative impacts of the conflicts on the environment are:

- Invasion of protected areas and the destruction of habitats,