Proposed Addendum to the ITTO Project Document

Prepared by the
Forestry Development Authority
and Fauna & Flora International

Since the proposal was written and submitted, a number of potential changes to the site and certification system have arisen, although the activities and objectives remain the same. Two changes are proposed:

1) Location of demonstration site

In the proposal, the two demonstration sites were named as Tarjuowon, in the southeast of Liberia, and Wonegizi, in the northwest. However, FFI and FDA were informed in December 2012 by the Superintendent of Sinoe County, that Tarjowon was no longer available for REDD but instead would be developed as a logging concession and for oil palm concession. These events highlight the extreme difficulties of developing REDD in an area where both logging and oil palm companies are actively lobbying local government for their land and promising significantly greater short term benefits.

As a result, FFI and FDA began the process of selecting a replacement demonstration site using a formal selection criteria framework validated following multi-stakeholder consultations. Site selection followed a structured process: Shortlisted potential demonstration sites were assessed following a baseline literature review and key stakeholder interviews, application of the project screening tool (developed through the selection criteria) in both Monrovia and via field visits, data collation, analysis and discussions. Following extensive stakeholder consultations at the national, regional and local levels and scoping visits to shortlisted sites, Mount Wakorlor Forest was selected as a suitable site to pilot REDD in Liberia.

Mount Wakorlor, located in the Lake Piso Multiple Use Reserve (LPMUR), is the highest point of LPMUR at 322m, and extends all the way down sea-level, where it meets the Atlantic Ocean (SW). Covered primarily by closed canopy forest, the total area of the Mount Wakorlor forest is yet to be confirmed through satellite imagery, although estimates put it at between 2,500-3,500ha. It is known that some selective logging has occurred, and the edges of the forest are being eaten away through clearance for farming. As a result there are also some areas of tall, mature secondary and low, newly regenerating forest previously cleared for shifting cultivation but allowed to regenerate. The entire forest is covered by land titles (deeds) from two towns-Tolsor and Sembehun, meaning that none of the forest is state owned and ensuring residents of these two towns have clear land and resource rights to the area.

Mount Wakorlor forest is known to be under significant threat, both substantial and current.

Large trees of particular species are especially under threat from the production of traditional canoes, with up to 3 large trees being destroyed to produce one 3-5m canoe. Producers of sawn planks (produced by 'pit-sawing inside the forest) also target large trees. Other pressures include further need of forested land for shifting cultivation (subsistence) and wood for the production of charcoal and firewood for drying fish, an important commercial use of the forest. Trapping and hunting (with guns) also appears to be a significant threat to biodiversity in the forest. Local people report that elephants, leopards and pygmy hippopotami used to be present but have been extirpated. Chimpanzees persist on the mountain but at unknown density or population – meaning the viable of the population is also not confirmed. Other wildlife identified during scoping visits includes mongoose, monkeys (including possible sighting of lesser spot-nosed monkey), Nile monitor lizards, birds, frogs and unconfirmed (local) records of snakes and mammalian carnivores.

The quantity of carbon within this forest, the demonstrable threats, the land rights held by the community rather than the government, and the strong relationship developed over 15 years of FFI and partner presence in the region contributed to the final selection of this site. Added value to working in this area includes an existing collaboration between neighbouring communities with respect of forest boundary, smoothing the path with the development of management plans, benefit sharing mechanisms and grievance redress /conflict resolution.

Four community meetings were held on the, 25th, 26th and 30th of January and the 1st of February. The purpose of the community meetings were manifold: to increase familiarity with the area, to introduce the concept of REDD, to explore community interest in participating and to begin the process of Free and Prior Informed Consent. A forest visit was also hosted by the community, enabling project staff to assess use, threats, quality of forest and diversity of wildlife or animals present in the forest. In attendance were FFI, FDA, Community Members and a representative from the local NGO Farmers Associated to Conserve the Environment (FACE). The community are enthusiastic about the support being offered to sustainably use their forest, and interested to explore alternative management approaches through REDD. An MOU for continuing to work together is currently being developed in partnership with the FDA and the communities.

2) Certification systems

The project focuses on the development of two REDD demonstration sites in Liberia, intended to build local capacity, increase understanding of REDD and share lessons learned to inform REDD strategy formulation at national, regional and international levels. To achieve this, an agreed activity is the facilitation of project development plans for both sites based on emerging best practices. In our proposal, these were suggested to be the Climate Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) standards and Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS).

However, a new standard known as Plan Vivo has emerged, specifically aimed at community-based payments for PES programmes projects (www.planvivo.org). Plan Vivo is in the process of establishing a REDD framework specifically for developing and managing community-based land-use projects with long-term carbon, livelihood and ecosystem benefits. Support is provided throughout the process, from PIN, PDD, validation, registration and to the issuance of Plan Vivo certificates. Each certificate represents the reduction or avoidance of one tonne of carbon dioxide. All certificates are registered in the Market Environmental Registry, with certificate supply matched to buyer demand. With an estimated 350,000 certifications marketed in 2012, Plan Vivo aim at a premium quality credit with a buyer who is interested in the ethical background to carbon sales, rather than a straight carbon offset, with the majority of previous buyers from the CSR sector.

Following extensive internal and external discussion, 15 years' experience working on Liberian forest governance issues and 3 years of direct experience developing REDD demonstration sites, clear advantages have emerged to developing the Liberia community REDD demonstration sites through the Plan Vivo approach and standards, rather than focused on VCA and CCBA. While there is a high level of overlap between the different standards in terms of establishing best practice, PV suits the Liberian situation well in a number of ways: the standard was designed with community led programmes in mind with a central objective to generate and channel the maximum possible benefits to communities. As a result, PV adopts a different treatment of uncertainty to VCS, whereby 95% certainty is not a requirement. This lead to less risk of over-conservative or under valuation of emissions reductions, particularly attractive in community-REDD where areas tend to be small and monitoring requirements for a 95% certainty VCS-standard project will be technically complex and costly. We therefore request that a no objection be granted to developing both pilot sites under Plan Vivo.

Yours sincerely,

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