



**Development of a Landmark  
Land Use and Management Framework  
for Liberia**

Conference Paper

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AFRICA**

Winning the fight against Corruption in the Land  
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Transformation

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## ACRONYMS

ALPC	African Land Policy Centre
CNDRA	Center for National Documents, Records and Arc
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LRA	Land Rights Act
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Liberia is among the currently fast thriving democracies in West Africa, and seeks to build a resilient country based on inclusive growth and social justice. Despite the gains, much still needs to be done to ensure a good quality of life for the citizens. This need has been identified in the Vision 2030 document, which aims to make Liberia a middle-income county by 2030. To achieve this, the country will need an annual consistent GDP growth of 9 percent for a sustained period. Quite clearly, this is an ambitious target that will require significant economic activity to meet.

Consistent investments in agriculture and industry will be needed to generate jobs and reduce poverty for a growing population. In 2008, the population of Liberia was 3.5 million. This is projected to reach 6.6 million by 2038. Currently about 42 percent of the 4.6 million population is below the age of 15. This also means investment in social services such as education, health and sanitation to cater for the needs of the population, particularly the youth cohort who need an education that delivers knowledge and skills to prepare them for the 21st century.

With the urgent need for industrial investment, natural resource exploitation and social service provision, there will also be competing demand for land for the various uses – industrial, commercial, residential, recreational, etc. Liberia has a total land area of 111,369 km<sup>2</sup>, 45 percent of which is forest. The challenges of how much land will be available for industrial development; how much can be allocated for commercial use; appropriate locations for settlement; the processes for demarcating communal, commercial or residential land; etc. are needed to ensure the optimal use of land for various purposes. This underscores the imperative for a Landmark Land Use and Management Framework. The framework document will establish a clear roadmap and recommend processes to National Land Use Planning. Many African countries such as Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa have undertaken land use planning. Liberia can benefit by way of lessons learnt in this regard.

In the past, there have been attempts at developing a land use and management agenda. However, these have been either municipal based (the City of Monrovia Land Use Amendment for example) or sectoral (such as the FDA's Liberia Land Cover and Forest Mapping). These instruments by reason of their limited scope and lack of coordination have proved largely inadequate in conceptualizing a planned, optimal land use agenda in Liberia.

In recognition of this, the country's legislation passed the Liberia Land Authority Act creating a central authority, which is vested with the power to manage all matters relating to land including spatial planning, supervision, resolution of land disputes etc. The Authority has developed a Landmark Land Use and Management Framework, and is now seeking to develop a comprehensive land use policy in accordance with its mandate. The policy will consolidate laws such as the Forestry Reform Law, Land Rights Act, and National Gender Policy among others, and harmonize into one plan of action for land use planning and management. This calls for enhancements of the Authority's human resource, physical and financial capacities to carry out the task effectively and efficiently.

The framework document prescribes the procedures for developing a land use policy for Liberia. A three phased process is recommended; the first phase being the development of a national land use and management policy, establishment of relevant institutions, capacity building of personnel, awareness creation and information dissemination, while phase two consists the development of a National Spatial Development Framework, County Spatial Development Framework, District Spatial Development Frameworks, Structure Plans and Phase Three, which involves the development of Local Plans for Cities and towns within districts.

With this strategic approach, the Liberia Land Authority can complete the process of developing an approach to manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Liberia's long-term economic, environmental and social goals

## **INTRODUCTION**

In October 2016 the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) was legislated as the Nation's first one-stop-shop for land management and administration. The LLA has the statutory mandate to administer land administration, and land use planning and management across the nation. The Authority is charged with supporting the development of a National Land Use and Management Agenda. LLA began the process with the development of a National Land Use and Management Framework, a holistic roadmap to Land Use and Management Planning.

The framework document was developed in response to the need for a framework to guide the development of national land use and management policy; which will guide land use planning in Liberia. The project was jointly implemented by LLA, which has the legal mandate for land administration in Liberia, and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The primary purpose of the land use planning framework document is that it provides the roadmap that outlines feasible, actionable steps toward more integrated multi-sectoral planning processes and a more systematic and harmonized system that regulates land use in Liberia.

This is intended to ensure the sustainable use of land, ensure clear and transparent processes, and facilitate integrated and informed decision-making, while conserving the country's natural resource base. The findings, conclusions and recommendations are also expected to encourage the government, development partners and other stakeholders to effectively balance competing economic, environmental and social demands on land.

This paper presents the process LLA implemented to develop the Landmark Land Use and Management Framework, outlines the components of this roadmap, and presents the progress towards the development of the National Land Use and Management Policy, and other regulatory instruments to advance land planning in Liberia.

This advancement of this Policy is especially poignant with the passage of Liberia's Landmark Land Rights Legislation, which advocates for the development of land management plans for all customary communities nationwide. A national vision is necessary to guide these plans, particularly as the issues of land use planning are novel concepts to many in Liberia.

## **THEMATIC FOCUS**

The project is incorporated in the Planning, monitoring and evaluation: Challenges, opportunities and emerging best practices in developing and implementing land policies (rural and urban); theme of the 2019 Conference on Land Policy in Africa, with a specific focus on national land use and management policy development.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Currently, the country does not have a Land Use Policy. People in Liberia have been using land in an unplanned and uncontrolled fashion, without due regard to the land's best potential use and without due consideration for conservation of natural resources and safeguarding the environment. Today's rapid growth in population and economic activity is placing unprecedented pressure on Liberia's landscape. Oil exploration, forestry and mining, agriculture and recreation, housing and infrastructure are all in competition to use the land. This accelerated change is occurring without consideration to the potential of the land and without the guidance of a land use policy.

Consequently, important wetland ecosystems, high potential arable lands, grasslands and forest areas have been converted to urban centers and industrial sites with undesirable environmental and social consequences. If the current situation of unguided and unbridled land use continues, the nation's natural resources will be destroyed beyond repair with untold social and economic consequences.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Framework development process included:

- Desk research and review of legislative documents
- Regional field visits to three of Liberia's fifteen counties: Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba Counties to initially scope and conduct consultations with local stakeholders,
- Interviews with opinion leaders and other relevant focus groups,
- National consultation in Montserrado County, the nation's capital.

This was followed by analysis of the data. The final phase included evaluation, report writing, conduct of a lessons learnt workshop and recommendations and next steps to implement the initiatives outlined in the framework.

The Framework focused on:

- The development of a blueprint for a collaborative and transparent process for crafting a comprehensive national land use plan,
- Development of a consensus at the national level, particularly among the natural resource agencies (FDA; Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy; Ministry of Agriculture; the Land Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency, among others) on the relative importance of a variety of often-conflicting goals that have been expressed in national legislation and policy

- Creating links between highway and road planning and land use planning is a key action to be addressed in the Land Use Framework
- Prevention of gender discrimination, especially among female farmers or land owners
- Creating a precise delineation of the boundaries for previously granted concessions vs. customary land ownership. The recent creation of the National Concession Portal is an important step in this direction
- Providing for more rigorous and precise definition of boundaries and rights for any new concessions granted, and more complete requirements for the participation of local communities before the concessions are granted
- Clarification of land rights for those in informal settlements, especially in urban areas, in order to create a sense of stability for families housed there, and to encourage private investment in creating new housing to ease overcrowding and unsanitary conditions and investment by local businesses to create more economic value for the government and provide important employment and goods and services for local populations
- Adoption of clear procedures and regulations to govern the exercise of eminent domain so that the national government can proceed with the development of additional needed infrastructure
- The need to create a national land use plan, as was called for in the Environment Protection and Management Law of 2002, Section 87.

### **FINDINGS FROM THE LAND USE PLANNING FRAMEWORK CONSULTATIVE PROCESS**

Developing the Land Use Planning Framework involved consultative sessions with key stakeholders in chosen counties representative of the general land use pattern of Liberia. The sessions were held to understand, first hand, the concerns and suggestions of various land user groups in Liberia as well as their input into what they consider a workable land use planning framework for the country. Consultation sessions were held in Montserrado County, Nimba County, and Grand Cape Mount County. There was a good attendance at each site, with attendance ranging from 25-35 persons per session, with an excellent cross-section of stakeholders represented, including: county superintendents, mayors, surveyors, county land officers, environmental and agricultural agency employees and representatives from youth and women's groups.

At each meeting, the consultant staff explained the nature of the assignment from the Liberian Land Authority, and then asked for input from the audience, stressing that the LLA was interested in reaching beyond Monrovia in the planning process, and taking on views from people at the municipal and county levels. There was a remarkable degree of consistency in the concerns, observations and suggestions expressed with respect to a possible land use framework.

#### Key conclusions from Stakeholder Consultation Process:

- There is a strong interest in greater communication between the LLA and local/regional governments as the Authority continues to devolve responsibility for land use planning and regulation to the local governments.
- Representatives at each location recognized a serious need for capacity-building at the local level, if they are to assume a more direct role in land use planning and management. This includes training programs on topics like blueprint and plan reading, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drafting, building inspection, etc., plus more intensive education for a smaller group in urban planning and engineering. In addition, local government officials were very concerned about lacking essential equipment such as computers, transportation vehicles and office space to help them carry out land use control activities.
- There is also broad consensus on the need for an extensive public education process regarding the land use planning and control process, so that the public understands who is responsible for the various components of the land use system. A critical aspect of such a campaign was felt to be convincing the public of the value to the society from better land use control, including the importance of obtaining the appropriate permits before beginning construction and the need to obey enforcement actions such as stop work orders.
- Many concerns were expressed about the state of land ownership documents, with participants extremely critical of the National Archives (CNDRA) and the difficulty, length of time and expense of obtaining deeds. Many participants felt that land documents are being falsified. There seems to be clear need for the LLA to establish a GPS-based cadastral survey system connected with access to the recordation of deeds, so that ownership of individual properties is clear.
- Participants were frustrated by property owners who are holding on to large tracts of land that they show no apparent intent to develop. This particularly appears to be a problem with holders of customary land. Suggestions for dealing with this land vacancy problem included limiting the total amount of land that could be granted or raising property taxes on vacant land.
- There was an explicit recognition of the importance of competent and efficient land use administration and enforcement, given that failures in this area would substantially undermine the promise of improved land use planning. There was disagreement about the adequacy of current regulations to permit enforcement, with some participants pointing to the need to seek action from the Ministry of Justice to bring violators to court, which is apparently a very lengthy process and does not necessarily provide a guaranteed satisfactory result. Others claimed that officials have sufficient legal justification but are reluctant to exercise their powers.
- Participants felt that there was discrimination against women in terms of land ownership, with women often being denied use rights in the case of customary land.

- There is a perception at the local level that certain decisions which have a significant impact on towns and counties, particularly mining concessions, are made in Monrovia without sufficient consultation with local authorities.

Overall, there seemed to be an eagerness to participate more fully in the land use process at the local level, and a desire to work with the LLA on the transition process.

## **ROAD MAP FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND USE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT REFORM**

The framework document is a roadmap for developing a land use planning and management agenda for Liberia. A three phased process is recommended:

- 1) Phase I-Development of a national land use planning and management policy, establishment of relevant institutions, capacity building of personnel, awareness creation and information dissemination;
- 2) Phase II-Development of a National Spatial Development Framework, County Spatial Development Frameworks, District Spatial Development Frameworks, Structure Plans;
- 3) Phase III- Development of Local Plans for cities, towns, customary communities

## **PROGRESS TOWARDS NATIONAL LAND USE PLANNING**

Following the completion of the Framework, LLA has embarked on several projects as outlined in the recommendations:

- TOR for the development of a National Land Use and Management Policy
- Pilot Participatory Land Use Planning in Foya, Lofa County, Rural Liberia
- Pilot Participatory Land Use Planning in rural Sinoe County
- Development of County Spatial Development Strategy in Sinoe County

These projects were developed to test planning methodologies and inform the development of a National Land Use and Management Policy, which will further guide the reform agenda.

## **CONCLUSION**

A Land Use and Management Framework for Liberia outlines an approach and guides policy to manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Liberia's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. It should also provide a blueprint for decision-making that addresses growth pressures, and spatial development plans at the national and local levels.

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