



**Participatory Land Use Planning for
Equitable and Inclusive Development in
Rural Customary Communities**

Case Study from Liberia

Conference Paper

**2019 CONFERENCE ON LAND POLICY IN
AFRICA**

Winning the fight against Corruption in the Land
Sector: Sustainable Pathway for Africa's
Transformation

Authors:

Hon. Ellen O. Pratt

Commissioner for Land Use and Management

Hagi Sheriff

GIS Officer

Ethan Miller

IDH Consultant

LIBERIA LAND AUTHORITY

Clay Building| Sekou Toure Avenue
Monrovia, Liberia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	2
THEMATIC FOCUS	2
POLICY IMPLICATIONS.....	3
METHODOLOGY.....	3
PROJECT SITE.....	4
METHODS.....	5
LAND USE PLANNING PROCESS	6
DATA COLLECTION	8
DATA ANALYSIS	9
FINDINGS	9
LAND USE PLANNING TEMPLATE.....	10
CONCLUSION	11
REFERENCES	13

ACRONYMS

ALPC	African Land Policy Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organization
IDH	The Sustainable Trade Initiative
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LISGIS	Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LRA	Land Rights Act
PLUP	Participatory Land Use Planning

INTRODUCTION

In September 2018, after years of advocacy, negotiation, and research from many stakeholders, the President of Liberia approved the Land Rights Act (LRA), following passage into law by the National Legislature. The law, which became effective on October 10, 2018 upon publication, provides for the formal recognition of all customary land and heralds in a new era in which community land rights are afforded equal protection to private land rights (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia, 2018). One tenet of the LRA, as explicated in Article 35, Section 1.e, is the need for land use and management planning to occur in every community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia, 2018). Numerous other reports and studies have highlighted the need for participatory land use planning in Liberia as a necessary precursor to sustainable investments, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability (FCPF & UN-REDD, 2012; NIBIO, NFG, & ICRAF, 2016; The World Bank, 2010). However, as with many such reforms, implementing such a large-scale effort can be extremely complex and daunting for a government agency to manage; especially one that is still in its formative stages.

The Liberia Land Authority (LLA), the agency tasked with implementing the LRA, and IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), embarked on a pilot process in Foya District of Lofa County, in Northwest Liberia, to understand the opportunities and challenges of participatory, bottom-up land use planning in Liberia. This initiative aims to clarify the insights around the implementation of participatory, bottom-up land use planning as a new process of land reform in Liberia.

While participatory land use planning has been implemented in other African nations (IFAD, 2014; Resources, 2017; Ujamaa Community Resource Team, 2010), many countries still do not have adequate institutions, capacity, and legal frameworks for such interventions. In Liberia, the legal framework has been addressed through the LRA, however institutions and internal capacity for implementing the act remain weak (The World Bank, 2017). This project serves as a case study, especially for other African nations undergoing land tenure reform and land use planning, through which lessons can be learned from practical implementation experience.

The first of its kind in Liberia, this project tests methodologies for bottom-up land use planning and multi-sectoral coordination in the land sector at the clan and district levels. By analyzing the successes and challenges of this process, we offer insights that can be used to inform tenure reform processes and methods occurring elsewhere.

THEMATIC FOCUS

The project is incorporated in the Rapid urbanization, sustainable land use and spatial planning, taxation and development control theme of the 2019 Conference on Land Policy in Africa, with a specific focus on land use and management planning and development controls.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Experts link poor governance of natural resources, including land, to the factors that contributed to the Liberian Civil War. For example, Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (IMF, 2008) states:

The origins of the conflict can be traced to two broad factors. First, significant portions of society were systematically excluded and marginalized from institutions of political governance and access to key economic assets... In the early days, land and property rights of most Liberians were severely limited.

The Government of Liberia's efforts to reform land tenure gained significant momentum in 2013 with the adoption of Liberia's first Land Rights Policy (Land Commission, 2013). The Policy established four land rights categories including Government Land, Public Land, Private Land and Customary Land.

With regards to the land ownership rights of communities with customary land, the Policy states:

The Government recognizes and protects the land rights of communities, groups, families, and individuals who own, use, and manage their land in accordance with customary practices and norms, equal to Private Land Rights.

Moreover, Article 35, Section 1.e of the Land Rights Act, the legal framework established to implement the Policy, requires every customary community to "develop a land use management plan", as a component of the formalization process of securing customary land rights.

Further, the Act gives the Liberia Land Authority the authority to develop regulations and guidelines for the effective implementation of the Act. The LLA, as a product of the institutional restructuring of the land sector, was established by an Act of Legislature on October 5, 2016 with a primary mandate to "develop policies on a continuous basis, undertake actions and implement programs in support of land governance, including land administration and management". Among several functions and responsibilities, the LLA is "promote, support and ensure the development of land use plans and zoning schemes and their implementation through municipalities, towns and other local government structures", and to "to hold and manage all unallocated Public Land on behalf of the Liberian people".

METHODOLOGY

The land use planning process followed a participatory approach, incorporating top-down perspectives into a largely bottom-up process. The land use planning methods outlined below were carried out with expert technical assistance from a consultant firm, Meta Meta Research, with IDH and the LLA providing field data and analysis towards the planning process. The process was implemented between November 2018 and April 2019. This paper discusses the opportunities and challenges of the land use planning method and illustrates the template developed to assist in providing a streamlined,

consistent standard for development and land use management planning for rural customary communities.

PROJECT SITE

The project site was Foya District in Lofa County, Liberia. Foya is in the Northwest corner of the Liberia, bordering Sierra Leone and Guinea. As such, it is a main thoroughfare for trade and movement between the three countries.

According to the 2008 population census, there were 71,364 people living in Foya District (LISGIS, 2008). The district is comprised of a mosaic of grasslands, secondary seasonal tropical forest, and agriculture land. A previous study found that more than half of the total land area of 57,000 ha in Foya District is covered by the grasslands (NICFI, 2016). The district is about 440 meters above sea level, has an average annual temperature of 24 to 30 degrees Celsius and has an average rainfall of 2,931 mm (IDH & LNIC, 2018).

Foya District is a Statutory District, as such it is governed through the statutory administration by the District Superintendent and District Commissioner, and their respective offices. Concurrently, the district also has a customary administration system in which the Paramount Chief oversees the Kissi Chiefdom (which aligns with the district boundaries), the chiefdom includes three clans: Wuam, Rankollie, and Tengia, and each clan has Sectional, Zonal, and Town Chiefs. Each clan is divided into sub-clans. Wuam has Upper and Lower Wuam, Rankollie has Upper, Central, and Lower Rankollie, and Tengia has Upper and Lower Tengia.

Agriculture in Foya is dominated by shifting cultivation, mainly for upland rice farming. In addition to upland rice, other crops include oil palm, cassava, fruits and vegetables, cocoa, and coffee (NICFI, 2016). The area was the productive rice and cereal producing zone of Liberia before the war. However, now it is largely subsistence-oriented or linked to informal local and regional trade.

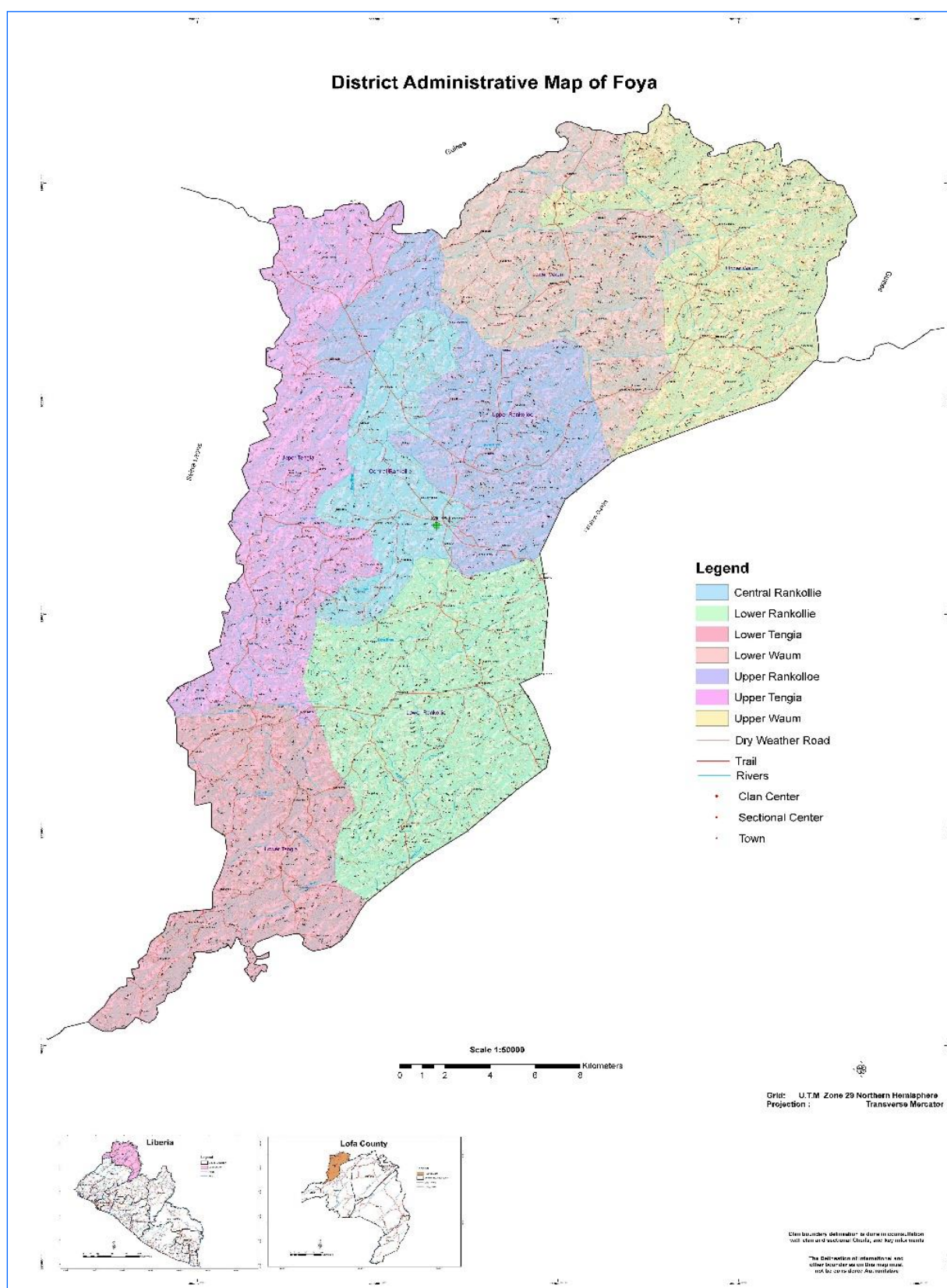


Figure 1.0 - District Administrative Map of Foya, Lofa County

METHODS

The land use planning process followed a participatory approach, incorporating top-down perspectives into a largely bottom-up process. The land use planning methods outlined below were carried out chiefly by a consultant firm, Meta Research, which IDH and the LLA commissioned for the initiative. The process all took place between November 2018 and February 2019. Data collection and analysis was performed by IDH and LLA staff.

LAND USE PLANNING PROCESS

- **National Workshop**

The first phase of the land use planning process involved a two-day workshop at the national level, held in Monrovia December 3 and 4. During these sessions, representatives from national government ministries and agencies, civil society organizations, and Foya District convened to kick off the process. The workshop included a discussion on the land use planning methods, a session on defining objectives, and mapping current and future development efforts by government and civil society in Foya. The sessions disaggregated the work by government, civil society, and local representatives to achieve a holistic picture of the District.

- **Land Cover Mapping**

Secondly, a two-day working session was held in Monrovia on December 5 and 6, in which a small group of technicians from government and non-profits organizations came together to develop a land cover map of Lofa County, including Foya District. Ten people attended the workshop and were trained on land cover mapping using Open Foris Collect and Google Earth.

- **District Workshop**

Once the national-level workshop was completed, the team moved to Foya District, where they spent the next two weeks. The first activity performed was a one day District-level workshop. During this workshop, local government and civil society representatives developed hand-drawn maps of the district, indicating current land uses and proposed visions of future land use. This activity drew on both the statutory and traditional administrations for knowledge, guidance, and consultation. The workshop was the real kick-off event for the bottom-up portion of the land use planning process.

- **Clan-level Consultations** Between December 8 and 22, extensive consultations and assessments were performed within the district. These were done at the clan-level for Tengia, Wuam, and Rankollie. Each clan-level consultation lasted two days and included participatory resource mapping, problem analysis, future land use visioning, analysis of land use conflicts, review of land tenure arrangements, and discussion on income sources. Through the mapping activities, communities identified areas for farming and other livelihood activities, land for future use or conservation, land for infrastructural development, and land for potential sustainable agro-production supported through external investments. These exercises and their results form the backbone of the land use planning process. Each session was attended by

representatives from the clan's respective sub-clans. For example, the Tengia session was attended by the Clan Chiefs, Clan Chairladies, Youth Leaders, and other representatives from both Upper and Lower Tengia.

In addition to the participatory rural appraisal techniques, biophysical observations were also made across the landscape. These included soil, water, and vegetation assessments. Seven soil pits were dug in areas that were chosen to represent the variations in slope class, land use, and geography. Streams and wetlands were visited to assess water resource management capacity and to record their locations for the land use plan. All the information gathered through these various exercises were collected, analyzed, and then synthesized by the consultant team into a single land use plan for Foya District.



Figure 2.0 Consultation with Women Leader



Figure 2.1-Consultation with Elders

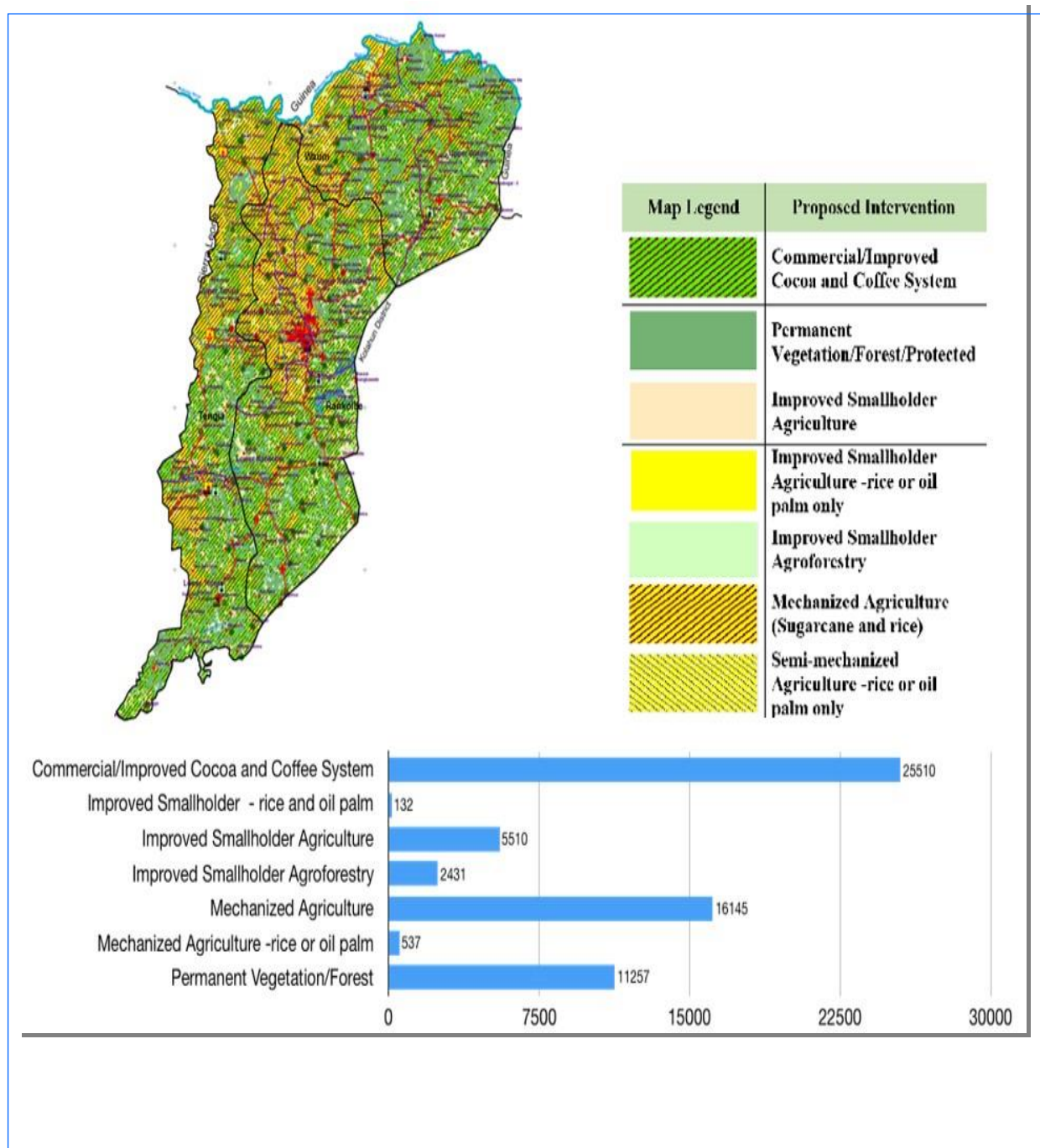


Figure 3.0-Land Use Map of Foya District

DATA COLLECTION

While the consultant team implemented the above-described land use planning process, LLA and IDH staff collected data to understand the challenges and opportunities of the process. This data was collected through participant observations and key informant interviews. Participant observations were made using a standardized template through which later review and synthesis could be performed. These observations were structured around facilitation, participation, content and other observations. Key informant interviews were held with staff of the LLA, IDH, and the consultant team in order to assess the initiative.

DATA ANALYSIS

The results from the observation recordings and the interviews were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive approach. They were then sorted into a priori 'Structural' and 'Procedural' themes. Structural themes refer to lessons that can be learned about the framework and institutional structures around participatory land use planning while procedural themes refer to points regarding the actual implementation and land use planning process. While many themes and observations were collected, we here report the most salient lessons for future initiatives and implementation, based on discussion with the LLA and internal review.

FINDINGS

- 1) Structural Themes - Of the many themes and observations made, four primary lessons can be drawn about the structuring of participatory land use planning.
 - a) Building intra-governmental and inter-agency support is crucial for comprehensive land use planning. In Liberia, as with many countries where land use planning is new, previous management plans have been created and executed by individual sectors. Such a history of sector-specific planning is a challenge to overcome in a short time, as multi-sector land use planning requires a significant culture change.
 - b) Local awareness-raising is important to ensure people understand the connection between land rights reform and land use planning. For areas where both processes (rights and planning) are new, the message needs to be clear and translatable into actual experiences and scenarios. At times the team faced confusion from community members as to the purpose and intent of land use planning.
 - c) NGOs and CSOs should partner with the LLA to assist in implementation while the LLA builds financing, capacity, and personnel. The model employed here, in which consultants are hired to carry out implementation, is not cost-effective for the LLA to implement themselves. Instead, emphasis can be placed on ensuring standard procedure for creating land use plans so that other NGOs and CSOs who implement do so in a systematic and approved manner.
 - d) Convening a core group of technician-level staff from various agencies is a strong way to build cohesion and capacity around the technical aspects of land use planning.

STRUCTURAL THEME

Lessons about
framework and
institutional structure

PROCEDURAL THEME

Lessons about
implementation and
land use planning
process

- 2) Procedural Themes - For participatory land use planning to be successful, the process of implementation needs to be effective as well as the structure. Therefore, we have pulled out the following seven lessons from observing and assessing the process, which can inform future work:
- a) Disaggregate planning discussions by gender and age. In many communities, inter-personal power dynamics can strongly influence response to land-related questions. Influences by local chiefs, dynamics between towns, and women vs. men perspectives need to be anticipated and planned for accordingly. Splitting groups by gender and age can ensure people are able to speak freely.
 - b) Facilitate interactions between people from the landscape and national representatives so people at the national level can hear and see for themselves what a bottom-up process looks like. This is especially important in countries where the 'bottom-up' method is novel.
 - c) The scale of land use planning is a critical question and determinant of time and resources. We performed the process at the clan-level and at the district-level. We did not facilitate planning at the level of each individual town. This issue of scale is a critically important decision from both a logistics and a legal perspective. According to the LRA, communities need to develop land use plans but how 'community' is defined is open to interpretation. Since much of the traditional political structure and decisions are centered at the level of the clan, we followed this approach.
 - d) Having strong facilitators and rapporteurs during the PRA components is key to accurately capturing the information. Without someone taking careful notes, critical observations and reflections can be missed and can significantly alter the results.
 - e) For rural contexts, biophysical soil analysis and land suitability are critical components of the land use plan. This information is important to agriculture and forestry investors who may be interested in the areas.
 - f) Customary land formalization needs to be a separate process. The intricacies and delicate nature of boundary harmonization needs to be treated as a separate task, especially when land use planning is conducted at the level of the clan or jurisdiction.
 - g) Land use planning on customary land needs to allow for short-term land use decisions by communities while setting targets and recommendations instead of prescriptions at the landscape scale. In rural communities in Liberia, and likely other places as well, land use change happens rapidly, driven largely by immediate needs. This brings a complex dynamic to land use planning in these areas and must be acknowledged in the plan.

LAND USE PLANNING TEMPLATE

As part of the implementation of the Land Rights Act, communities must develop land use management plans as a component of the customary land formalization process. A deliverable of the PLUP process was a land use planning template, which provides guidance for implementing participatory land use planning in Liberia. It specifically focuses on rural PLUP, as the protocol will differ for urban and peri-urban communities.

The guide, through a ten-process shares lessons learned, practical examples, and photos from the process, as piloted in Foya District and the communities within. The purpose of

this content is to ensure future land use planning builds on the successes and avoids the mistakes of previous exercises.

The template has two parts:

Part One: Community-level PLUP details a method for community-level PLUP. This method can be followed by communities themselves, and supported by CSOs and other partners where appropriate.

Part Two: County-level PLUP documents the protocol for conducting PLUP for an entire county. Part Two is geared toward government and development partners.

It is important to note that the template is to be utilized by communities in creating land use and management plans. It can be customized to fit the particular context and community. Understanding the limited experience communities have with development of such plans, the lessons learned through this pilot process have resulted in the template, which is envisaged as a tool to promote sustainable planning because it is not expected that donors and partners will provide land planning experts and support into perpetuity. Communities must learn to provide these services themselves.

Overview of the 10 Steps

PREPARING FOR PLUP | 1 week

1. Define the scale of 'community' and the unit for planning
2. Constitute a representative PLUP group at the community level
3. Establish common objectives for the PLUP process
4. Review studies or projects that have happened in the area

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION | 2-3 days

5. Participatory mapping of current land uses and borders
6. Situation and problem analysis
7. Identify and agree on solutions
8. Prepare future land use map and plan

FINALIZING THE PLAN | 3 days

9. Compile decisions and maps into a final plan

VALIDATING THE PLAN | 3 days

10. Present and validate

CONCLUSION

Participatory land use planning has been often-cited as a key requirement for smart development, both from a rural and urban perspective. In rural settings, land use planning can be employed to balance agriculture development, environmental conservation, and infrastructure expansion. In many African nations where agricultural investments are increasing, land rights are unclear, and land is distributed at the national level, participatory land use planning can provide a pathway for transparent development. In Liberia, participatory land use planning holds this promise. However, for it to be successful, implementation needs to be monitored, evaluated, and improved upon. This project provides results from a land use planning process, which can be used at both the national and international level for guiding similar initiatives.

The results presented here illustrate a few key points for informing future implementation. First, the initial involvement of CSOs, Donors, and other stakeholders to assist in implementation will be critical for the mandated scale and pace of land use planning but sustainable is crucial. The process must be simplified to the extent that communities can develop such plans in the absence of external support. This can apply

to other countries where implementing agencies are understaffed and underfunded for their mandated tasks. For these types of arrangements to be successful, however, regulations and frameworks for implementation should be promulgated by the coordinating government body. These regulations can ensure that processes are conducted in a systematic and standardized manner.

It should be noted though that this project and its results reflect a rural land use planning process. Conducting such a process in peri-urban and urban settings will face very different challenges and results. Therefore, it is important that separate frameworks for land use planning be prepared for these different settings. It is unlikely that the activities we carried out in Foya will be relevant for land use planning in Monrovia, for example.

Bottom-up land use planning is a new approach for many nations. Previously, land use planning, if it was done, was done by a national body or conducted through a purely technical scientific lens. The participatory approach laid out here gives the people who would be most affected by land use decisions the power to determine how they want their land to be used. For this approach to be successful though, national stakeholders must understand the process and local stakeholders must be fully invested and engaged. Maintaining both levels of political commitment requires strong and continued coordination and communication.

The lessons presented here can help illuminate key concerns and opportunities for future bottom-up land use planning efforts elsewhere. Through a careful and improved approach, such processes can pave the way for more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

REFERENCES

- FCPF, & UN-REDD. (2012). Readiness Preparation Proposal for Country: Republic of Liberia. Monrovia, Liberia.
- IFAD. (2014). How to do Participatory land-use planning, 11.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/TE.1958.4322031>
- IMF. (2008). Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Washington, DC.
- Land Commission. Land Rights Policy (2013). Monrovia, Liberia.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia. The Act Establishing the Liberia Land Authority (2016). Monrovia, Liberia.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia. The Land Rights Law (2018). Monrovia, Liberia.
- NIBIO, NFG, & ICRAF. (2016). Forest and Mosaic Landscape Restoration in Lofa County, Liberia. Monrovia, Liberia.
- Resources, M. of N. (2017). Rwanda National Land Use Planning Guidelines. Kigali, Rwanda.
- The World Bank. (2010). Mainstreaming Social and Environmental Considerations Into the Liberian National Forestry Reform Process. Washington, DC.
- The World Bank. (2017). Project Appraisal Document for Liberia Land Administration Project. Washington DC.
- Ujamaa Community Resource Team. (2010). Participatory Land Use Planning as a Tool for Community Empowerment in Northern Tanzania. London, United Kingdom.