

Agriculture is the primary livelihood for about 70% of Liberia's 5.07 million population of which 2.55 million (50.3%) are men and 2.5 million (49.7%) are women<sup>15</sup>. Women are disproportionately grouped in the least productive sectors, with almost 90% of them employed in the informal sector and agriculture (UN Women 2022<sup>16</sup>, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 2018<sup>17</sup>, EPA 2022<sup>18</sup>). Women contribute to the agricultural sector's workforce through food crop production (93%), marketing and trading (85%), and agricultural labor (80%). Women are mainly responsible for the planting, weeding, and harvesting of food while men take care of the brushing, feeling, clearing, and fencing<sup>19</sup>. Additionally, 79% of women working in agriculture are self-employed, 17.3% are employed by a family member, and only 3.7% are employed by a nonfamily member<sup>20</sup>.

In the country women are excelling in roles that were previously reserved for men and are contributing to the conservation of protected areas. More and more women are trained to be Community Ecoguards, a position that has since been perceived as male-dominated.

On account of the precarious economic situation, unsustainable logging practices are on the rise, especially in the Community Forest<sup>21</sup> areas, where governance structures are weak.

The market for timber and timber products is structured in two different threads: formal (feeding the international exports of timber, selling mainly round logs) and the informal (feeding the domestic market with poorly finished products - mainly lumber). In an average year, timber exports can generate an income between USD 7 to 9 million<sup>22</sup>.

Extraction of products for local markets is done with no monitoring, in an unregulated way, hence seriously jeopardising long-term sustainability of Liberian forests. While timber exploitations by the informal sector is poorly documented - with only one formal study providing actual data - estimations are that the informal sector may be extracting 3 to 4 times more volume than the formal sector, which explains why the current deforestation rate is around 2% per year, amongst the highest in the world. Effects of charcoal production and firewood extraction are not assessed by studies but are certainly an additional pressing factor.

Since 2013 the EU and UK FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) have provided substantial resources (about EUR 15 million) to set up the regulatory and enforcement systems required by to reach FLEGT Licensing as foreseen under Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between Liberia and the EU.

The past and ongoing support, including the EU funded VPA Support Unit (SU) 2 Project, the EU FLEGT VPA Programme and the FCDO funded Multi-stakeholder Forest Governance and Accountability Project. This support has resulted in major improvements in sector governance, especially in terms of transparency and stakeholders' participation in the formal exploitation. The EU and the Government of Liberia had mutually agreed on an ambitious roadmap<sup>23</sup> for issuing FLEGT licenses by 2020, an objective which failed to be achieved due to lack of political will and a requirement for additional support, mostly in terms of effective enforcement of legality and core regulatory functions.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Joint Implementation Committee (JIC), meeting under the VPA between the Government of Liberia and the EU in March 2022, allowed the political dialogue to advance on these issues, with effective discussion on enforcement, community forestry and legality matrix revision process. The stakeholders also discussed the need for a wider consultation on the sustainability of the forests and the options to achieve it.

<sup>15</sup> <https://countrymetersw.info/> / Proforest (2020)

<sup>16</sup> UN WOMEN (2022) Liberia Country Gender Equality Profile, August

<sup>17</sup> Environment Protection Agency of Liberia (2018). National Policy and Response Strategy on Climate Change. Republic of Liberia.

<sup>18</sup> Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia (2021). Liberia's Second National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia

<sup>19</sup> UN Women, 2022<sup>19</sup>, Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, 2009<sup>19</sup>, FAO and ECOWAS Commission, 2018<sup>19</sup>)

<sup>20</sup> UN Women, 2022<sup>20</sup>, Ministry of Gender and Social Protection, 2009<sup>20</sup>, FAO and ECOWAS Commission, 2018<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Liberia's Community Rights Law (2009) aims to empower communities to engage in the sustainable management of their forests. Under the law, communities can obtain a Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA) for areas between 5,000 and 50,000 hectares.

<sup>22</sup> "Support Mission to the EU Delegation to Liberia" – Final Report 2021 by Forest for the Future Facility.

<sup>23</sup> FLEGT-VPA between Government of Liberia and EU was ratified and entered into force in December 2013.