

## Major Developments in Forest Sector

2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007

1. **Forest Reform Monitoring Committee (FRMC):** the FRMC ceased to exist as of 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2007. The Executive Order (#1), which established the FRMC expired on February 1<sup>st</sup> at midnight. However, interested members of the FRMC are still convening informally to continue work on some of the outstanding issues or work left by the FRMC. This is a voluntary support to the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and this group should not be seen as a replacement of the FRMC.
2. **Forest Management Advisory Council (FMAC):** The FDA has now started discussions about the steps towards the establishment of the (FMAC). This is a requirement of the forestry law. The process might take a while as we will have to ensure that the FDA carries this out within the framework of the law. The FRMC decided not to transform itself into the FMAC because that would have violated the law.
3. **Community Rights Law (CRL):** the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) is working with a team of consultants to draft the Community Rights Law (CRL) with respect to forests as required by section 10.1c of the forestry law (NFRL 2006). The draft should address a range of forest related issues and establish a legal basis for community forestry. DFID is funding this work. As a part of this work, we have recruited a land tenure expert to support the design and implementation of a rapid tenure and governance study in three communities. The result will inform the drafting of the CRL.
4. **Land Reform:** this is now considered an urgent priority for the government. The Governance Reform Commission (GRC) is set to lead work towards the establishment of a Land Reform Commission. The general view is that this should encompass all aspects of land use (agriculture, mining, forestry, settlements, etc.). President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf acknowledged in her state of the nation that this is a major problem and expressed the need to start a national dialogue on Land Reform.
5. **Forest, FDA and Land Tenure:** the FDA recently issued a public announcement calling for deeds to deeded forest lands. About 36 deeds were brought forward for forest lands. The forest area covered by these deeds amounted to 8,404,525 acres out of an approximate forest cover of 12m acres. An illustrative map produced by the FDA using the metes and bounds described in the deeds showed that almost all the key forest areas are being claimed. In the past people have allowed logging on their land (apparently) because the resources belong to the government. But now, logging on private land will have to be negotiated with land owners and the contract holder will only have to comply with the law and pay their taxes to government. They will also not go through the competitive bidding process. Looking at the list of deeds published by the FDA, I (*based on personal interactions with different forest communities during the forest concession review outreach process*) can tell that some deeds for other forest areas are still outstanding.

The FDA along with representatives from Green Advocates, Sustainable Development Institute, Fauna and Flora International, and the Liberian Forest Initiative met with senior officials of the GRC on March 1, 2007 including the Chairman, former President Amos Sawyer at the GRC to dialogue on Land Tenure. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March and will bring together other agencies of government concerned with land issues. This will include Ministry of Lands and Mines, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.

6. **Chain of Custody:** the bid has been conducted and a winner will be announced shortly.
7. **Regulations:** the vetting of the ten core forestry regulations will be completed shortly. The final drafts of these regulations will be presented to the FDA by the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2007 for onward submission to the Board of Directors.