

**VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (VPA SECRETARIAT)
A-Z BUILDING, MAMBA POINT
REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

**SECRETARIAT FIRST- QUARTER ACTIVITY REPORT
OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2009**

PREPARED BY

VPA SECRETARIAT

PRESENTED TO

VPA STEERING COMMITTEE

DATE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2010

1.0 Executive_Summary:

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) Technical Secretariat, the supporting arm of the multi-stakeholders Steering Committee in the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) negotiation process between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and European Union (EU) officially commenced functioning in October 2009. Since its recruitment by the Steering Committee (SC) and subsequent seating, the Technical Secretariat (TS) has been working collaboratively and cooperatively with all stakeholders in the ongoing VPA process in Liberia. In the midst of numerous challenges, the TS have worked assiduously with all parties involved in the process to move it forward unhindered.

This report is a progress report of activities the Secretariat has undertaken during its first quarter of existence. It highlights achievements, setbacks/constraints, failures/short comings and recommendations for the way forward in moving the process.

Following the formal launch of the VPA negotiation process between the Government of Liberia and the European Union in March, 2009, the process took on a slow pace due to delay in the constitution of the Steering Committee and the Secretariat. The delay in constituting these two bodies negatively impacted the process, causing alterations in the proposed road map prepared by the negotiating parties. However, when the Secretariat was finally recruited and seated in October 2009, the process began to gain momentum.

Since its constitution, the Secretariat during the reporting period successfully hosted two (2) major multi-stakeholders workshops: first on Legality Definition and Legality Assurance System for Liberia (November 4, 2009), and the second workshop on Legality Assurance System for Liberia (November 17, 2009).

The main objective of the first workshop was primarily to solicit from the perspectives of the larger stakeholder group the definition of legality (definition of legal timber in the Liberian context) and next, to set up two technical working groups that would work to determine legality definition and also put in place a robust legality assurance system for Liberia.

At the end of the first workshop, two technical working groups were constituted to address the issues of Legality Definition and Legality Assurance System. The two working groups are charged with the responsibilities to determine the meaning for legal timber for Liberia and to put in place for Liberia a robust legality assurance system. They are also charged with the responsibility to inform the EU on Liberia's proposals for addressing the EU-FLEGT Facility (EFI) final report on **"GAP ANALYSIS BETWEEN LIBERIA CHAIN OF CUSTODY SYSTEM AND EU EXPECTATIONS FOR LEGALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS"** presented to the Government in July 2009.

The Secretariat has subsequently prepared terms of reference for each of the technical working groups. A second multi-stakeholders workshop, this time on developing a robust Legality Assurance System for Liberia was held on November 17, 2009. The workshop was facilitated by an international consultant Mr. Jussi Lounasvuori. Jussi is a LAS expert from the European Forest Institute (EFI).

The visit of Mr. Jussi Lounasvuori in November 2009 was followed by that of Dr. Arthur G. Blundell, an international consultant and expert on Legality Definition from the Natural Capital Advisors. Dr. Blundell worked with the technical working group on Legality Definition, making presentations and providing them professional guidance and directions in relation to developing legality definition for Liberia.

The two consultants respectively worked with the two technical working groups providing each working group with the necessary professional guidance and directions in commencing and finalizing their respective tasks.

The Secretariat has been faced with numerous challenges during its first quarter of operations. In addition to hosting two multi-stakeholders workshops, making several field visitations to community platforms, holding of working sessions with technical working groups and international and local consultants, it hosted four steering committee meetings to discuss pertinent issues leading to moving the VPA process forward in Liberia.

The second Inter-session Video Conference between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and the European Union (EU) was held on Tuesday, December 8, 2009 at the Head Office of the EU in Monrovia. The Negotiating Team (NT) headed by Hon. Dr. Florence Chenoweth represented the

Liberian delegation at the Conference. The Conference provided for the EU delegation an update of Liberia's present position in the VPA process. The EU delegation on the other hand lauded Liberia on its progress in the VPA process thus far and provided tentative agenda items and expectations for discussion at the first negotiation session in Brussels in February 2010.

1.0 Background:

Illegal logging worldwide has created international concerns as it has resulted in serious environmental and social damage, cost governments billion of dollars annually, and negatively impacted governance: i.e. undermining rule of law, depressing global prices, and fueling conflict. This problem of illegal logging was recognized at a G-8 submit where measures to tackle illegal logging was discussed and an "Action Program on Forests" formally adopted.

Subsequently, the European Commission in a bid to contribute to measures to combat illegal logging hosted in April 2002 an international workshop to discuss the problem. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg (2002), the EC set out a strong commitment to combat illegal logging and its associated trade in illegally-harvested timber. The European Union then published its first proposal for a FLEGT Action Plan in May 2003. FLEGT is Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade.

The EU-FLEGT Action Plan recognizes that the EU, as a major consumer of wood products shares responsibility with timber producing countries to tackle illegal timber and its related trade. The FLEGT Action Plan therefore proposes the development of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between the EU and individual timber producing countries to eliminate illegally-produced timber from a partner country's international and domestic trade.

A Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) is therefore a legally binding agreement between the EU and the partner country (in this case, Liberia) to undertake, to work together, and to support the aims of the FLEGT Action Plan as well as implement timber licensing scheme. VPA aims to contribute to timber producing countries' commitments to promote sustainable forest management by supporting improvement in forest law enforcement and governance.

In this direction, Liberia has to commit itself to developing credible legal and administrative structures and technical systems to verify and ensure that timber is produced in accordance with national laws.

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process for Liberia informally began at about 2007 with several stakeholders' involvement. But it was not until March 2009 when the formal negotiation process between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and the European Union (EU) was launched.

Since then the GoL has successfully constituted the Negotiating Team, the VPA Technical Secretariat, and the Steering Committee. However, r the SC that serves as employer of the TS cannot hold contract with the TS because it does not have a legal status therefore, the TS is being contracted by the IDL Group... The Steering Committee is therefore seeking for a process that will legalize its status either through an Executive Order from the Presidency or Proclamation.

3.0 INTRODUCTION:

Following a vigorous recruitment process of members of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement Technical Secretariat (TS) by a five man Selection Panel set up by the Selection Committee (April-May 2009), the TS was finally recruited and it officially commenced duties on 19th, October, 2009. The Technical Secretariat is presently located in Monrovia at Mamba Point, on Old CID Road (in the A-Z Building). The TS is primarily to provide technical and all other supports necessary to the Steering Committee that would help to strengthen the negotiation position of Liberia's Negotiating Team (NT) during the VPA negotiations with the EC.

Liberia's forests are of remarkable global, national, and local importance. They contribute to the livelihood of millions of people as well as to the economic development of Liberia. Additionally, they are of tremendous ecological importance to current and future generations. But for many decades, especially during the pre-war era and even up to the time of the civil crisis in Liberia, illegal logging activities plagued the forest sector, depriving Liberians of benefits to be accrued from forest resources.

Illegal logging and its associated trade lead to substantial economic, social, and environmental damage. It is a worldwide phenomenon which involves financial, technical and trading links between companies and individuals in timber-producing countries and timber consuming countries. It therefore behooves these actors to share responsibility for illegal logging activities, and thus, to also fully share the responsibility to combat them.

A Voluntary Partnership Agreement is critical to upholding Liberia's forest sector principles of good governance, public accountability, and to eliminate illegal timber from its timber trade. It will further uphold Liberia's objectives of protecting and sustainably managing its forests and ensuring that all timber it exports originates from legal and sustainable sources.

In realization of the above, the Government of Liberia after several consultations with relevant stakeholders, agreed to a VPA negotiation process with the European Commission (EC); and in March, 2009 together with the EC launched a formal VPA negotiation process in Monrovia, Liberia.

Since the official launch of the VPA negotiation process with the EC in March 2009, the GoL has successfully put in place the necessary organs (SC, NT, and TS) that will adequately represent its position and interests at the negotiations with the EC. The parties have developed a proposed Road Map which when agreed and finalized, would guide the negotiation process.

4.0 ACTIVITIES:

The EU-FLEGT Action Plan proposes the development of Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) between the EU and individual timber producing countries, designed purposely to eliminate illegally-produced timber from a partner country's international and domestic trade. As a binding agreement between the parties (the EU and timber producing countries), a VPA will ensure that the parties work together to support the aims of the FLEGT Action Plan and to implement a timber licensing scheme.

Therefore, the VPA being a critical part of the EU Action Plan on FLEGT and also a manifestation of the GoL's political will to good governance, requires that the VPA negotiation process establishes a Technical Secretariat (TS) that will coordinate activities of the GoL's Negotiation

Team and ensure the full participation of all stakeholders through regular consultative meetings, awareness workshops and the coordination of a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee. In this light, the SC in October 2009 recruited TS that began work immediately thereafter. The TS is seated in Monrovia at Mamba Point (A-Z Building).

Since commencement of work in October 2009, the TS have been faced with numerous challenges. It has hosted two major multi-stakeholders consultative workshops:

1. Workshop on Legality Definition (LD) and Legality Assurance System (LAS): November 4, 2009; and,
2. Workshop on Legality Assurance System (LAS): November 17, 2009.

In addition to the two workshops, the TS hosted four regular and one special called Steering Committee meetings during the reporting period under review.

The multi-stakeholder consultative workshop on Legality Definition and Legality Assurance System held on November 4, 2009 at the Monrovia was facilitated by Subah-Belleh Associates, a Management Consultant Firm. The workshop had two main objectives:

1. To solicit from the larger stakeholder group perspective the definition of legality (definition of legal timber in the Liberian context); and
2. To constitute two technical working groups to develop Liberia's legality definition and legality assurance system.

At the end of the first workshop, two technical working groups were constituted to address the issues of Legality Definition and Legality Assurance System. The working groups are charged with the responsibilities to determine the meaning for legal timber for Liberia and to put in place for Liberia a robust legality assurance system. They are also charged with the responsibility to inform the EU on Liberia's proposals for addressing the EU-FLEGT Facility (EFI) final report on **"GAP ANALYSIS BETWEEN LIBERIA CHAIN OF CUSTODY SYSTEM AND EU EXPECTATIONS FOR LEGALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS"** presented to the Government in July 2009.

In addition to the consultancy provided by the two international consultants on Legality Definition and Legality Assurance System, two local consultants, Mr. Thomas Pichet of

SGS/LiberFor and Mr. Ishmael Doodoo of UNDP were contacted by the TS to provide support/consultancy and have since been working with the two technical working groups.

The two technical working groups have been heavily engaged during the past months with individual working sessions.

The LD working group, in addition to its own regular working sessions, had several working sessions with Dr. Arthur Blundell who provided an overview on lessons learned from VPA negotiations elsewhere regarding drafting on a legality definition. According to his presentations, an operational LD must be drafted in an interactive process with the LAS working group in order to ensure that the definition can be objectively verified through an operational LAS. The LD should cover the scope of issues (social, economic and environmental) identified by stakeholders as important recommendation from the workshop on LD and LAS. Therefore based on recommendations from the workshop, the consultant's presentations, and working group deliberations, the LD working group decided that a reasonable process for drafting an operational LD would be to develop a template of issues to be covered by the legality definition.

Subsequently, the TS tasked with responsibility of developing that template and has since completed a draft template and circulated same to LD working group, SC, and LAS working group for review. This exercise centered on determining legal sources of issues of concern: i.e. extraction of relevant laws, regulations, codes, etc. that address issues of concerns in determining what a legal timber is.

In similar manner, the LAS working group is also working hard. Besides its own regular working sessions it also had a series of working sessions with Mr. Jussi Lounasvouri, a consultant from EFI and an expert on Legality Assurance System. Mr. Lounasvouri worked with the LAS WG for one week in November 2009 on "Guidance for Development Work" (system development) for LAS and made a presentation on "EFI Gap Analysis Report on Liberia COCS."

Legality Assurance System is a core element of Voluntary Partnership Agreement to demonstrate the legality of timber and timber products; it contains a licensing scheme for timber destined for the EU market. In consideration of the above, the LAS working group is

tasked with the responsibility to develop a LAS for Liberia that will provide criteria, procedures, and technology to assure legality of timber and timber products.

In commencing its work to address the above task, the LAS WG during one of its working sessions decided to look at the various components/elements of the LAS to begin addressing the different aspects as they relate to the LAS. Subsequently, the TS has developed some questions out of these elements of the LAS and circulated same to selected members of the WG (based on their roles and requests) for answers for discussion at upcoming working sessions.

On November 17, 2009, a second multi-stakeholders workshop was held to discuss the future development of a Legality Assurance System. The workshop was facilitated by an international consultant Mr. Jussi Lounasvuori. Jussi is a LAS expert from the European Forest Institute (EFI).

The visit of Mr. Jussi Lounasvuori in November 2009 was followed by that of Dr. Arthur G. Blundell, an international consultant and expert on Legality Definition from the Natural Capital Advisors. Dr. Blundell provided the Legality Definition technical working group with guidance in relation to developing legality definition for Liberia.

The two consultants respectively worked with the two technical working groups providing each working group with the necessary professional guidance and direction in commencing and finalizing their respective tasks.

In addition to the aforementioned work, the Secretariat facilitated numerous other activities to contribute to the VPA process.

The Secretariat made several field visits to community platforms. On November 20-21, 2009 the TS travelled to Kakata, Margibi County as an observer to the electoral process of community representative to the SC from the non-forested region comprising Montserrado, Margibi, Bong and Bomi Counties. Mrs. Sely K. Williams of Bong County was elected to the SC as Community Representative to the SC for that platform. Also, on December 4-6, 2009, the TS made a similar visit to Platform # 3 (Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Sinoe Counties) where Messrs. Thomas Balleh and Sorlie George of Grand Gedeh and River Gee were elected as community representatives to the SC for that platform. On the other hand, the TS travelled to Grand Bassa and Rivercess Counties (Platform # 1) on December 4-6 2009 for awareness raising on the ongoing VPA process in Liberia as well as to ensure that the level of interaction between the

community representative to the SC for that platform, Mr. William Page was cordial and up to expectation.

The second Inter-session Video Conference (VC) between the Government of Liberia (GoL) and the European Union (EU) was held on Tuesday, December 8, 2009 at the head offices of the European Commission in Monrovia. The Negotiating Team (NT) headed by Hon. Dr. Florence Chenoweth represented the Liberian delegation at the VC. The Conference provided a forum for the Liberian Negotiating Team to brief the EC delegation on its activities and preparedness for negotiations. The EC delegation commended Liberia on its progress and provided tentative agenda items and expectations for discussion at the first negotiation session in Brussels in February 2010.

5.0 FINANCIAL REPORT: OCTOBER 1 – DECEMBER 31, 2009

During the period October 1 – December 31, 2009, a total of US\$102,373.01 expenditure was incurred for VPA activities undertaken by the Secretariat. This amount comprised of personnel cost, purchase of Office Equipment, Office Furniture & Fixture, Project vehicle, payment of six months lease rental, facilitation of Steering Committee meetings, conduct of multi-stakeholders workshops, among others. This expenditure was disbursed from the six month mini-budget (US\$242,136.35) approved by the Steering Committee. As will be observed from the below table, some budget items have been significantly expended while others did not experience any expenditure. Those budget items with significant drawn-downs were due to increase in volume of activities that directly impacted those allotments. Those allocations that do not reflect any significant or no expenses are due to low or non expenditure for those budget items. In our estimation for the next foreseeable three month-period, we anticipate a significant over-run in the stationery and office supply budget allotted by the Steering Committee. This will be due to the under-projection for the six month period as compared to the increase in ear-marked activities that require more stationery and office supply. The below table gives detailed explanation of budget items expenditure incurred during the reporting period.

Table 1 – First Quarter Expenditure Report

	Budget Item	Six-Month Allotment	Expenditure 1st October to 31st Dec. 2009	Balance Against Allotment
1	Personnel - Secretariat	61,550.00	24,150.00	37,400.00
2	Office Equipment	10,645.00	10,485.00	160.00
3	Office Furniture & Fixture	3,864.14	3,921.35	(57.21)
4	Office Supply & Stationery	2,609.87	2,642.60	(32.73)
5	Phone Cards	995.00	230.00	765.00
6	Internet Subscription, etc.	2,589.00	1,189.00	1,400.00
7	Office Rent, Electricity, etc.	29,027.00	14,940.50	14,086.50
8	Project Vehicle - New Purchase	35,000.00	31,400.00	3,600.00
9	Vehicle Running Cost - Gasoline, etc.	2,695.75	1,306.36	1,389.39
10	Printing and Publications	4,100.00	-	4,100.00
11	Radio/Print Media	7,000.00	639.02	6,360.98
12	Staff Travel & Accommodation	9,650.00	1,010.00	8,640.00
13	Bank Charges/miscellaneous	4,527.09	2,361.15	2,165.94
14	Short-Term Technical Expertise	2,000.00	-	2,000.00
15	Media Consultant Firm	6,000.00	-	6,000.00
16	Advertisement	5,000.00	-	5,000.00
17	Public Awareness	12,000.00	-	12,000.00
18	Website Development & Upkeep	1,500.00	-	1,500.00
19	Capacity Building - Government, Civil Society, Industry, Community	35,150.00	6,069.03	29,080.97
20	Steering Committee Meetings	5,633.50	2,029.00	3,604.50
21	Negotiation Team Meetings	600.00	-	600.00
	Total	242,136.35	102,373.01	139,763.34

FINANCIAL ISSUES

During our first budget review under the guidance of the Steering Committee ad hoc budget committee, it was observed that the total budgetary allocation for the VPA process is inadequate as envisaged for the two year-period. For the interim, the Steering Committee mandated the Secretariat to seek approval from the donor (UK Government Department for International Development (DFID)) for internal re-allocation of some allotments to off-set the immediate funding gap. Evidently, this is just a temporary measure, even if we get the permission from DFID to effect the internal budget realignment. A review of the Project two years budget clearly reveals a funding gap. For example, adequate funding is needed to purchase additional vehicle for the Project. An additional vehicle is needed to provide logistical support to the Project. There will be numerous nation-wide travels to adequately interact and inform the local communities and in the same token solicit their inputs in the VPA process. One utility vehicle is insufficient for this Process. Already, the Office Equipment budget is exhausted, though there is still need for additional office equipment. Although the Project is presently foreseen for a two year life-span, but it is likely that it will exceed this projected timeframe. It is therefore important to begin planning for additional resources that will safely take us beyond the two-year period. It is our understanding that the process of getting funding from some potential donors is painstaking and time consuming. In most cases, the process takes about one and half years to get funding arrangements concluded with international donors. We therefore recommend that some strides be devoted in this direction at the earliest. The below budget draw-down table gives an insight of our present expenditure standing against the two years approved budget.

VPA SECRETARIAT - TWO YEAR BUDGET DRAWDOWN STATEMENT

	Budget Line	Budget Line Item 1	Sum Total Expenditure 2	(1 - 2) Available Budget (Balance) (1) - (4)	Rate of Consumption % (2)/(1)
1	Secretariat Office - Personnel, Office Equipment, Office Furniture, Project Vehicle, Office Running Cost, etc.	472,745.00	94,274.98	378,470.02	19.94%
1.1	Personnel Cost	224,400.00	24,150.00	200,250.00	10.76%
1.2	Office Equipment - Laptop, Desktops, Printers, etc	10,645.00	10,485.00	160.00	98.50%
1.3	Office Furniture & Fixture	7,850.00	3,921.35	3,928.65	49.95%
1.4	Office Supply & Stationery	10,000.00	2,642.60	7,357.40	26.43%
1.5	Phone Cards	4,000.00	230.00	3,770.00	5.75%
1.6	Internet - Broadband Installation & Monthly Subscription, Anti-Virus, etc	9,300.00	1,189.00	8,111.00	12.78%
1.7	Office - Rent, Electricity, Water, Refurbishing, Security, etc.	74,550.00	14,940.50	59,609.50	20.04%
1.8	Project Vehicle	35,000.00	31,400.00	3,600.00	89.71%
1.9	Vehicle Running Cost - Gasoline, Repairs, & Maintenance	13,200.00	1,306.36	11,893.64	9.90%
1.10	Radio/Print Media	20,000.00	639.02	19,360.98	3.20%
1.11	Staff Travel Accommodation	32,000.00	1,010.00	30,990.00	3.16%
1.12	Printing and Publications	20,000.00	-	20,000.00	0.00%

1.13	Miscellaneous/Contingency - Bank Charges, etc.	11,800.00	2,361.15	9,438.85	20.01%
2	Short-Term Technical Expertise (Tasks identified by the Negotiation Tgeam, e.g., impact assessment, market analysis, compliance verification systems and legal skills)	153,600.00	-	153,600.00	0.00%
2.1	FDA Evaluation and Monitoring	4,800.00	-	4,800.00	0.00%
2.2	Technical Advisor	50,000.00	-	50,000.00	0.00%
2.3	Legal Advisor	50,000.00	-	50,000.00	0.00%
2.4	Legal Assistant	20,000.00	-	20,000.00	0.00%
2.5	Transportation	28,800.00	-	28,800.00	0.00%
			-		
3.0	Communications - Media Consultancy, Advertisement, Public Awareness, Website Development & Upkeeping, etc.	126,000.00	-	126,000.00	0.00%
3.1	Media Consultant Firm	45,000.00	-	45,000.00	0.00%
3.2	Advertisement	25,000.00	-	25,000.00	0.00%
3.3	Public Awareness	50,000.00	-	50,000.00	0.00%
3.4	Website Development and Upkeep	6,000.00	-	6,000.00	0.00%
		-	-		
4.0	Capacity Building - Government Support Staff, Civil Society/Trade Leaders, etc.	113,000.00	6,069.03	106,930.97	5.37%
4.1	Government Support Staff	13,000.00	-	13,000.00	0.00%
4.2	Stakeholder Facilitation	50,000.00	1,628.03	48,371.97	3.26%
4.3	Civil Society/Industry & Community	50,000.00	4,441.00	45,559.00	8.88%
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5.0	Steering Committee Meetings (20 members) - Refreshment, Printing, Transportation, etc.	21,700.00	2,029.00	19,671.00	9.35%
5.1	Meeting Facility (Rent - 12 meetings)	3,600.00	-	3,600.00	0.00%
5.2	Refreshment (12 meetings)	5,400.00	821.50	4,578.50	15.21%
5.3	Gasoline (Generator)	3,500.00	-	3,500.00	0.00%
5.4	Printing	2,000.00	162.50	1,837.50	8.13%
5.5	DSA/Travel, Transportation, etc.	7,200.00	1,045.00	6,155.00	14.51%
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6.0	Negotiating Team Meetings (8 Members) - Facilitation, Refreshment, Printing, Travel Costs, ect.	80,220.00	-	80,220.00	0.00%
6.1	Meeting Facility (Rent - 15 meetings)	4,500.00	-	4,500.00	0.00%
6.2	Refreshment	9,000.00	-	9,000.00	0.00%
6.3	Printing	4,000.00	-	4,000.00	0.00%
6.4	DSA/Intl Travel (2 trips @200/day x 5days/trip)	16,000.00	-	16,000.00	0.00%
6.5	Airfare to Brussels (2 trips @ \$1,500/trip)	24,000.00	-	24,000.00	0.00%
6.6	Hotel (2 trips @300/night x 3 nights/trip)	14,400.00	-	14,400.00	0.00%
6.7	DSA/Local travel (6 trips @ \$30/day x 3days/trip)	4,320.00	-	4,320.00	0.00%
6.8	Contingency/Miscellaneous	4,000.00	-	4,000.00	0.00%
	TOTAL	967,265.00	102,373.01	864,891.99	10.58%

Analysis of the above table indicates that 10.58% of the two year budget was expended during the first quarter. Of the total percentage, 19.94% from the Secretariat Office budget, while 9.35% from the Steering Committee Meetings. For Capacity Building, 5.37% was expended. In summary, a total of US\$102,373.01 was expended during the period, thus leaving a running balance of US\$864,891.99 for the remaining twenty-one months.

CONSTRAINTS/CHALLENGES

The VPA process is still a new process for timber producing countries in Africa and especially for Liberia in particular. Even though there is a legal framework in place that would broadly support the VPA process in Liberia, yet, very little is known about a Voluntary Partnership Agreement amongst the various stakeholder groups involved in the process, let alone the entire populace of Liberia. Therefore, to facilitate a process leading to the formulation of a legality definition for Liberian timber and timber products as well as put in place a verification mechanism that would ensure compliance with the legality definition has been a serious challenge for the Secretariat. Several technical working sessions aimed at achieving this objective with the two working groups constituted at the November 4, 2009 multi-stakeholders workshop on LD and LAS for Liberia have been facilitated and managed by the Secretariat under extreme budgetary circumstances.

Another challenge posed to the Secretariat was that of an effective community outreach program to create and disseminate awareness about the VPA process to communities in Liberia. As indicated earlier, VPA arrangements are relatively new in Liberia. As such, financial and technical efforts to sensitize the population are required to have the VPA arrangements fully entrenched in the minds and hearts of Liberians. In this regard, the Secretariat during the reporting period embarked on an outreach effort to take the VPA to the communities for awareness purpose. The first of these exercises was in Grand Gedeh County (Platform # 3), followed by Grand Bassa and Rivercess Counties (Platform # 1).

Earlier in its work, (October to early December 2009), the Secretariat encountered a lot of difficulties in executing its functions. During this period, commercial vehicles were hired on a daily basis to meet its transportation needs. With the purchase of one utility pick-up in early December 2009, this constraint was partially alleviated. However, there is still a need for another utility vehicle to facilitate the work of the Secretariat nation-wide, especially to make effective planned outreach and other meaningful programs to communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Though the Secretariat has functioned for only one quarter (three months) it has observed from its activities coupled with associated costs thus far that the current budgetary allotment for the

proposed two year life span of the VPA process for Liberia is understated. Already some of its budget item allotments are nearly exhausted. At the moment, it is difficult if not impossible to purchase additional office equipment without soliciting prior approval from DFID for budget items internal re-alignment. Though we are presently seeking approval from DFID for such internal budgetary re-alignment to remedy this problem, this effort is just a temporary measure. Additional funding is required for the successful implementation of the entire VPA Process.

Feasibility studies conducted for successful implementation of nation-wide community outreach activities clearly indicate the need for additional funding. There are plans to undertake numerous and progressive nation-wide travels for community outreach activities as well as bridge gaps identified in the current budget for the VPA process.

Predicated on the above, we are pleased to make the following recommendations:

1. That the Steering Committee seeks/identifies additional funding from the Government of Liberia (GoL) and other donors to augment the current budget being provided by DFID for the VPA process in Liberia in order to:
 - Bridge pitfalls/gaps identified in the current budget as was recently presented in the report of the special Budget Committee set up by the SC to review the Secretariat's current budget;
 - Provide additional utility vehicle (one 4WD hardtop jeep) to support the Secretariat's nation-wide Community Outreach and other out-of-Monrovia programs; and
 - Support other logistical needs of the Secretariat that may arise as the VPA process progresses.
2. That the Steering Committee (SC) seeks or identifies additional funding from the GoL and other donors that would provide for capacity building programs for the TS and facilitate external/international travels of the TS for exposure to and knowledge sharing with other countries in the VPA process:
 - The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) being a new phenomenon in Liberia requires that actors in this process be provided some kind of capacity building as well as exposures to lessons learnt and best practices in other countries where VPA processes are ongoing. The Technical Secretariat should be no exception to such an undertaking as this could also serve as an added advantage in enhancing its work.

- In the absence of exposure to practical experiences of other countries in the VPA process (lessons learnt in other VPA negotiating countries), the TS will continue to experience an uphill task in performing its responsibilities as there are no blue prints or other reliable points of reference common to all countries in the VPA process. Hence, in order to improve the capacity and add to the experience of the TS, it is extremely important for the Secretariat technical staff to travel to other countries for knowledge sharing. An initial travel to Ghana or other places would serve a useful purpose in this instance.