



Statement by the Independent Forest Monitoring Coordination Mechanism (IFMCM) on the Proposed Conservation Agreement Between the Republic of Liberia and Blue Carbon

July 18, 2023

The Independent Forest Monitoring Coordination Mechanism (IFMCM¹) commends the Liberian Government for its vision to contribute to global efforts to fight climate change by tackling deforestation in Liberia. There is no doubt Liberia is currently threatened by the rapid and alarming rate of deforestation as recorded by Global Forest Watch. In 2022, according to Global Forest Watch², Liberia recorded the highest primary forest loss since 2001. While a Conservation deal with UAE's Blue Carbon appears to offer an opportunity to reverse this alarming trend of deforestation, such a deal must not violate the rights of communities and must not threaten the livelihoods and well-being of tens of thousands of Liberians living in areas surrounding Protected and Proposed Protected Areas across Liberia.

The IFMCM is cautioning that an agreement with Blue Carbon must not violate various Liberian laws including the Community Rights Law of 2009 with Respect to Forest Lands and the Land Rights Law of 2018³. Other specific concerns are:

1. **Granting exclusive carbon rights to Blue Carbon:** First, the Government of Liberia and Norway⁴ have a 150-million-dollar agreement to protect Liberia's forest and the status of that agreement is currently unclear given the Norway funds have not been fully utilized and the agreement remains in effect until 2025. Second, if the proposed agreement is opting to grant exclusive carbon rights to Blue Carbon it will violate the rights of communities that own the land and forest that are the subject of the agreement. Liberia's Land Rights Law of 2018 is clear that communities own their customary forest lands and the resources on them. *Claiming the legal rights to market the forest carbon has clear implications for property rights, as it affects the communities' rights to determine how their land is used.* The Liberian Government should be aware that it will be acting inconsistent with the Land Rights Law if it were to consider that it has the legal right to market forest carbon from forest lands it does not own.
2. **A beneficial agreement to Liberia should not contain carbon offsetting conditionality:** Liberia's forest is an asset and a product for the global benefit which should attract funding on its own for the benefit it will bring to the global community in contributing to mitigating effects of global carbon emissions. We need to make a strong case for its conservation rather than entering into a scheme that may lead the country to accumulate liabilities and further plunge the country into debt. Additionally, there is little predictability of the profitability of carbon credits as their value continues to be volatile and still unpredictable as was the case when Liberia first engaged with the failed Carbon Harvesting Concession in 2007⁵.

¹ The IFMCM is a collection of seven Liberian CSOs working together to strengthen Civil Society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (CS-IFM) in line with Forestry Development Authority Regulation 108-07 (Part 7) and Annex VIII of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)

² www.globalforestwatch.org/map/country/LBR/

³ Both laws grant customary communities the right to Free Prior and Informed Consent for any activity that may impact on their land and the forest thereon.

⁴ https://www.mofa.gov.lr/public2/2press.php?news_id=1292&related=7&pg=sp

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jul/23/uk-liberia-carbon-forest-bankrupt>

The IFMCM calls on both the Government of Liberia and Blue Carbon of UAE to be cognizant of and fully comply with the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006, the Act Establishing Community Rights Law of 2009 with Respect to Forest Lands and the Land Rights Law of 2018. While the Blue Carbon agreement may offer an opportunity to reverse the alarming trend of deforestation, the IFMCM believes that failing to fully comply with the existing regulatory framework would undermine the government's good intention toward conservation. The IFMCM is therefore calling on the government to reconsider any action geared towards an agreement, deal, or MOU with UAE's Blue Carbon until consultation with a broad spectrum of Liberian stakeholders is held. These consultations must take into consideration Free Prior Informed Consent and community benefits.