

Institutional Framework and Monitoring Protocol for Independent Forest Monitoring in Liberia

NGO-COALITION, CS-IFM, SDI, FCI, SAMFU, LFMW, NUCFMB, and NUCFDC | DECEMBER 2024

Introduction

This document describes how civil society monitors forestry activities in Liberia. It aims to establish a clear framework for maintaining standards and ensuring consistency by describing the procedures for independent forest monitoring (IFM) as implemented by civil society. The framework lays out the roles and responsibilities of participating Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) including NGOs, National Unions, journalists and forest monitors.

Civil Society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) broadly focuses on forest governance: compliance with and enforcement of all laws, regulations, contractual obligations and international agreements that impact the forest sector.. This includes assessing on an ongoing basis: how decisions are made that affect forest resources, how those decisions are implemented, and how the decisions and their implementation impact on the situation of forest communities and forest resources. These three key elements of the scope of work fall within four strands: (a) performance of relevant government institutions; (b) performance of private companies and their operations; (c) community access to and use of benefits from forest management; and (d) emerging issues in the forest sector. These strands are elaborated below:

1. The first strand of activities focuses on assessing on an ongoing basis the performance of relevant **government institutions** including the FDA, , Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) and all other public institutions, committees or contracted private bodies that have a role in **regulating** activities that impact the forest or a mandate that covers forest resources. Monitoring activities cover all aspects of their mandate – for example how different regulatory authorities maintain policy cohesion and coordinate their respective functions, or permits and contracts.
2. The second strand of this work focuses on **companies** interests in Liberia, specifically those that are either extracting natural resources or have been granted access to forest areas and those whose operations direct impacting on forest resources. It

has focused primarily on logging companies seeking to be prequalified to do logging, those that have been qualified to do logging, and those with active logging agreements or any other forest use permit. Monitoring activities in this strand may also cover agribusinesses, mining or other industries and include systematically tracking changes in their identities, for example changes in the make-up of Significant Individuals. Others include monitoring their operations or activities in the forest and their relationships and interactions with affected communities in their permit area.

3. The third strand of this work focuses on **community representatives**, including but not limited to Community Forestry Development Committees (CFDC) and Community Forestry Management Bodies (CFMB). Monitoring focuses on the relationship between logging companies and communities, and on the functioning of CFDCs and CFMBs. These activities focus on the flow of revenues and other **social obligations** to communities, decision making about those benefits at the community level and the use of those benefits at the local level. In the case of forestry concessions (Forest Management Contracts, or FMCs), monitoring focuses on the negotiation and **fulfillment** of the Social Agreements. In respect of community forests, it includes monitoring the Nine Steps process to obtain a Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA), the subsequent Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP) and, where relevant, the Commercial Use Contract (CUC, or similar precursors).
4. The fourth strand of work focuses on **emerging issues** in the forestry sector. These will include other activities that directly affect forests, forest use, and/or forest communities such as customary land formalization, forest-risk commodities, , carbon and charcoal or fuelwood production.

This document has been prepared by members of the IFM CM. It is based on an original version prepared by the CS-IFM Team (now CS-IFM Inc.) in 2013 and endorsed by the NGO Coalition of Liberia in 2015. It was further revised in December 2024 and subsequently merged from two previous parts: Institutional Framework and Monitoring Protocol, in April 2025. It aims to establish a clear framework for maintaining standards and ensuring consistency amongst CSOs conducting CS-IFM.

Membership

The participating CSOs are those working in the forest sector who are knowledgeable about forest governance and its related issues. Currently this is the National Union of Community Forestry Development Committees (NUCFDC), National Union of Community Forest Management Bodies (NUCFMB), NGO Coalition of Liberia (represented by its facilitator or Management Team member), Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI), Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), and Liberia Forest Media Watch (LFMW). Collectively they comprise the Independent Forest Monitoring Coordination Mechanism (IFM CM). This mechanism exists to:

- Serves as a processing hub for discussions on field alerts received directly from community members or raised by IFM CM members on the course of their work;
- Meet on the third Friday of every month to deliberate on infractions reported by any member of the group. It will discuss and prioritize where to undertake IFM investigations, and shall commission joint investigations comprising of members of the platform or an independent investigation visit under the auspices of the CS-IFM;
- Support individual IFM CM members to advocate on identified forestry issues;
- Collaborate with other networks and coalitions to advocate for the implementation of recommendations from IFM monitoring reports.

Roles and Responsibilities of Partners in IFM

This section illustrates the independence of each entity in fulfilling the mandates for which it was established. The following paragraphs summarize these mandates:

All members of the IFM CM shall:

- Collect and analyze data on forest sector issues, possible illegalities, community grievances, community-company relations, and community-local leader relations, and share this in IFM CM meetings;
- Participate in CS-IFM joint investigations; and produce accurate, evidence-based IFM joint investigative reports for public and policy-level dissemination to influence decision-making;
- Leverage their respective platforms to share findings from IFM reports and disseminate

information on the importance of forest governance, conservation, and community rights;

- Collaborate with other members of the IFM CM and broader civil society networks to advocate for transparency, accountability, and sustainable forest management, using evidence relating to non-compliance to laws, regulations, contracts, agreements, policies and procedures;
- Provide training and mentorship to forest communities and other civil society actors as mandated by their status; and
- Participate in National Multi-Stakeholder Monitoring Committee (NMSMC), NGO Coalition, Community Forest Working Group (CFWG) and similar technical group discussions to share key findings and recommendations from IFM reports, as mandated by their status.
- Document and share success stories, challenges, and lessons learned to encourage broader engagement in forest governance.

1. In addition, as the custodian of the IFM CM, CS-IFM Inc. shall:

- Provide a central point of expertise, supporting other CSOs and communities. Take the lead on IFM investigations recommended at the IFM CM meetings;
- Coordinate IFM investigations, for example by hosting monthly IFM CM meetings to discuss priority topics.
- Lead on many investigations, wherever the IFM CM as a whole agrees to task it to do so, as per its mandate; conduct case-studies on forest-related violations and compliance; and generate information on forestry violations and compliance. Conducts joint investigations alongside other CSOs and community members, as part of skill-sharing. It is willing and interested to conduct joint investigation with the FDA or other authorities.

2. Lead in the production of joint investigative reports.

In addition, as national representatives of forest communities, NUCFDC and NUCFMB shall:

- Maintain records on land rental fees and cubic meter fee payments made to affected communities, and log volumes harvested to justify the cubic meter fee;
- Provide the primary contact with their respective members, including any community-appointed monitors.

2 | Independent Forest Monitoring Coordination Mechanism

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- Ensure IFM support to individual CFDCs and CFMBs is coordinated, not confused.
- Lead in **recurrent** monitoring (as described in the Three Types of Monitoring table below) to generate information on forest law, regulations, procedural and community rights violations as well as projects implemented by communities from forest incomes, and use the necessary structures, templates, and reporting cycles to do this; and
- Leverage their member communities to share findings from IFM reports and advocate for changes the reports recommend.

3. In addition, as the leading IFM CM members for advocacy and capacity-building NGOs (i.e. SDI, FCI, SAMFU) shall:

- Establish their individual advocacy and capacity-building workplans and wherever possible integrate IFM into these.
- Provide training and mentorship on forest governance, monitoring, leadership, gender, financial management, transparency and accountability.
- Lead on advocating for positive systemic change, based on the evidence provided in IFM reports and other information, leveraging their NGO networks to do so.

4. In addition, as a media member of IFM CM, LFMW shall:

- Primarily conduct investigative journalism rather than IFM, as described in the Three Types of Monitoring table below above, but at times conduct joint IFM investigations with other IFM CM members.
- Provide training and mentorship to community-based journalists and other civil society actors on effective communication and media engagement strategies;
- Leverage its media platforms to share findings from IFM reports and follow up publication of IFM reports by, for example, seeking comment from key protagonists ;
- Amplify the voices of affected communities by

using Forest Hour and other media to highlight their concerns and recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders.

- Organize targeted media campaigns as appropriate, including radio programs, social media content, and print publications.
- Serving as a bridge between local communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders by communicating issues and fostering dialogue.

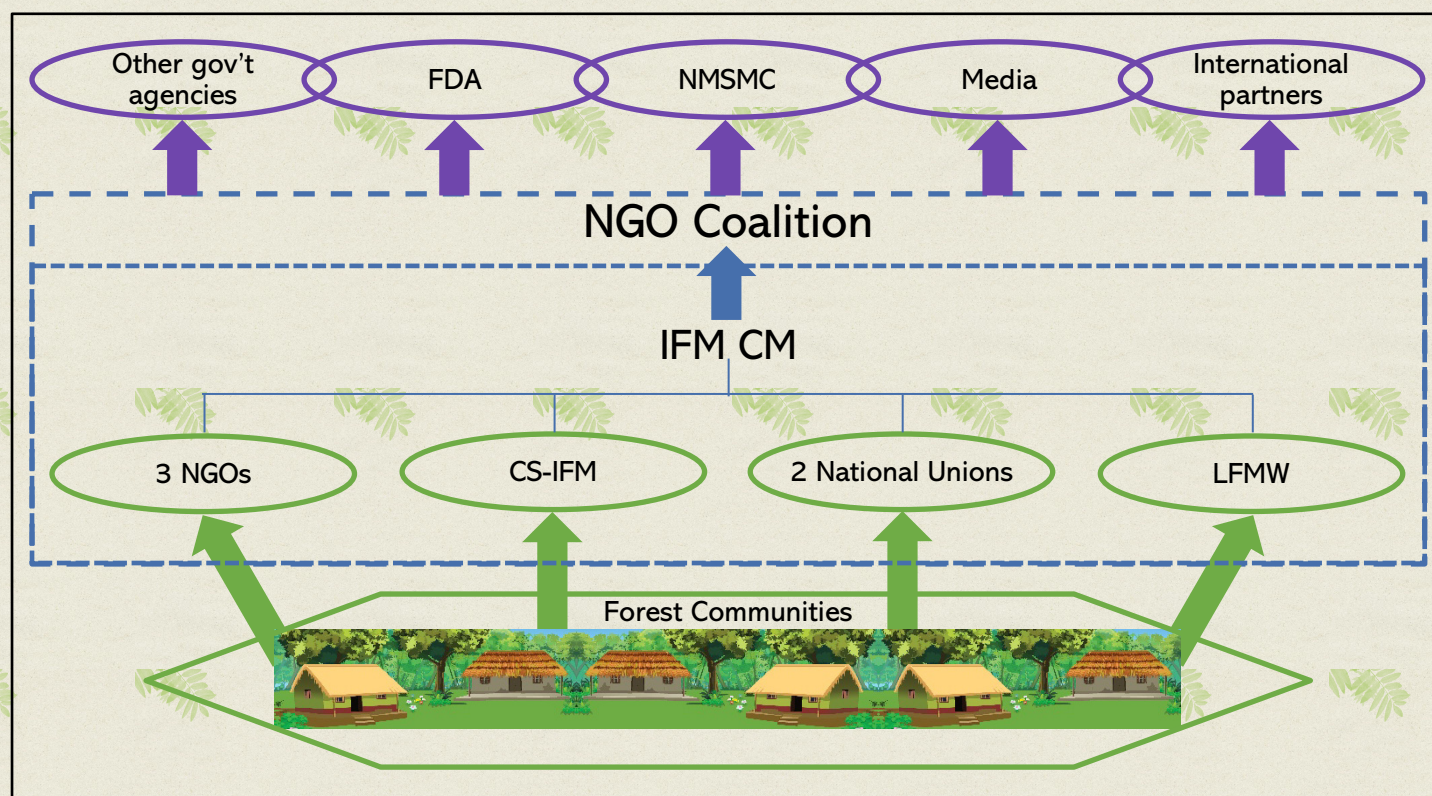
5. In addition, as the umbrella body for environmental CSOs in Liberia, the NGO Coalition (led by its Secretariat) shall:

- Present IFM reports at the NMSMC and other meetings at the request of the IFM CM members;
- Circulate IFM reports among stakeholders, including the NMSMC, and international partners;
- Remain the hub of collective evidence-based advocacy engagement; and lead on joint advocacy actions, including protests, press statements, flyers, posters and other actions for the implementation of IFM reports and recommendations, at the request of the IFM CM members.
- Where the NGO Coalition feels it cannot raise an issue on behalf of the IFM CM will individual IFM CM members are able to do so as mandated by their status (see Key Protocols below).

Community-appointed forest monitors

Each CFDC, and CFMB has an obligation to monitor the forest resources their communities depends on. Community-level monitors are typically appointed by CFDCs under the Social Agreement obligations, in the case of community forests, as 'forest guards' appointed under a Commercial Use Contract (CUC) or similar third-party agreement. Their role is to alert their forest committee leadership, and through this, the IFM CM, through any of its members, about suspected irregularities or failures to comply with the law, regulations, procedures and/or social obligations. They may also conduct IFM jointly with CS-IFM and/or other IFM CM members.

Diagram of Institutional Framework for IFM



The diagram indicates that CS-IFM, the National Unions (NUCFMB, NUCFDC) participating NGOs (SDI, FCI, Samfu) and LFMW all potentially receive information on forest issues from affected communities. They are also all members of IFM CM and of the NGO Coalition. Through these channels the outputs from IFM – including reports, advocacy and information – reach the

target policy audience (FDA, other government agencies, multi-stakeholder dialogues, the media and international partners).

This framework recognizes that forest communities are the bedrock for information gathering, but all members of the IFM CM shall from time to time gather information on forest related issues from their own work in the field.

Three types of monitoring

The following protocol covers IFM only, but it acknowledges IFM is one three distinct types of monitoring, as follows:

IFM	Recurrent monitoring	Journalism
Coordinated and led by CS-IFM.	Conducted by each National Union.	Conducted by journalists.
Based on case studies investigations.	Based on the coordination role of each National Union.	Based on case studies, testimonies etc.
Triggered by alerts, responding to information from a variety of sources including the media.	Regular, for example every quarter or every year.	Triggered by events, responding to newsworthiness.
Investigatory, adapting the investigative approach to the situation.	Fixed set of questions, asked repeatedly over time.	Investigatory, adapting the investigative approach to the situation.
Probes root causes (What, Where, When, Who, Why and How?)	Documents good and bad news equally.	Documents good and bad news, adapting to situation.

• In-depth , taking time and diligence.	• Summarises standard data to present a big picture.	• Short , with public audience attention in mind.
• Peer-reviewed to maintain credibility.	• Consistent with a database structure .	• Published as quickly as possible.

Key protocols

This section details five elements of the IFM protocol: information gathering, information management, opportunity to respond; peer review and publication. Reference should also be made to the [Guide to community based IFM](#), which provides useful guidance to CSOs and communities alike.

Information Gathering

Wherever possible, IFM uses official documents as primary sources of data: all permit agreements should be the official and signed versions. Production and export data should wherever possible be from official sources.

- For environmental impact assessments, maps, inventory, and management plans, relevant agencies should provide final approved versions of these.
- Communities (CFDC and CFMB) provide final signed copies of Social Agreements, Third-Party Agreement, Commercial Use Contracts, by-laws, bank statements, information about their community infrastructure projects etc.
- For information from community representatives, IFM seeks to triangulate information by consulting two or more independent sources, whilst ensuring individuals are not unduly exposed to risk by exposing themselves as sources.

In all cases, CS-IFM verifies the authenticity of documents accessed through third parties, and seeks to establish that a document is not forged. When IFM conducts field missions to verify on the ground, it presents copies to relevant authorities to authenticate.

Documentation and Information Management

Those conducting IFM agree to manage information and analyze data by applying proper management strategies including:

- Storing electronic information in password-protected locations and more than one place (i.e., computers, smart phones, and assigned backup devices);
- Ensuring only authorized people can access confidential information from either electronic or hard copy information, whether it has been used in a report or not. Unauthorized people will only be allowed to access information with the consent and supervision

of those authorized.

- Establishing and using a well-labeled or coded and systematic filing system for electronic and hard copy information so as to be easily accessed by authorized users.

Validation – opportunity to respond

Those conducting IFM agree to the following protocol on opportunity to respond:

- Before publishing a report that alleges wrong doing, the authors present protagonists an opportunity to respond to any allegations against them. For example, before reporting that a logging company did not complete the environmental impact assessment before logging, this allegation should be put to the logging company first.
- This due diligence should be limited to the allegations concerned and ideally limited to objective questions of “Yes” or “No”. It is rarely necessary or appropriate to share an entire draft report with any protagonist prior to peer review.
- One purpose of the opportunity to respond is to enable additional facts about the case to be provided to the investigators. It is important that what the investigators observed should not be disputed, but the interpretation of these observations can be improved with additional factual evidence, and is always subject to the opinions of those making an interpretation.
- The opportunity to respond should be provided in a traceable manner, such as a letter or email with confirmatory evidence of its receipt.
- Where the subject of a report disputes the facts, it will be requested to present its counter claims and provide evidence to substantiate this claim. Where these contradictions cannot be reconciled, both accounts will be published in the IFM report.

Peer review

Those conducting IFM may choose to strengthen the report by sending it for peer review. If so, they agree to the following protocol on peer review:

- The IFM CM establishes an ad hoc technical committee to review each report prior to its

publication. Membership of the committee is on the basis of availability, interest, and knowledge (but no conflict of interest) of the issue or locality.

- There should be a minimum number of people on any peer review committee, and no more than seven. In the case of investigation affected logging concessions (FMCs) or community forests, the committee should always include a member of the NUCFMB, and NUCFDC depending on the type of permit or agreement under study. If the CS-IFM team were not involved in the investigation, a member of this team should join the peer review committee. The author of the draft report cannot peer review their own work, but may be available to provide any clarifications. Peer review committee members do not always have to be members of IFM CM.
- Once the draft of the report is available, the peer review committee convenes to review the report and present its feedback to the authors within no more than ten working days.
- A revised draft is presented to the peer review committee for final review and endorsement. If there is no objection within five working days after circulation to the peer review committee for final review, the report is presented to the NMSMC for example (see below) with a view to its discussion at the next NMSMC meeting, and wider publication.
- In the event that the peer review committee rejects the report, the authors may still publish the report but may not include any mention of the IFM CM or of a peer review.

Publication

An important aspect of accountability is that IFM reports are seen as authored by those who conducted the research. Listing IFM CM (*it is not a registered entity*) or any members that were not involved in the investigation as authors is not recommended. This is because those not involved should not be expected take the risk of defending the findings and analysis in the report.

The authors of any report may *seek* to have the report published in the name of a coalition such as the NGO Coalition of Liberia, the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, or in collaboration with other members of IFM CM. The authors must obtain permission from these group(s) before publishing in their name. The decision to do this should be based on the target audience and advocacy objectives of the report.

Publication can take place through a number of channels. In most cases, the report is first distributed to a limited audience (although legally this still constitutes publication

as there is no way to control what these recipients do with their copies).

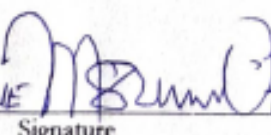
- Reporting to the **NMSMC**. This is the traditional first audience and often the most appropriate one. It is the main statutory body concerning forest governance, and its meetings provide an opportunity to formally discuss the report amongst a wide range of relevant stakeholders.
- It is appropriate to share an electronic copy of the report with NMSMC members a few weeks prior to its monthly meeting, and then to request a discussion is included on the agenda. It is then important that the authors and publishers of the report are able to attend the meeting. If not, then other collaborating attendees need to be briefed on civil society's position regarding the report. Any discussion at the NMSMC is documented, including follow-up action points required of any stakeholder.
- The **CFWG** (Community Forestry Working Group) and **LBWG** (Legality Working Groups) provide similar forums dedicated to different aspects of forest governance. Distributing a report to these groups is useful at a technical level and to build consensus about the recommendations. These groups do not however have the same institutional power as the NMSMC.
- Where they exist, **Complaints Mechanisms** may be suitable channels for the IFM report, especially if the report documents a serious, systemic failure (rather than just an individual breach of or failure to follow the law by a company, community or official). These must use the official Complaints Mechanism procedures, if available.
- The decision about what channel(s) to adopt is the responsibility of the report publishers, based on the target audience and advocacy objectives of the report. It is often more diplomatic, respectful and effective to share the report with a limited audience, and give them an opportunity to discuss it, before releasing it to the general public or posting it online.
- If there is a no formal or written objection of the IFM report from any member of the NMSMC or other stakeholder; the report is subject to wider publication within ten working days from the date of the relevant meeting.
- If there is a formal or written objection, those CSOs responsible for the report, may convene a meeting with those objecting, within ten working days from the date of receipt of the objection, to agree on necessary actions. It is recommended that additional participants or mediators, for example from the relevant government agency and/or NGO Coalition, or

external actors, are included in any such meeting and that its minutes are documented.

- Ultimately, all IFM reports must be made available to

the public, for example on <https://loggingoff.info/>, also using appropriate media to further disseminate the report. This demonstrates our commitment to greater transparency.

Endorsed by

CS-IFM  Civil Society INDEPENDENT FOREST MONITORS	DAYUGAR JOHNSON		TEAM LEADER	19/01/2026
NUCFMB 	Bonathan G. Klalaka		Lead facilitator	16/01/2026
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SDI 	Jonathan W. Yiah		Program Manager	16-01-2026
FCI 	Makula S. Kamara		Project Coordinator	16-01-2026
SAMFU 	Samuel RD Kucunah		Prog. Manager	Jan 16, 2026
LFMW 	Paul M. Kannah		Team Leader	Jan. 16, 2026
NGO Coalition 	MITCHELL BROWNE		FACILITATOR	01-16-2026