

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Date

CEPF Grant xxxxx

Grantee

Society for Environmental Conservation

Project Title

Strengthening Community Capacity for the conservation of the Cavally Belt/Zwedru

Project Location

Zwedru, grand Gedeh, Liberia

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization.
Society for Environmental Conservation
2. Grant title.
Strengthening Community Capacity for Sustainable Land-Use Plan in Zwedru/Cavally/(LBR18)
3. Grant number
4. Grant amount (US dollars): \$ 47,00.00
5. Proposed dates of grant.
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken: Liberia
7. Date of preparation of this document: February, 2019

8. **Introduction:**

The Proposed Zwedru National Forest (64,458ha) about 600 kilometers from Monrovia is a fragmented forest belt located in east central Liberia, north-west of the town of Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County -Liberia. It forms part of one of the world's priority biodiversity hotspots (Upper Guinea Forest) and holds exceptionally diverse ecological communities, distinctive flora and fauna, and a variety of forest types providing refuge to a number of endemic and endangers species and home to many species of global conservation concern (Myers et al. 2000). Some of these endangered species include the critically endangered Liberian Greenbul (*Phyllastrephus leucolepis*) and more species, Icterine Greenbul and Chestnut Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya castanea*, Western Bearded Greenbul *Criniger barbatus*, Brown Nightjar- *Caprimulgus binotatus*, White-breasted Guineafowl- *Agelastes meleagrides*, Yellow-bearded Greenbul, Fraser's Sunbird *Deleornis fraseri*, Zebra Duiker- *Cephalophus zebra* (Vulnerable), Crowned Eagle- *Stephanoaetus coronatus* (near threatened), Rufous-winged *Illadopsis Illadopsis rufescens*, Brown-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes cylindricus*, Timneh Parrot, Western Red Colobus- *Procolobus badius*, Chimpanzee- *Pan troglodytes* (Endangered), and Pygmy Hippopotamus- *Choeropsis liberiensis*.

The Proposed Zwedru National Forest (PZNF) region also has major source of diverse river systems, valuable timber species, non-timber forest products (NTFP) and medicinal plants that provide ecological and socioeconomic services to several thousand community dwellers living in towns and villages lying directly in its proximity. This forest has greater potentials to cumulate in carbon stock and regulate climate disasters. Like many sites in Liberia, this region biodiversity and tropical forests is threaten by anthropogenic factors including overexploitation of natural resources and Ecosystem degradation (degradation from unsustainable agricultural practices, fuel wood and charcoal demands, mining, and pollutions). It is under growing pressure from small scale farmers and artisanal miners. Historically, these forests thrived in tandem with agriculture. Despite its potential, there is limited success in the management of this forest that could contribute to a balanced long-term and sustainable economic growth that supports the livelihoods of local and rural communities and ensure the biodiversity conservation for this important national and global heritage is conserved for future generations.

Land is the basis of human society because it provides food, water, energy, clothing and shelter. The problems of inappropriate land uses, population growth, over-exploitation of natural assets and environmental degradation are complex and long-term. They are exacerbated by their linkage with poverty, inequality and social conflicts because many people have inadequate access to land or to the benefits from its use. It is commonly agreed that tenure of land - and land policy in a broader context - is a fundamental variable in agrarian and rural development.

Land tenure insecurity, associated with local political conflicts and gender inequality, for example can be a key factor in land degradation (The World Bank, Agenda 21, FAO). In recent times, the land policy issues have assumed a new urgency in political and economic discourse in Liberia. Agricultural production is the main source of income for households (approximately 90% of households in forest edge communities). The main farming activity is rice cultivation, the majority of which is carried out in upland areas. Approximately half of land holdings are dedicated to upland farms. Rice production in inland valley swamps (IVS) areas and plantations (largely coffee and cocoa) each cover 25% of the remaining agricultural land. In upland areas, forest or “farm-bush” is cleared and farmed for one or two years. However, today agricultural lands in these areas are so degraded that subsistence rather than market-based farming is the norm. As the population grows, the fallow period between cropping years is becoming shorter and the demand for more ‘untouched’ land, including land in the reserve areas, is increasing. Farmers have few options but to encroach on forests and practice rotational slash and burn agriculture to meet their food needs. As a result, farmers are claiming more farmlands from the forest area due to no land use planning within the PZNF.

In addition to farming, the area’s population is highly dependent on the natural resource base for other needs. Hunting for bush meat to supplement declining yield exert further pressures on the landscape. Uncontrolled extraction of minerals further exacerbates the situation. Lack of knowledge of sustainable farming practices and continued overreliance on subsistence farming with poor inputs and low access to capital implies that communities would remain food insecure with a yearly hunger season. Productivity of farms, cited to be a key challenge in the area, would continue to be low and challenges such as decreases in fertility and declining fallow periods, which are linked to shifting cultivation “are likely to get worse in future”. Complementary activities for both subsistence use and cash generation include logging, mining, gathering, hunting, fishing, and petty trade. Communities rely on numerous forest products in their everyday lives; this includes both timber and non-timber forest products such as honey, fruits, seeds, thatch, and rattan. These natural resources are gathered primarily in bush-fallow areas and plantations but also in forests ‘Bush’ areas are also important to the creation and maintenance of local society’s traditional structures particularly local governance and secret societies. There is limited institutional capacity and insufficient local professional capacity to carry out integrating conservation, development work and development and implement land use plan in the area. The Forestry Development Authority (FDA) is critically under-funded and lack sufficient field staff to fully implement land management use. In the longer term, therefore deforestation would affect the important ecosystem services and livelihood options that underpin the communities agricultural and livelihood activities, including clean freshwater supplies, erosion control, soil fertility, carbon storage, NTFPs and supplies of animal protein. The communities would remain marginalized and unable to harness external support and lack the capacity and organization to help them.

Therefore, achieving the desire on biodiversity conservation would be daunting. Worse, if these populations living in these terrains remain largely unaware of the high value of the PZNF natural environment and resources, they will not be able to play the role of utilizing and conserving them effectively. Instead, they might become impoverished and have no choice but to exploit biodiversity

9. **Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities:**

Given that the Cavally Belt Project has been operational since September, 2018 the following stakeholder engagement activities provides an overview of the kinds of activities that will be undertaken:

- 2 Consultations meetings with traditional authorities, key stakeholders, relevant government authorities on forest and landscape management
- Conduct two day technical training workshop on integrated land use planning and mapping for 24 participants from 4 communities including partners
- Undertake land use planning and mapping with target communities Project launch meetings with local leaders in the project area and with major stakeholders in Zwedru.
- Organize 1 meeting/workshop with relevant stakeholders and government agencies for validation of community land use plans
- Conduct a rapid assessment in the 4 communities
- Organize 5 community awareness outreach platforms/discussions on biodiversity, land use and forest management, climate change and environmental issues
- Production and broadcast of weekly radio call-in talk shows in local languages about what's been happening to the animals and forests and why behavior change is important
- Train 200 farmer trainers on climate smart agricultural techniques (conservation agriculture, integrated agriculture-aquaculture/horticulture, Agro-forestry systems (with
- Conduct 4 market chain studies on prioritized NTFPs and identify opportunities for capacity building.
- Training of 15 targeted individuals (farmers, non- farmers, SMFEs natural resource users, etc.) on Cane rat (*Thryonomys Sp*) domestication.
- Establish/strengthen VSLA groups and provide training on VSLA methodology

Community Engagement for the relevant stakeholders support towards the project implementation

- Consultative meetings with the relevant land Ministries and Local Authorities such as: Forestry Development Authority (FDA) Ministry of Agriculture, Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Land Commissioner, LISGIS, District Commissioners as well as the Paramount Chief, Clan chiefs, Town Chiefs and the County Superintendent, to provide oversight of the projects and solicit their moral support and contribution. Series of Town hall meetings and focus group discussions in various communities to introduce the project aim and objectives for their acceptance and support.

Community Engagement for the development and mapping of land use plan

- Meeting of all community chiefs to introduce the Sustainable Land Use Plan project. The chiefs formally blessed the project at these meeting
- Consultations meeting with FDA, LISGIS, Liberia Land Authority (LLA) staff about the possible collaboration.
- A partnership agreement will be signed within SEC and among collaborative land ministries as to ensure partnership roles and responsibilities.
- Conduct two days' workshop for capacity building of project beneficiaries on technical aspect of sustainable land use plan.
- Conduct intensive (field related) through collaborative partners that will serves as a lead facilitators and trained community participants during the technical training will also serve as local experts in their various communities to develop the sustainable land use plan and mapping for four communities.
- A special invitation will be sent to relevant stakeholders including land ministries, civil society, and private companies for a day community land use plans validation workshop.
- Organize 5 community awareness outreach platforms/discussions on biodiversity, land use and forest management, climate change and environmental issues;

- A football tournament will be organized within the project communities and a trophy/ medal will be presented to the winner. Special invitation will be sent to FDA, MOA, LISGIS, LLA and Civil Society Coalition to elaborate on various topics: Importance of community land use plan, Importance of biodiversity, Sustainable/ best agricultural practices etc to climax the occasion for better understanding of project communities in the biodiversity conservation and best practices.
- Innovative platforms will be established in each project community and partnership approach to complement conventional community meetings in providing support to communities and civil society in addressing issues of concerns regarding biodiversity conservation/ land use plan process for feed back to the larger communities. This will ensure maximum participation of communities. The platform will bring together key partners, including community base organizations, government and the private sector using participatory approach which will strengthen local ownership of the action.

Engagement activities about livelihoods activities:

- Focus group discussions with groups of women about preferred livelihoods activities
- Focus group discussions with groups of men about preferred livelihoods activities
- Town hall meetings to share information about different livelihoods activities
- Conduct assessment on existing smallholder farmers in project communities
- Sign Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Smallholder farmers for smooth implementation of best agricultural practices
- Sign MoA with relevant hunters for alternative to wildlife hunting project
- Focus group discussions with hunters and smallholder farmers about bushmeat trade and preferred alternatives

10. **Project Stakeholders:** The key stakeholder groups for this project are:

- 4 project communities in the Franzai, Zai, Tuzon and Garley, Grand Gedeh County
- Important sub-groups within the communities are community leaders (chiefs, youth leaders, women leaders); elders; women; youth; farmers; miners; hunters; bushmeat traders
- Regional FDA staff (Regional Forester for the Region and other regional staff)
- FDA staff from headquarters in Monrovia, especially those from the Conservation and Community sections
- Ministry of Agriculture, Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information,
- Grand Gedeh County Community College, Agriculture Department
- Traditional authorities for the project area (Paramount Chief, Acting Paramount Chief)
- Government authorities for the project area (District Commissioner, County Superintendent, County Statutory Superintendent)
- Partner organizations in the implementation of SEC project, Sustainable Land Use Plan
- Community Forestry Working Group,

Stakeholder Engagement Program:

SEC's approach to stakeholder engagement in the Sustainable Land Use Plan project is to integrate stakeholder engagement with all facet of the activities. As integral part of methodologies of the project SEC will ensure the active participation of relevant stakeholder's are maintained and supported through relevant stakeholder commitment.

- Particularly for the implementation of the Land Use Plan, ensure that there is general consensus within the Communities for each decision that needs to be made throughout the process.

- Ensure that all stakeholders have a good understanding of the project and what it is trying to achieve so that they can make informed decisions with respect to activities supported by the project.

Multiple methods will be used for all stakeholder engagement and will vary from one activity to another. The example of demonstration on Land Use Plan Project can serve as an example to illustrate this:

- Community interest in sustainable land use plan is established through responses on the focus group discussions about livelihoods activities with men and women separately; discussions about livelihoods activities; informal discussions with community members
- Community members are informed about the possibility of establishing a demonstration site through town hall meetings; informal discussions with community members
- Participation in the activity was formalized in a written agreement with SEC outlining the responsibilities of community members and SEC
- Throughout the process of establishing the demonstration sites, relevant traditional authorities will be kept up-to-date about progress through discussions with project staff
- Feedback from the participants will be obtained through focus group discussions
- At harvest time, the results of their farms produce will be shared through visits to the demonstration sites by interested community members participants on community radio; posting photos of the cane rats pen on bulletin boards in each community
- Stakeholders are aware of the results of the demonstration sites through updates given at meetings

11. **Consultation methods:** As noted above, multiple methods will be used for stakeholder engagement and will vary according to activity and stakeholder group. Consultation with stakeholders will take place throughout the life of the project and consultation methods will again vary according to activity and stakeholder group. The consultation methods that have been used previously and which we expect to continue to use in the future include:

- Town hall meetings with the whole community or particular sub-groups (e.g. women, miners)
- Surveys/questionnaires e.g. questionnaire for participants in a training activity, before and after the activity
- Focus group discussions with specific groups e.g. groups of women to discuss livelihoods activities
- Town hall meetings that include participatory methods such as participatory mapping
- Discussions at meetings of stakeholders
- Informal discussions with community members
- Key informant interviews e.g. series of interviews with some individual hunters, smallholder farmers.
- Meetings e.g. meetings with community leaders to discuss possible boundaries for the mapping
- Suggestion boxes installed beside the project bulletin boards

12. **Other Engagement Activities:**

In a very real sense, all of the community-based activities in the Sustainable Land Use Plan and livelihood are engagement activities. As noted above, SEC has signed MOUs with communities in which they commit to conserving part of their Community Forest (the areas of High Conservation Value) and SEC commits to continuing to support the communities to improve their livelihoods. CEPF enables SEC to honor this commitment, thereby engaging the communities in this conservation work, as well as to provide training to the farmers and developing their capacity to effectively conserve the Forests for the protection of the remaining species. Specific activities include:

- Training for a small loan program
- Mapped out community land use plan
- Work with hunters to domesticate alternative to bush-meat (grass-cutter)
- Training to effectively manage the Community Forests
- Training in best Agricultural practices

13. Timetable:

This section will provide a schedule outlining dates and locations when various stakeholder engagement activities, including consultation, disclosure, and partnerships will take place and the date by which such activities will be incorporated into project design. As noted above, stakeholder engagement is integral to all project activities and all project activities incorporate stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the schedule for stakeholder engagement is really the same as the schedule for the whole project.

Resources and Responsibilities:

It is important to note that stakeholder engagement is integral to all project activities and all project activities incorporate stakeholder engagement. Therefore, Field and extension officers will carry out stakeholder engagement relevant to their areas of responsibility. For example, the Field Officer have responsibility for project wide stakeholder engagement activities such as the town hall meeting noted above to introduce the project, carrying out surveys in the communities where they work. Some of the stakeholder engagements are budgeted such as sustainable land use plan which involves FDA, LLA, MOA and LISGIS, the total cost is 2,000 USD.

The extension officer has the responsibility to conduct all stakeholder engagement for all livelihood components supported by the field officer.

14. Grievance mechanism:

SEC will solicit means of grievance mechanism from project communities and other means of mechanisms will be shared with the immediate project communities and allows them to choose the best options for the project by which they may raise a grievance with SEC, the CEPF Regional Implementation Team, the CEPF Secretariat or the World Bank. Affected local communities will be informed of the objectives of the project and the existence of a grievance mechanism. The email address, telephone number, and physical address of SEC, the CEPF Regional Implementation Team, will be made publicly available through announcements at public meetings, through notices placed on community bulletin boards, and via announcement on community radio. We will share all grievances – and a proposed response with the Regional Implementation Team within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Executive Director, they may submit the grievance to the World Bank at the local World Bank office.

15. Monitoring and Reporting:

Stakeholder and third-party involvement in the monitoring of project impacts will take place through the following activities.

Focus group discussions and questionnaires designed with participants in all training activities. Focus group discussions and questionnaires with all participants in the small loan program

Before and after self-assessments by SEC staff of their ability to support community led biodiversity conservation activities

Before and after self-assessments by Communities) of their ability to manage alternative livelihood options and a small loan program

External mid-term evaluation of the Cavally Belt Project will cover SEC activities and will include focus group discussions and key informant interviews with stakeholders

External end-of-project evaluation of the Cavally Belt project will cover SEC activities and will include focus group discussions and key informant interviews with stakeholders