



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPATORY LAND USE PLANNING IN LIBERIA: THE DOS AND DON'TS OF BOTTOM-UP LAND USE PLANNING AS PART OF TENURE REFORM

ELLEN PRATT, ETHAN MILLER, URIAH GARSINII
Liberia Land Authority, Liberia
ellenopratt@gmail.com

**Paper prepared for presentation at the
“2019 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 25-29, 2019**



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



Copyright 2019 by author(s). All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.

Abstract

In September 2018, after years of advocacy, negotiation, and research, the Government of Liberia passed the Land Rights Act (LRA). This act formally recognizes customary land and calls for land use planning in every community. The Liberia Land Authority, the agency tasked with implementing the LRA, and IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative, are piloting bottom-up land use planning in Foya District of Lofa County, in Northwest Liberia, to understand the opportunities and challenges of such a process. The first of its kind in Liberia, this project captures lessons learned from land use planning at the clan and district level. Key insights include the need for inter-agency support, careful consideration of land use planning scale, and careful accommodation of power dynamics during the bottom-up process. By analyzing the successes and challenges of this process, we offer insights that can inform tenure reform processes occurring elsewhere.

Key Words:

Land tenure, land use planning, Liberia, participatory mapping, customary land

Introduction

In September 2018, after years of advocacy, negotiation, and research from many stakeholders, the Government of Liberia passed the Land Rights Act (LRA). This act allows for the formal recognition of all customary land and heralds in a new era in which community land rights are afforded equal protection to private land rights (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia, 2018). One tenet of the LRA, as explicated in Article 35, Section 1.e, is the need for land use planning to occur in every community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia, 2018). Numerous other reports and studies have highlighted the need for participatory land use planning in Liberia as a necessary precursor to sustainable investments, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability (FCPF & UN-REDD, 2012; NIBIO, NFG, & ICRAF, 2016; The World Bank, 2010). However, as with many such reforms, implementing such a large-scale effort can be extremely complex and daunting for a government agency to manage; especially one that is still in its formative stages.

The Liberia Land Authority (LLA), the agency tasked with implementing the LRA, and IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), have embarked on a pilot process in Foya District of Lofa County, in Northwest Liberia, to understand the opportunities and challenges of bottom-up land use planning in Liberia. This initiative aims to elucidate insights around the implementation of bottom-up land use planning in a post-conflict state like Liberia.

While participatory land use planning has been implemented in other African nations (IFAD, 2014; Resources, 2017; Ujamaa Community Resource Team, 2010), many countries still do not have adequate institutions, capacity, and legal frameworks for such interventions. In Liberia, the legal framework has been addressed through the LRA however institutions and internal capacity for implementing the act remain weak (The World Bank, 2017). This project serves as a case study, especially for other African nations undergoing land tenure reform and land use planning, through which lessons can be learned from practical implementation experience.

The first of its kind in Liberia, this project tests methodologies for bottom-up land use planning and multi-sectoral coordination in the land sector at the clan and district level. By analyzing the successes and challenges of this process, we offer insights that can be used to inform tenure reform processes and methods occurring elsewhere.

Policy Background

Experts link poor governance of natural resources including land, to the factors that contributed to the Liberian Civil War. For example, Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (IMF, 2008) states:

The origins of the conflict can be traced to two broad factors. First, significant portions of society were systematically excluded and marginalized from institutions of political governance and

access to key economic assets... In the early days, land and property rights of most Liberians were severely limited.

The Government of Liberia's efforts to reform land tenure gained significant momentum in 2013 with the adoption of Liberia's first Land Rights Policy (Land Commission, 2013). The Policy established four land rights categories including Government Land, Public Land, Private Land and Customary Land. The policy states:

The Government recognizes and protects the land rights of communities, groups, families, and individuals who own, use, and manage their land in accordance with customary practices and norms, equal to Private Land Rights.

The Liberia Land Authority was established by an act of Legislature on October 5, 2016 with a mandate "to hold and manage all unallocated Public Land on behalf of the Liberian people" and "promote, support and ensure the development of land use plans and zoning schemes and their implementation through municipalities, towns and other local government structures". Finally, on 19th September 2018, the President signed the Liberia Land Rights Act. Article 35, Section 1.e requires every customary community to "develop a land use management plan."

Methods

The land use planning process followed a participatory approach, incorporating top-down perspectives into a largely bottom-up process. The land use planning methods outlined below were carried out chiefly by a consultant firm, Meta Meta Research, which IDH and the LLA commissioned for the initiative. The process all took place between November 2018 and February 2019. For the goal of this investigation specifically, data was collected and analyzed about the process itself. This collection and analysis was performed to understand the opportunities and challenges of the land use planning method. The meta-analysis of the land use planning was performed by IDH and LLA staff.

Project Site

The project occurred in Foya District of Lofa County, Liberia (see Figure 1). Foya is in the Northwest corner of the country, bordering Sierra Leone and Guinea. As such, it is a main thoroughfare for trade and movement between the three countries. According to the 2008 population census, there were 71,364 people living in Foya District (LISGIS, 2008). The district is comprised of a mosaic of grasslands, secondary seasonal tropical forest, and agriculture land. A previous study found that more than half of the total land area of 57,000 ha in Foya District is covered by the grasslands (NICFI, 2016). The district is

about 440 meters above sea level, has an average annual temperature of 24 to 30 degrees Celsius and has an average rainfall of 2,931 mm (IDH & LNIC, 2018).

Foya District is a Statutory District, as such it is governed through the statutory administration by the District Superintendent and District Commissioner, and their respective offices. It has three administrative districts: Wuam, Rankollie, and Tengia. Concurrently, these administrative districts also have customary administration systems. The Paramount Chief oversees the Kissi Chiefdom (which aligns with the Foya District boundaries) and the chiefdom includes three clans: Wuam District has two clans, Rankollie has three, and Tengia has two. Each clan has Sectional, Zonal, and Town Chiefs.

Agriculture in Foya is dominated by shifting cultivation, mainly for upland rice farming. In addition to upland rice, other crops include oil palm, cassava, fruits and vegetables, cocoa, and coffee (NICFI, 2016). The area was the productive rice and cereal producing zone of Liberia before the war. However, now it is largely subsistence-oriented or linked to informal local and regional trade.

Land Use Planning Process

National Workshop

The first phase of the land use planning process involved a two-day workshop at the national level, held in Monrovia December 3 and 4, 2018. During these sessions, representatives from national government ministries and agencies, civil society organizations, and Foya District convened to kick off the process. The workshop included a discussion on land use planning methods, a session on defining objectives, and mapping current and future development efforts by government and civil society in Foya. The sessions disaggregated the work by government, civil society, and local representatives to achieve a holistic picture of the District.

Land Cover Mapping

Secondly, a two-day working session was held in Monrovia on December 5 and 6, in which a small group of technicians from government and non-profits came together to develop a land cover map of Lofa County, including Foya District. Ten people attended the workshop and were trained on land cover mapping using Open Foris Collect and Google Earth.

District Workshop

Once the national-level workshop was completed, the team moved to Foya District, where they spent the next two weeks. The first activity performed was a District-level workshop. During this workshop, local government and civil society representatives developed hand-drawn maps of the district, indicating current land uses and proposed visions of future land use. This activity drew on both the statutory and traditional administrations for knowledge, guidance, and consultation. The workshop was the catalyst event for the bottom-up portion of the land use planning process.

Clan-level Consultations

Between December 8 and 22, 2018, extensive consultations and assessments were performed within the district. These were done at the clan-level for Tengia, Wuam, and Rankollie. Each clan-level consultation lasted two days and included participatory resource mapping, problem analysis, future land use visioning, analysis of land use conflicts, review of land tenure arrangements, and discussion on income sources. Through the mapping activities, communities identified areas for farming and other livelihood activities, land for future use or conservation, land for infrastructural development, and land for potential sustainable agro-production supported through external investments. These exercises and their results form the backbone of the land use planning process. Each session was attended by representatives from the clan's respective sub-clans. For example, the Tengia session was attended by the Clan Chiefs, Clan Chairladies, Youth Leaders, and other representatives from both Tengia clans.

In addition to the participatory rural appraisal techniques, biophysical observations were also made across the landscape. These included soil, water, and vegetation assessments. Seven soil pits were dug in areas that were chosen to represent the variations in slope class, land use, and geography. Streams and wetlands were visited to assess water resource management capacity and to record their locations for the land use plan.

All the information gathered through these various exercises were collected, analyzed, and then synthesized by the consultant team into a single land use plan for Foya District.

Data Collection

While the consultant team implemented the above-described land use planning process, LLA and IDH staff collected data to understand the challenges and opportunities of the process. This data was collected through participant observations and key informant interviews. Participant observations were made using a standardized template through which later review and synthesis could be performed. These observations were structured around facilitation, participation, content and other observations. Key informant interviews were held with staff of the LLA, IDH, and the consultant team in order to assess the initiative.

Data Analysis

The results from the observation recordings and the interviews were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive approach. They were then sorted into a priori 'Structural' and 'Procedural' themes. Structural themes refer to lessons that can be learned about the framework and institutional structures around participatory land use planning while procedural themes refer to points regarding the actual implementation and land use planning process. While many themes and observations were collected, we

here report the most salient lessons for future initiatives and implementation, based on discussion with the LLA and internal review.

Results

Structural Themes

Of the many themes and observations made, four primary lessons can be drawn about the structuring of participatory land use planning.

1. **Building intra-governmental and inter-agency support is crucial for comprehensive land use planning.** In Liberia, as with many countries where land use planning is new, previous management plans have been created and executed by individual sectors. Such a history of sector-specific planning is tough to overcome quickly as multi-sector land use planning requires a significant culture change.
2. **Local awareness-raising is important to ensure people understand the connection between land rights reform and land use planning.** For areas where both processes (rights and planning) are new, the message needs to be clear and translatable into actual experiences and scenarios. At times we met confusion as to the purpose and intent of land use planning.
3. **Build the capacity of NGOs and CSOs to support communities when they prepare their land use plan.** The model employed here, in which consultants are hired to carry out implementation, is not cost-effective for the LLA to implement themselves. Instead, emphasis can be placed on ensuring standard procedure for creating land use plans so that other NGOs and CSOs who implement do so in a systematic and approved manner.
4. **Convening a core group of technician-level staff from various agencies is a strong way to build cohesion and capacity around the technical aspects of land use planning.** We found that bringing a multi-sectoral group of technicians together, especially in a ‘hackathon’ setting, built strong relationships between these individuals, that has continued in communication and collaboration months since the event.

Procedural Themes

For participatory land use planning to be successful, the process of implementation needs to be effective as well as the structure. Therefore, we have pulled out the following seven lessons from observing and assessing the process, which can inform future work:

1. **Disaggregate planning discussions by gender and age.** In many communities, inter-personal power dynamics can strongly influence response to land-related questions. Influences by local chiefs, dynamics between towns, and women vs. men perspectives need

- to be anticipated and planned for accordingly. Splitting groups by gender and age can ensure people are able to speak freely.
2. **Facilitate interactions between people from the landscape and national representatives** so people at the national level can hear and see for themselves what a bottom-up process looks like. This is especially important in countries where the ‘bottom-up’ method is novel.
 3. **The scale of land use planning is a critical question and determinant of time and resources.** We performed the process at the clan-level and at the district-level. We did not facilitate planning at the level of each individual town. This issue of scale is a critically-important decision from a logistics and from a legal perspective. According to the LRA, communities need to develop land use plans but how ‘community’ is defined is open to interpretation. Since much of the traditional political structure and decisions are centered at the level of the clan, we followed this approach.
 4. **Having strong facilitators and rapporteurs during the PRA components is key to accurately capturing the information.** Without someone careful notes, critical observations and reflections can be missed and can significantly alter the results.
 5. **For rural contexts, biophysical soil analysis and land suitability are critical components of the land use plan.** This information is important to agriculture and forestry investors who may be interested in the areas.
 6. **Customary land formalization needs to be a separate process.** The intricacies and delicate nature of boundary harmonization needs to be treated as a separate task, especially when land use planning is conducted at the level of the clan or jurisdiction.
 7. **Land use planning on customary land needs to allow for short-term land use decisions by communities while setting targets and recommendations instead of prescriptions at the landscape scale.** In rural communities in Liberia, and likely other places as well, land use change happens incredibly fast, driven largely by immediate needs. This brings a complex dynamic to land use planning in these areas and must be acknowledged in the plan.

Discussion

Participatory land use planning has been often-cited as a key requirement for smart development, both from a rural and urban perspective. In rural settings, land use planning can be employed to balance agriculture development, environmental conservation, and infrastructure expansion. In many African nations where agricultural investments are increasing, land rights are unclear, and land is distributed at the national level, participatory land use planning can provide a pathway for transparent development. In Liberia, participatory land use planning holds this promise. However, for it to be successful,

implementation needs to be monitored, evaluated, and improved upon. This project provides results from Liberia's first land use planning process, which can be used at both the national and international level for guiding similar initiatives.

The results presented here present a few key points for informing future implementation. First, the involvement of CSOs, Donors, and other stakeholders to assist in implementation will be critical for the mandated scale and pace of land use planning. This can apply to other countries where implementing agencies are understaffed and underfunded for their mandated tasks. For these types of arrangements to be successful, however, regulations and frameworks for implementation should be promulgated by the coordinating government body. These regulations can ensure that processes are conducted in a systematic and standardized manner.

It should be noted though that this project and its results reflect a rural land use planning process. Conducting such a process in peri-urban and urban settings will face very different challenges, politics, and results. Therefore, it is important that separate frameworks for land use planning be prepared for these different settings. It is unlikely that the activities we carried out in Foya will be relevant for land use planning in Monrovia, for example.

Bottom-up land use planning is a new approach for many nations. Previously, land use planning, if it was done, was done by a national body or conducted through a purely technical scientific lens. The participatory approach laid out here gives the people who would be most affected by land use decisions the power to determine how they want their land to be used. For this approach to be successful though, national stakeholders must understand the process and local stakeholders must be fully invested and engaged. Maintaining both levels of political commitment requires strong and continued coordination and communication.

The lessons presented here can help illuminate key concerns and opportunities for future bottom-up land use planning efforts elsewhere. Through a careful and improved approach, such processes can pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable development; green growth.

References

- FCPF, & UN-REDD. (2012). *Readiness Preparation Proposal for Country: Republic of Liberia*.
Monrovia, Liberia.
- IDH, & LNIC. (2018). *Background Data, Foya District*. Monrovia, Liberia.
- IFAD. (2014). How to do Participatory land-use planning, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TE.1958.4322031>
- IMF. (2008). *Liberia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. Washington, DC.
- Land Commission. Land Rights Policy (2013). Monrovia, Liberia.
- LISGIS. (2008). *2008 National Population and Housing Census: Preliminary Results*. Monrovia, Liberia.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liberia. The Land Rights Act (2018). Monrovia, Liberia.
- NIBIO, NFG, & ICRAF. (2016). *Forest and Mosaic Landscape Restoration in Lofa County, Liberia*.
Monrovia, Liberia.
- NICFI. (2016). *Forest and Mosaic Landscape Restoration in Lofa County, Liberia*. Monrovia, Liberia.
- Resources, M. of N. (2017). *Rwanda National Land Use Planning Guidelines*. Kigali, Rwanda.
- The World Bank. (2010). *Mainstreaming Social and Environmental Considerations Into the Liberian National Forestry Reform Process*. Washington, DC.
- The World Bank. (2017). *Project Appraisal Document for Liberia Land Administration Project*.
Washington DC.
- Ujamaa Community Resource Team. (2010). *Participatory Land Use Planning as a Tool for Community Empowerment in Northern Tanzania*. London, United Kingdom.

Figures

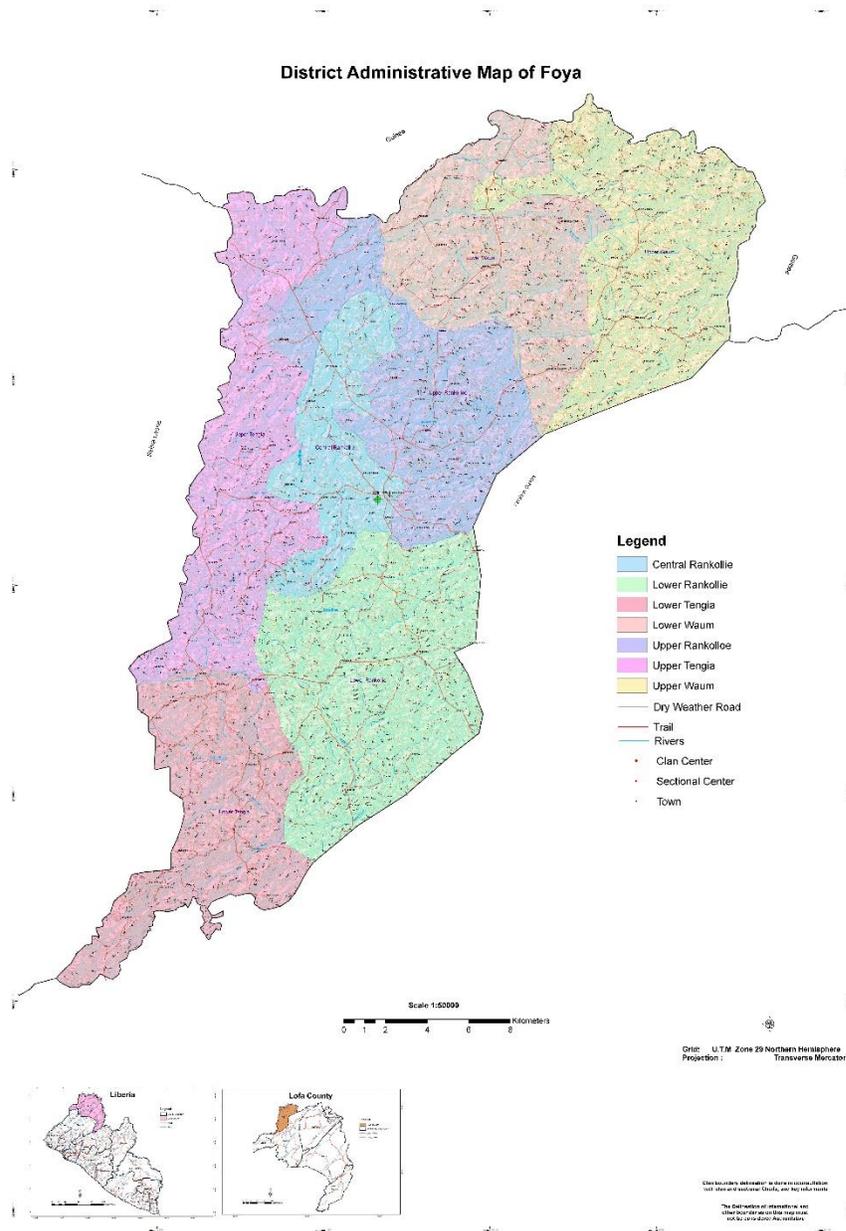


Figure 1. Map of Foya District, in Liberia. Produced by Meta Meta Research.