

2. Agricultural expansion, particularly for subsistence farming (cocoa) and large-scale oil palm and rubber production.
3. Mining and mineral exploitation (iron ore extraction in the Nimba Hills, for example).

From 2001 to 2021, 0.56% of tree cover loss occurred in areas where the dominant drivers of loss resulted in deforestation, with important impact on biodiversity and water resources⁴¹.

With the Community Forest Law of 2009, forestry communities are starting to realise the potential of selling assets (in this case logs) to ensure survival and development of their communities. While, in theory, this is a positive and empowering development, the lack of capacities for monitoring and control of the sales contracts with the logging companies has led to a poorly accounted for (only in terms of value of its timber) and highly unsustainable reduction of the forest wealth in community forest areas.

In addition to the timber extraction related challenges, the deforestation rate is putting one of the best preserved hotspots for biodiversity at risk. For decades, Liberia's wildlife has been depleted by the bush meat and pet trade, which makes no distinction between protected and non-protected species. With a legal framework hardly known by citizens and by law enforcement agents or by the judiciary, this trade has put protected species at the risk of extinction. Actions against illegal wildlife trade, including timber, must continue to avoid further erosion of biodiversity values underpinning law enforcement and governance.

Lack of adequate capacity permeates also in the conservation sector. There is an urgent need to support adequate infrastructures in protected areas, operational capacity of Forestry Development Authority (FDA) rangers and law enforcement agents, as well as a research-based decision making in the management of protected areas combined with knowledge creation about international best practices in the conservation sector.

In this context, the actions of the Erasmus+ programme for capacity building in the field of Higher Education and Vocational Education and training will be promoted to strengthen the capacity of the relevant education and training institutions and administration through international cooperation. These developments negatively affect the livelihood conditions of local communities and long-term sustainability of economic growth in Liberia, affecting also Liberia's capability to reduce GHG emissions as envisaged by its NDC and commitment to the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, these developments undermine the efforts to reducing vulnerability to climate change and increasing resilience, both in human and natural systems.

The action will address the root causes of deforestation thereby countering, at the same time, the loss of forest species in a biodiversity hotspot of the UGRF⁴².

2. Unsustainable forest management practices and inadequate governance and political will to ensure long-term economic gains and development from the forestry sector

Current forest management principles are based on the guidelines applied back in the 1950s-60s and have proven insufficient to sustain both the commercial forest exploitation and the development of community forestry in the long term. There is an urgent need to review and restructure the management framework of Liberian forests, if forestry is to provide an economically relevant input based on a long-term commercial exploitation or conservation purpose, including Community forests.⁴³

The role that logging companies have been playing is detrimental for progress in the sector. Partly responsible for the wrong decision making by administrators, the private sector is taking advantage of the lack of capacity and of political will within the key government bodies. Additionally, inadequate enforcement of regulations and overlapping mandates between Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and Liberia Land Authority (LLA), are creating a business environment enabling operators with short-term strategies and discouraging investments by companies with long-term approaches.

The revision of the nationally determined contributions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement and related Forest Reference Emission levels, as well as Liberia's

⁴¹ Global Forest Watch. Country Profile Liberia.

⁴² Upper Guinean Rain Forest.

⁴³ As per the study on sustainability of forest operations, drafted by the VPASU-2, current management approach does not sustain viable commercial forestry beyond the current cutting cycle (in the next 20-30 years). Based on basic principles of forest management, planning operations need to start today if we want to curve this trend.