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Social and environmental impacts of Maryland oil palm plantations on forests biodiversity and community livelihoods in Liberia

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Abstract

Liberia holds 44.5 % of the remaining portion of the Upper Guinean Rainforest in West Africa which is home to critically endangered forest elephants and western chimpanzees, the forests are of vital importance for the livelihoods of millions of West Africans and provide key ecosystem services of local and global importance for food systems transformation and agroecology. Liberia's efforts toward land reform through legislation and policies recognise communities' rights to own and manage their customary lands and resources. These include the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006, the Community Rights Law Concerning Forest Lands of 2009, and the Land Rights Act of 2018. In May 2022, the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) - Friends of the Earth Liberia team researched the Social and Environmental Impacts of Maryland Oil Palm Plantations in Liberia. 23 Key Informant Interviews and 10 focus group discussions in seven communities in and around the MOPP plantation. They included farmers, (contract) workers, MOPP staff, local authorities, women and youth leaders, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Inspector, the civil society head, and the gender coordinator of Maryland County. The team cross-checked information with formal documents as much as possible and took photographs and GPS locations of areas of deforestation, pollution, and conflict. Research finds that land conflict and deforestation include several negative impacts on communities. MOPP has not respected land tenure rights or followed free prior and informed consent (FPIC) standards, including resettlement without reparation and destruction of farms and old towns without (sufficient) compensation or restitution. Communities lost their farms during MOPP land acquisition and clearance and villages were identified as 'village de squatters', resulting in limited access to farmland increases food insecurity, and fewer cash crops to support family incomes. MOPP destroyed high conservation value areas and destroyed secondary forest regrowth which affected important biodiversity areas. MOPP is one of the four large-scale industrial palm oil plantations in Liberia. Situated in Maryland County, it has a palm oil mill in a joint venture with Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL). Its 2011 concession agreement includes 8,800 hectares for industrial palm oil plantations.

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