

Social and Environmental Impacts of Maryland Oil Palm Plantations on Forests Biodiversity and Community Livelihoods in Liberia, West Africa



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1. Introduction:

Liberia holds 44.5 % of the remaining portion of the Upper Guinean Rainforest in West Africa. The forests are home to critically endangered forest elephants and western chimpanzees and vital for the livelihoods of millions of West Africans and Liberians for food, cultural purposes, medicine, and environmental protection.¹ Liberia has made significant efforts toward land reform through legislation and policies such as the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006, the Community Rights Law Concerning Forest Lands of 2009, the Land Rights Act of 2018, etc.

However, implementation is weak and the establishment and continued expansion of oil palm plantations adversely impact forest protection, biodiversity conservation, and the livelihood of communities.



Figure 1: Liberia's Tropical Rainforest and home for chimps and ecosystem services²

2. Objectives:

- Assess the social and environmental harms in the plantation area (violation of community rights, food security, environmental pollution),
- Get a first overview of deforestation with its impact on forest biodiversity and communities,
- Recommend strategies for redress for land right violation, deforestation, and environmental harms,

3. Materials & Methods:

Secondary Data (literature review)	Primary Data Collection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping research, • Reviewed Maryland Oil Palm Plantation, (MOPP's) concession agreement, • The Land Rights Law of Liberia 2018, • Social Impact Assessment framework, • Theory of Corporate Social Responsibility, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In May 2022, conducted 23 Key Informant Interviews and 10 focus group discussions in seven communities in and around the MOPP plantation, • took photographs and GPS locations of deforested areas, • MOPP was given the right to respond on the draft report, • dialogue between affected communities and MOPP on the results of the report,

6. References:

- [1] World Rainforest Movement (April 12, 2001) [WRM Bulletin 45](https://www.wrm.org.uv/bulletin-articles/liberia-forest-destruction-backed-by-the-government) Liberia: Forest destruction backed by the government. <https://www.wrm.org.uv/bulletin-articles/liberia-forest-destruction-backed-by-the-government>.
- [2] Lucinda Rouse (July 15, 2020) the struggle to protect Liberia's chimps and their forests. <https://chinadialogue.net/en/nature/the-struggle-to-protect-liberias-chimps-and-their-forests/>
- [3] FAO (2023) Indigenous Peoples, [FPIC Toolkit](https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/our-pillars/fpic/en/). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UNFAO). <https://www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples/our-pillars/fpic/en/>
- [4] FPP (24 February, 2016) Respecting Rights? Assessing Oil Palm Companies' Compliance with FPIC Obligations: A case study of Maryland Oil Palm Plantation in south-eastern Liberia. Forest peoples' Program (FPP) <https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/topics/agribusiness/publication/2016/respecting-rights-assessing-oil-palm-companies-compliance-fpi-0>
- [5] Liberia CFSNS Report (2018) Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108990/download/?iframe>

4. Results & Discussions:

Result 4.1

Lack of (FPIC) during land acquisition for Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP)

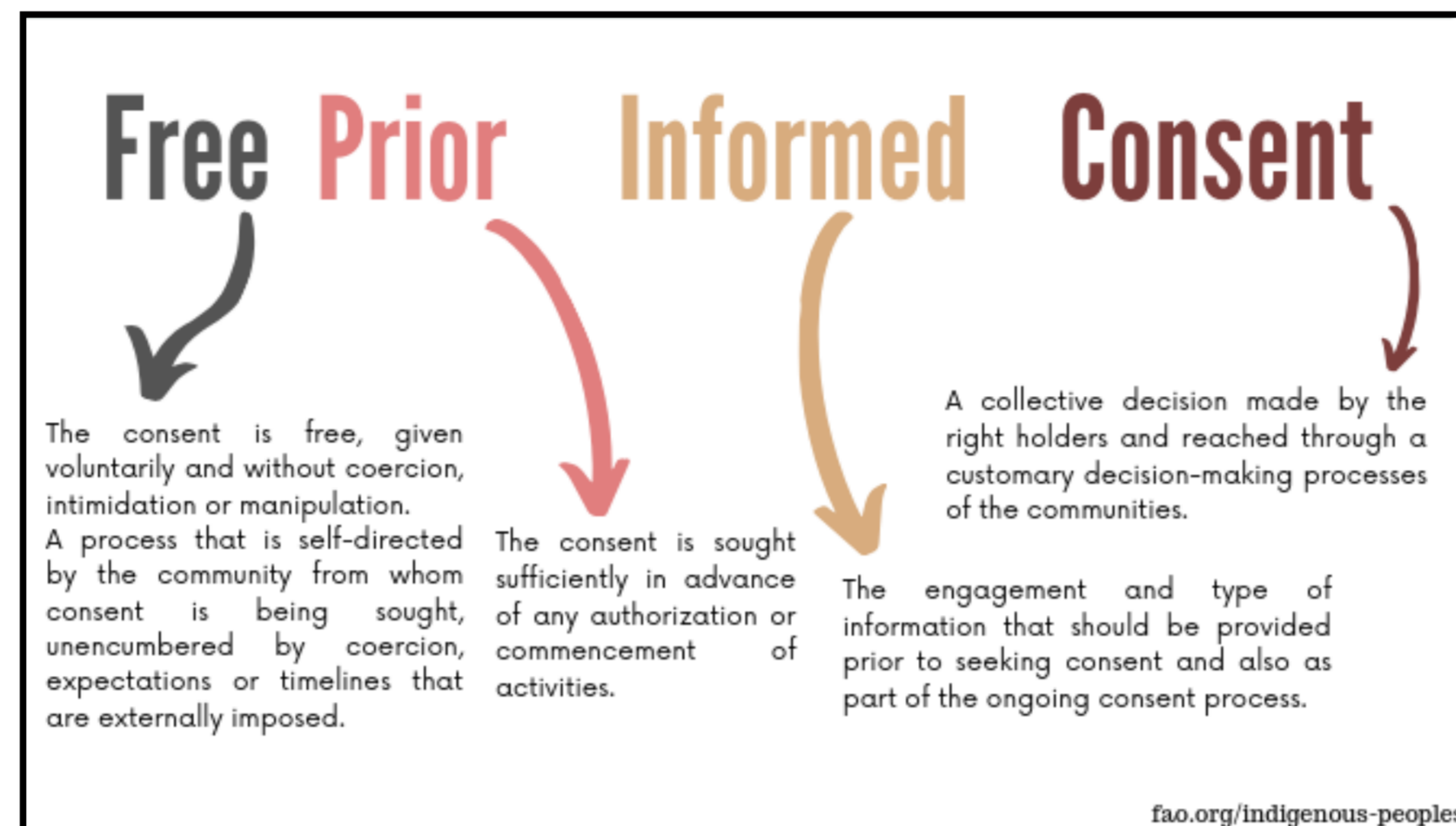


Figure 2: FAO FPIC Toolkit

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP/LC) recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which aligns with their universal right to self-determination. FPIC allows IP/LC to provide or withhold/ withdraw consent, at any point, regarding projects impacting their territories. FPIC must be respected at all times.³

Result 4.2

Farmland grab with impact on community food security and livelihoods

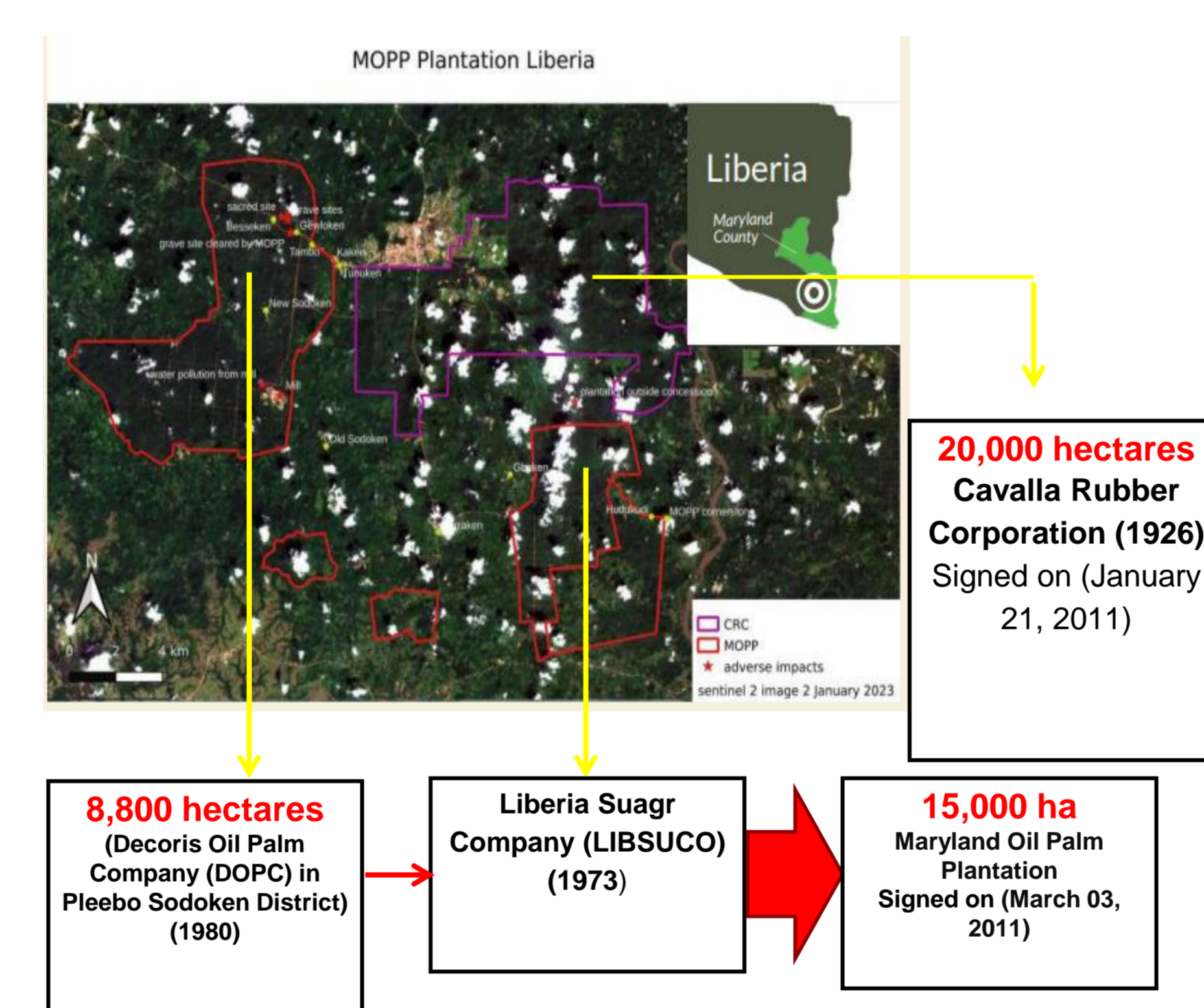


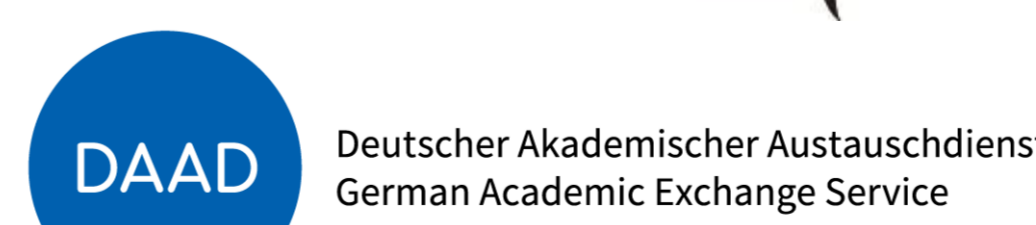
Figure 3: Concession areas of Maryland Oil Palm Plantation & Cavalla Rubber Corporation (CRC). SDI & MD, 2022

There is no formal Memorandum of Understanding with Communities or any other agreement of consent for their customary land to be leased to the plantation. (Gbolobo five families have a tribal deed certificate for their land but MOPP took their land and cleared it.)

In addition, 2015 Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) and SESDev research finds that the old Decoris plantation had several negative impacts on communities (lack respect land tenure rights, Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) standards, lack of resettlement without reparation, destruction of farms and old towns without (sufficient) compensation or restitution⁴

Hudukudi, Baraken and Gbaken communities as well as the Gbolobo clan (comprised of 5 towns: Gewloken, Kaken, Besseken, Tunuken, Tambo) state that MOPP took their land without their consent and proper compensation.

Supported by the



Result 4.3

Prevalence of Food Insecurity in Maryland County

Map 2: Prevalence of food insecurity by county, Liberia, 2018



Figure 4: Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey Map of Liberia, 2018

Results of the 2018 Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey indicate that Maryland County is the most food insecure with 35.5% due to low agricultural activities and production of staple food and marketable quantities⁵

Result 4.4

Deforestation with impact on forest biodiversity and local communities



Figure 5: Impact of Golden Sifca Oil Palm Processing Mill on forests in Maryland County. SDI & MD, 2022

Golden-SIFCA Oil Palm Mill is a joint venture between Golden Veroleum Liberia Inc. (GVL), and Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP), both oil palm companies operating in the Southeastern part of Liberia with Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) in Sinoe and MOPP in Maryland counties. The Mill is a 28-year investment incentive agreement with the Golden-SIFCA firm and worth US\$34 located in Pleebo Sodoken District, Maryland County.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation:

- Maryland Oil Palm Plantation(MOPP) should respect community land rights and FPIC, accept and support them in formalizing their customary lands to enable access to farmland
- halt expansion of oil palm plantations in order to protect the remaining forests and biodiversity
- Start a new process of legally binding land lease agreements between communities and the company for the community to receive just compensation for their lands
- Develop and finance community palm oil plantations where requested to improve their livelihoods
- Provide due repair and compensation for lands grabbed and farms destroyed in the past
- Financiers (Wilmar International, FMO Dutch Development Bank, and African Development Bank (AfDB)) should stop the financing of deforestation risk commodity

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