Gola Rainforest National Park REDD project

Initiative
Country Sierra Leone
Other Readiness Initiative:
Yes
REDD+ project:
Yes
Scope
Deforestation
Degradation
Enhancement
Conservation
Level Subnational
Status Active
Duration (Years) 30
Start date 2012
End date 2042
Size (hectares) 70,000

Summary

The Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP) REDD project is the first REDD+ project in Sierra Leone. The project area covers over 70,000 hectares of Upper Guinea forest, an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot and the largest remaining tract of forest in Sierra Leone. The project area provides a critical refuge for a number of endangered species and provides a range of ecosystem services including watershed protection and local climate stabilization and is an important source of natural resources for nearby local communities. The 7 Chiefdoms surrounding the National Park are the customary landowners of the project area and the project zone which surrounds the project area and where approximately 85 communities live, which amounts to an estimated 23,500 people.

In the 1920s, the management of the current project area was assigned to the Government, when the Gola Forest Reserves were created as production Forest Reserves. In 2011, the reserves became the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP). This was an important milestone which paved the way for the REDD+ project. The Park is Sierra Leone’s second national park and its first rainforest park.

The REDD+ project is being developed to meet the Climate Community and Biodiversity (CCB)
Standards and the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS). The project anticipates that joint validation will begin in September 2013.

The vision for the project is to “act as a catalyst for peace, prosperity and national pride in Sierra Leone, ensuring that the globally important habitats, biodiversity and environmental services of the GRNP and wider Gola landscape are conserved and that neighbouring communities are active environmental stewards of the natural resource base that underpins and enhances their livelihoods”. To facilitate the achievement of the project’s vision and ensure that the project achieves net positive benefits for climate, communities and biodiversity, project activities will be built on three key areas of focus:

1) Conservation strategy and effective management for the GRNP: the aim is to strengthen the conservation strategy and effective management of the GRNP so that the project can encourage the building of national policies and regulations as well as inform relevant regional and international platforms with best practices in the field of conservation.

2) Sustainable natural resource management: the aim is to enable local people to become environmental stewards of the natural resource base that underpins their livelihoods through education, capacity building, land use planning and activities that enhance the socio-economic benefits derived from the sustainable use of the project zone’s forests and agricultural land.

3) Research and monitoring: the aim is to develop and maintain a comprehensive social and biodiversity database and monitoring system to ensure the availability of accurate, relevant and timely information to inform and enhance project management and the effective delivery of outcomes, using adaptive management processes.

The activities surrounding sustainable natural resource management have been developed in coordination with the villages in the project zone and are designed to improve livelihoods whilst addressing and reducing the local drivers of deforestation. Engaging local communities in both management actions and livelihood activities is central to the project as it will ensure the permanence of the project. Activities will include developing sustainable farming practices which intensify the production of rice which is the staple food crop in the region, rehabilitating and improving production, harvesting, learning post-production techniques, and marketing of plantation crops such as cacao. Furthermore, internal savings and lending co-operatives will be established to support alternative livelihood strategies; land use management plans for community areas in the project zone and co-management areas within the project area will be developed to ensure the holistic management and impact of the programme.

The early stages of conservation work in the now Gola Rainforest National Park REDD Project was funded by the UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Darwin initiative, the Global Conservation Fund (an initiative set up by Conservation International), and the RSPB. For the years 2007-2012 the conservation programme was funded by the European Union and the French Global Environment Facility (Fonds Français pour l’Environnement Mondial - FFEM). Since 2012 the development of the REDD+ project has been funded by the RSPB and the EU through the 'Across the River- a Transboundary Peace Park for Sierra Leone and Liberia' project. The aim is to create a long-term sustainable financing source for the park through REDD+ and until carbon revenues become available the RSPB will temporarily support on-going conservation management actions.

**Stakeholder engagement and participation**
The GRNP project has adopted and followed the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in developing the REDD+ project. A stakeholder engagement plan was developed and implemented; this began in January 2012 with a series of consultative meetings from Paramount Chief level to forest edge communities to develop an understanding of climate change and REDD+ and to gain approval for beginning the project development process. Consultations and meetings were conducted throughout the project zone in accordance with best practice for social impact assessment, in Mende, the local language and using appropriate methodologies and tools. Community engagement and consultation is a key part of the project and regular road shows, radio programs, workshops, school events as well as traditional meetings and forums all form on-going means of communicating and engaging with a full range of local stakeholders from Paramount Chiefs to school children and farmers throughout the project zone and Chiefdoms.

**Land tenure arrangements and carbon rights**

The GRNP is situated on customary lands of which the surrounding chiefdoms and local communities are the customary owners. In 2007 a ‘community benefits and payment agreement’ was signed between the project implementers, the government and the local communities. This concession agreement enables local government, landowners, and communities to be compensated in exchange for forgoing their rights to any activities (farming, hunting, logging etc.), without changing the nature of the land ownership. As such the forest remains in customary ownership with management rights assigned to the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS). The Forestry Division is the management authority for all Forest Reserves and National Parks in Sierra Leone, including the project area. Carbon agreements have been signed between the traditional landowners and the Government of Sierra Leone, which now holds the carbon rights of the project area. It is proposed that the project proponent will enter into a joint venture agreement with the Government to manage the project area (the GRNP) and own the rights to sell the carbon credits that are created by the project for the lifetime of the carbon project.

**Forest Management**

The project will enter into a benefit sharing agreement with the 7 Chiefdoms surrounding the project area. This agreement will provide the high level link between the GRNP project's support to community activities and the Chiefdoms' cooperation in support of the deforestation mitigation efforts of the project. The agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities of each party and the activities and benefits that the project will provide to incentivise communities to adopt sustainable development practices that reduce deforestation in the project zone and offsite zone. Before project activities are implemented in the villages of the project zone, agreements will be made between the participants and the project that outline the activities and the responsibilities of each of the parties to provide again a direct link between the support provided and the conservation efforts. The project area is now established as a National Park and as such is protected by legislation. However, as seen in other Forest Reserves throughout Sierra Leone, legislation alone is not enough to prevent deforestation and so the project will build the capacity of locally hired rangers to prevent illegal activities within the project area to ensure the integrity of the project area and preserve its unique biodiversity.

**Reference levels**

Ground truthing surveys and community surveys throughout the reference region established the
baseline deforestation rate for the project through the interpretation of satellite images from 2001, 2007 and 2011 (the historical period), this rate was then used to model deforestation in the baseline scenario. The outcome of the model shows that, without the project, 1285 hectares of forest would be lost annually from the project area.

**Safeguards**

The project is following the principles of FPIC, has devised and implemented a grievance mechanism and has consulted with a full range of affected stakeholders during project development and at key decision making points and will continue to do so throughout the implementation of the project. All the project activities in the project zone and the development of the benefit sharing agreement have been developed with local stakeholders and are designed to reflect local interests, needs and practices to ensure that co-benefits are achieved for local communities and stakeholders. A comprehensive social monitoring plan is being developed that will be used to measure the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project to compare to the socio-economic baseline information that was collected by project partners comprising a social science team from Cambridge and Wageningen Universities.

Biodiversity will be conserved through the patrols of the rangers in the project area which will prevent illegal deforestation and hunting activities and through the team's integrated conservation and development activities in the project zone. Such actions will help to maintain and enhance the forests of the project area and the important forest matrices that exist in the project zone thus enabling the preservation of habitat critical for wildlife connectivity.

**MRV**

The GRNP project has used a methodology from the Verified Carbon Standard to quantify the carbon stocks and net emission reductions following a comprehensive analysis of satellite imagery. The research team received extensive training on the techniques required to set up and sample biomass plots in forest and post-deforestation areas and will continue to carry out monitoring, verification and reporting with the support of the RSPB throughout the implementation of the project.

**Land Tenure Before Implementation**

Customary ownership spread over over 7 chiefdoms.

**Land Tenure After Implementation**

Same as before implementation.

**Related Standards**

[Climate, Community, & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards](#) [11]

**Attachments**

[PDF][12]
External Links

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