



Liberia FLEGT VPA Stakeholder Performance Analyses Report

EU FLEGT VPA Facilitation Unit

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1 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
COC	Chain of Custody
EFI	European Forest Institute
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
FDA	Forest Development Authority
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FU	Facilitation Unit
GoL	Government of Liberia
JIC	Joint Implementation Committee
LIC	Liberian Implementation Committee
LVD PBM	Liberia Verification Department Project Board Meeting
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NBSTB	National Benefit Sharing Trust Board
NMSMC	National Multistakeholder Monitoring Committee
PMU	Programme Management Unit
SPA	Stakeholder Performance Analysis
TLIC	Technical Liberia Implementation Committee
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreements
VPA ALA	VPA Africa Latin America

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(English)

This Stakeholder Performance Analysis (SPA) presents a comprehensive assessment of awareness, interest, influence, and institutional engagement across the diverse stakeholders involved in Liberia's Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union (EU). Conducted by the Liberia Facilitation Unit under the AFD-supported VPA Support Programme, the SPA builds on the 2023 stakeholder mapping and provides an updated picture of stakeholder dynamics as Liberia considers transitioning into a Forest Partnership framework.

The analysis reveals that while formal participation in governance structures—particularly the Joint Implementation Committee (JIC)—has expanded, meaningful influence remains unevenly distributed. Core actors such as the Forest Development Authority (FDA) and the EU Delegation (EUD) maintain strategic dominance, while community representatives, civil society organizations (CSOs), and several government ministries continue to operate with limited influence due to structural, financial, or political constraints.

Stakeholders widely acknowledge tangible gains, including strengthened legality frameworks, increased dialogue through reactivated VPA platforms, and greater recognition of community and CSO roles. However, persistent gaps undermine these advances. These include weak enforcement of decisions, fragmented coordination, lack of budgetary autonomy, and overreliance on external facilitation. The absence of a FLEGT license after more than a decade remains the most emblematic failure, eroding trust and international credibility.

Crucially, stakeholders support the evolution toward a new Forest Partnership, but this support is conditional. Key preconditions include safeguarding participatory structures such as the JIC and LIC, securing domestic budget lines for inclusive engagement, formalizing stakeholder mandates in law or regulation, and embedding robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Without these reforms, stakeholders warn of increased risk of disengagement—particularly from grassroots actors and donor institutions—thereby jeopardizing the legitimacy and sustainability of Liberia's forest governance agenda.

This SPA concludes at a critical juncture. As Liberia navigates the transition to a Forest Partnership, it must act decisively to institutionalize inclusive governance, strengthen implementation capacity, and build national ownership. Only through a reformed and credible platform can Liberia maintain stakeholder confidence and deliver on its commitments to sustainable forest management, climate goals, and inclusive development.

While the stakeholder analysis provides a comprehensive overview of institutional roles, awareness, and participation across the VPA framework, the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) notes that the assessment does not fully interrogate the underlying causes of identified gaps, inconsistencies, or instances of non-performance. In particular, the analysis would be strengthened by evaluating the **technical practicability and systemic performance** of Liberia's VPA, including financial and operational deliverables, as key determinants of progress. Liberia's VPA framework is uniquely complex—

comprising **11 principles, 49 indicators, and 132 verifiers**, far more than peer countries such as Ghana, Guyana, and Indonesia—underscoring the need for a more contextualized understanding of implementation challenges. Recognizing these structural realities is essential for informed decision-making as Liberia considers its transition from the VPA to a Forest Partnership model.

(Français)

Cette Analyse de Performance des Parties Prenantes (SPA) évalue la sensibilisation, l'intérêt, le pouvoir et l'engagement institutionnel des groupes d'acteurs dans le cadre de l'Accord de Partenariat Volontaire (APV FLEGT) UE-Libéria. L'étude montre que, bien que la participation formelle se soit renforcée - en particulier dans des structures comme le Comité Conjoint de Mise en Œuvre (JIC) - l'influence effective reste inégale. Des acteurs clés tels que l'Autorité de Développement Forestier (FDA) et la Délégation de l'UE exercent une forte influence, tandis que les communautés, les OSC et certains ministères manquent de soutien structuré. Les parties prenantes ont proposé des réformes visant à renforcer la redevabilité, la coordination, le financement durable et la clarté institutionnelle du processus APV. La majorité soutient la transition vers un modèle de Partenariat Forestier, à condition que les garanties de participation, les mandats juridiques et le financement soient maintenus. Sans mise en œuvre de ces réformes, un désengagement stratégique pourrait compromettre la légitimité et la durabilité de la gouvernance forestière au Libéria.

L'Autorité de développement forestier (FDA) note que l'évaluation n'examine pas de manière exhaustive les causes sous-jacentes des lacunes, incohérences ou cas de non-respect identifiés. En particulier, l'analyse serait renforcée par l'évaluation de la faisabilité technique et des performances systémiques de l'APV du Libéria, y compris les résultats financiers et opérationnels, en tant que facteurs déterminants des progrès réalisés.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Stakeholder Performance Analysis (SPA) was conducted by the Liberia Facilitation Unit as part of its mandate under the AFD-supported VPA support programme. The objective was to evaluate the evolving roles, interests, and influence of stakeholders involved in Liberia's VPA-FLEGT process, building on the stakeholder mapping exercise completed in November 2023 during the inception of the Facilitation Unit project.

The SPA specifically aimed to:

- **Measure changes in “interest”, “power”, and “awareness”** since the 2023 stakeholder baseline;
- **Identify opportunities for VPA process improvement** and diagnose institutional bottlenecks;
- **Highlight future engagement models and entry points** to support a continued EU-GoL collaboration on forest governance.

The SPA focuses on the VPA process as a whole - including formal structures (JIC, LIC, NMSMC) and informal governance dynamics - rather than assessing individual programs or stakeholders in isolation.

3.2 STAKEHOLDER SELECTION

The SPA covers all major stakeholder groups engaged in the VPA process, including:

Government agencies: FDA, MFDP, MoJ, EPA, MIA, MoA, LRA;

Contracting Parties: European Union Delegation (EUD), Government of Liberia (GoL);

Civil society organizations: National and community-based (e.g. CSOs, NBSTB, NUCFMB, NUCFDC);

Private sector actors: Timber companies and associations (e.g. LibTA, LICSATDUN);

International donors and support projects: AFD, UNDP, World Bank, MFGAP;

VPA structures and coordination bodies: VPA Secretariat, Facilitation Unit.

Two **Community Forests** members and representatives were also met during the Mission. Though they are not direct VPA Stakeholders, their voices as beneficiaries were recorded in two case studies (see below)

3.3 DATA COLLECTION APPROACH

The SPA methodology was qualitative and interview-driven. Data sources included:

- **14 in-depth stakeholder interviews** and **2 Community forests interviews** conducted in June 2025 using a structured questionnaire aligned with three main objectives (See questionnaire Annex II).
- **The original stakeholder mapping** (Power-Interest Matrix, Nov 2023) was used as a baseline reference.

- **Observations and internal notes** collected by the Facilitation Unit over the course of the mission helped complete comprehension.

Stakeholders were assessed using several tools: Analytical methods (qualitative treatment of the interviews, quote extraction, triangulation), heat maps for empowerment and participation, thematic clustering of achievements and failures, classification of engagement trajectories (e.g. strategic leaders, observers, growing influencers), etc.

3.4 IMPLEMENTATION AND TIMELINE

The SPA was implemented internally by the Facilitation Unit with support from Project Management Unit. The process followed this calendar: Preparation of TOR and tools (March 2025); Interview mission in Liberia (May-June 2025 - 8 days); Interviews transcription (June 2025); Analysis and drafting (July 2025).

3.5 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

The table below presents the key stakeholders consulted for the SPA, including their roles and persons interviewed.

Table 1: Stakeholders consulted

Institution	Role	Interviewee
Contracting Parties / Lead VPA Actors		
European Union Delegation (EUD)	EU Contracting Party	Governance Focal Point
Forest Development Authority (FDA)	GoL Contracting Party & Competent Authority	Chairperson – Board of Directors & LIC, Managing Director, DMD – Commercial and Technical Services
Government Ministries and Agencies		
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Legal oversight	Department of Economic Affairs, Assistant Minister for Economic Affairs
Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)	Revenue and Tax Policy oversight	Assistant Minister for Revenue and Tax Policy, Directors for Direct Taxes, Indirect Taxes, etc.
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Environmental compliance	Executive Director
Civil Society and Community Stakeholders		
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	Oversight, independent monitoring	NGO Coalition, IFM CM representatives
Community Representatives	Forest landowners & rights holders	NUCFMB, CFMB, and NUCFDC delegates
National Benefit Sharing Trust Board (NBSTB)	Community fund management	Executive Secretary & Board Members
Private Sector		
Private Sector Actors (Logging companies / LibTA)	Forest operators, licensees	Company managers and association representatives

Private Sector Actors (Chainsaw Operators/ Association Coordinator)	Chainsaw operators	Chainsaw operators and Association Representative
International Support Programmes / Donors		
MFGAP Project	Technical/logistical support	Project Lead, Forest Governance Facilitator, VPA Support Officer
Agence Française de Développement (AFD)	Donor agency	Project Officer
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Multilateral governance partner	Forest/Climate Governance Officer
World Bank	Donor / observer	Country Economist and Forest Lead
Coordination and Support Structures		
VPA Secretariat	VPA Coordination & facilitation	Coordinator - VPA Secretariat



4 OBJECTIVE I – EVOLUTION OF AWARENESS, INTEREST, AND POWER

This section compares each stakeholder's 2023 power-interest position with their expressed awareness, interest, and perceived influence in the 2025 interviews.

4.1 AWARENESS, INTEREST, POWER: A SUMMARY

4.1.1 Awareness of the VPA Process (Questions 1 & 2)

Stakeholders were asked to describe their current awareness of the VPA's status, challenges, and opportunities, and how that awareness has changed since November 2023.

Most stakeholders reported **high or improving awareness**, particularly those actively participating in JIC, LIC, and field-based activities. Notably:

- **FDA, VPA Secretariat, MoJ and EUD** demonstrated very high awareness.
- **CSOs, NBSTB, EPA** also reported deepening understanding due to participation in reform tools and structures.
- Some actors such as **MFDP, EPA and the private sector** reported average or low awareness, often due to marginal engagement.

There was a general trend of **increased awareness since November 2023 across nearly all groups**, particularly where direct engagement had occurred.

"The awareness level is high now. The communities know what the VPA stands for, especially in terms of legality and their rights." — Community Representatives

"From the EU side, we've maintained a clear picture of the VPA's trajectory, challenges, and what still needs to be done. We're aware of the political sensitivities as well." — European Union Delegation (EUD)

4.1.2 Evolution of Interest in the VPA (Question 3)

Interest in the VPA process has increased for most stakeholders. This is especially evident among **CSOs, communities, and facilitation partners** like MFGAP, who reported growing involvement due to renewed JIC sessions, technical reforms, and opportunities for influence.

However, interest remains **conditional or low** among actors with unclear roles (e.g., private sector) or absent from decision-making (e.g., MFDP, EPA).

The trajectory of interest suggests that **meaningful participation opportunities** and **visibility in institutional platforms** are strong drivers of sustained stakeholder interest.

"Interest increased mainly because we see more space for participation now—especially through the regular LIC/NMSMC meetings." — Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

"To be honest, our interest has decreased. We expected more structured involvement, but the VPA discussions tend to exclude the private sector." — Private Sector Actors

4.1.3 Perceived Empowerment Through the VPA (Question 4)

Stakeholders were asked if they felt empowered by the VPA process since November 2023. **A majority expressed partial to full empowerment**, often linked to their ability to access or influence national VPA platforms like the JIC, LIC, or NMSMC.

The most empowered stakeholders were those with formal mandates or operational responsibility (FDA, Secretariat, EUD). Actors like CSOs, NBSTB, and MFGAP cited rising influence through engagement in coordination spaces. Donors and marginal actors (e.g., AFD, World Bank, MFDP) typically felt peripheral.

A recurring theme was that **institutional visibility, financial autonomy, and formalized decision roles** were key to empowerment.

“Through MFGAP support, we’ve been able to facilitate more inclusive meetings and build the capacity of smaller actors. That’s real empowerment.” — MFGAP Project

“Not empowered. We still have to wait for payments from government before we can act. So even if we know what should be done, we can’t do it without the money.” — National Benefit Sharing Trust Board (NBSTB)

4.2 EVOLUTION OF STAKEHOLDER'S 2023-2025 POWER VS INTEREST POSITION

This sub-section compares each stakeholder’s power-interest position as mapped in October 2023 with their self-reported awareness, interest, and perceived influence from the 2025 interviews. Power is defined as the ability to influence decisions and outcomes within the VPA framework, while interest refers to a stakeholder’s level of engagement and concern for the VPA’s success. The analysis below tracks changes per stakeholder to highlight shifts, continuity, or disengagement.

4.2.1 Forest Development Authority (FDA)

- 2023 Mapping: High power / high interest – Central implementing body
- 2025 Interview Findings: Power: Still dominant. Interest and awareness remain very high.
- Evolution Summary: Stable – retained strategic influence with growing accountability pressure.

4.2.2 EU Delegation (EUD)

- 2023 Mapping: High power / high interest – Contracting party, donor anchor
- 2025 Interview Findings: Confirmed as core strategic actor. Very high awareness and declining interest.
- Evolution Summary: Stable – but concern over over-dependence on EU Decisions.

4.2.3 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- 2023 Mapping: Low power / low interest – Fragmented influence, support role
- 2025 Interview Findings: Power increasing through LIC, legality matrix revision. High awareness and rising interest.

- Evolution Summary: Positive shift – CSOs now partially empowered and more structured.

4.2.4 Community Representatives (CFDCs, CFMBs, NUCFDC, NUCFMB)

- 2023 Mapping: Low power / mixed interest – Local influence, limited access to VPA structures
- 2025 Interview Findings: Greater awareness and visibility. Formal presence in NMSMC and JIC noted.
- Evolution Summary: Improved – Still structurally constrained, but with new recognition.

4.2.5 Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)

- 2023 Mapping: Mid-high power / high interest – Fiscal gatekeeper
- 2025 Interview Findings: High financial power but absent in governance. Limited awareness.
- Evolution Summary: Static – Institutional importance not matched by engagement.

4.2.6 Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

- 2023 Mapping: Mid-high power / interest – Legal authority, contract validation
- 2025 Interview Findings: Maintains legal role but little policy influence. High awareness.
- Evolution Summary: Stable – Still legally significant, but disengaged from forest sector decision-making.

4.2.7 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

- 2023 Mapping: Mid-high power / low interest – EIA and LAS compliance
- 2025 Interview Findings: Improved alignment with TLAS. Power untapped but growing interest.
- Evolution Summary: Mild increase – engagement expanding but not yet leveraged.

4.2.8 Private Sector (LibTA, concessionaires, LICSATDUN)

- 2023 Mapping: No power pre-contract; high power/interest post-contract
- 2025 Interview Findings: Perceived limited voice in governance. High ground-level power.
- Evolution Summary: Unchanged – structural disconnection from decision-making remains.

4.2.9 NBSTB

- 2023 Mapping: Low power / high interest – community benefit manager
- 2025 Interview Findings: Awareness and interest high. Power constrained by delayed disbursements.
- Evolution Summary: Mixed – strong operational interest but structurally underpowered.

4.2.10 VPA Secretariat

- 2023 Mapping: Not separately mapped
- 2025 Interview Findings: Very high awareness and operational influence. Lacks decision power.

4.2.11 MFGAP

- 2023 Mapping: Not rated – new actor
- 2025 Interview Findings: High interest and informal power through funding/logistics.

4.2.11.1 AFD

- 2023 Mapping: Not mapped
- 2025 Interview Findings: Moderate awareness; donor alignment focus. No VPA decision role.

4.2.11.2 UNDP

- 2023 Mapping: Not mapped
- 2025 Interview Findings: Linking VPA to REDD+/SDGs. Outside formal structures.

4.2.11.3 World Bank

- 2023 Mapping: Not mapped
- 2025 Interview Findings: Awareness limited; interest linked to forest governance land reform. No decision-making role.

The following table summarizes how stakeholder awareness, interest, and power have changed between the 2023 stakeholder mapping and the 2025 interviews.

Table 2: Stakeholder Evolution Matrix (2023–2025)

Stakeholder	2023 Power	2025 Power	2023 Interest	2025 Interest	2025 Awareness
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Mid-High	Mid-High	Mid-High	Mid-High	High
EU Delegation (EUD)	High	High	High	High	Very High
Civil Society Organizations	Low	Medium	Low	High	High
Ministry of Finance (MFDP)	Mid-High	Mid-High	High	Medium	Moderate
Private Sector	Conditional	Medium	Conditional	Medium	Mixed
EPA	Mid-High	Mid-High	Low	Medium	Improving
FDA	High	High	High	High	Very High
MFGAP	–	Medium	–	High	High
Community Representatives	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Uneven
AFD	–	Low	–	Medium	Moderate
UNDP	–	Low	–	Medium	Average
NBSTB	Low	Low	High	High	High
VPA Secretariat	–	Medium	–	High	Very High
World Bank	–	Low	–	Medium	Average

4.3 EMPOWERMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH THE VPA PROCESS

The table below summarizes stakeholder perceptions of whether they have felt empowered through the VPA process since November 2023.

Table 3: Empowering Examples Reported by Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Empowering Aspects (from Interview)
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Backstop legal role acknowledged, but no direct influence in VPA decisions.
EU Delegation (EUD)	Strategic ownership of process, central role in agenda-setting.
Civil Society Organizations	Formal participation in JIC and LIC; influence through independent monitoring and legality matrix revision.
Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)	Limited to administrative and fiscal duties; no empowerment expressed.
Private Sector	Observer status only; frustration with lack of coordination.
EPA	Recognized role in LAS and EIA links; still not fully integrated in VPA processes.
FDA	Lead implementer/Competent Authority; empowered by default through legal and operational leadership.
MFGAP	Facilitates coordination and participation; funds and supports platforms.
Community Representatives	Presence in JIC/NMSMC; cited specific influence on benefit discussions.
AFD	Attended JIC once; engages regionally, not directly empowered in Liberia.
UNDP	Grew in influence via REDD+/forest links; not part of decision-making bodies.
NBSTB	Manages community benefit flows and monitors implementation; influence depends on GoL transfers.
VPA Secretariat	Coordinates multi-stakeholder structures; operationally empowered.
World Bank	Observer only; role is catalytic and technical, not decision-making.

The figure below shows the following stakeholder trajectories:

- A. **Growing Influence and Engagement:** Rising interest and empowerment from a low baseline
- B. **Formal Power, Weak Engagement:** High formal power, but limited awareness or inconsistent participation
- C. **Strategic Leaders:** Consistently high awareness, interest, and influence
- D. **Observers and Enablers:** Do not formally participate but shape outcomes through funding or support

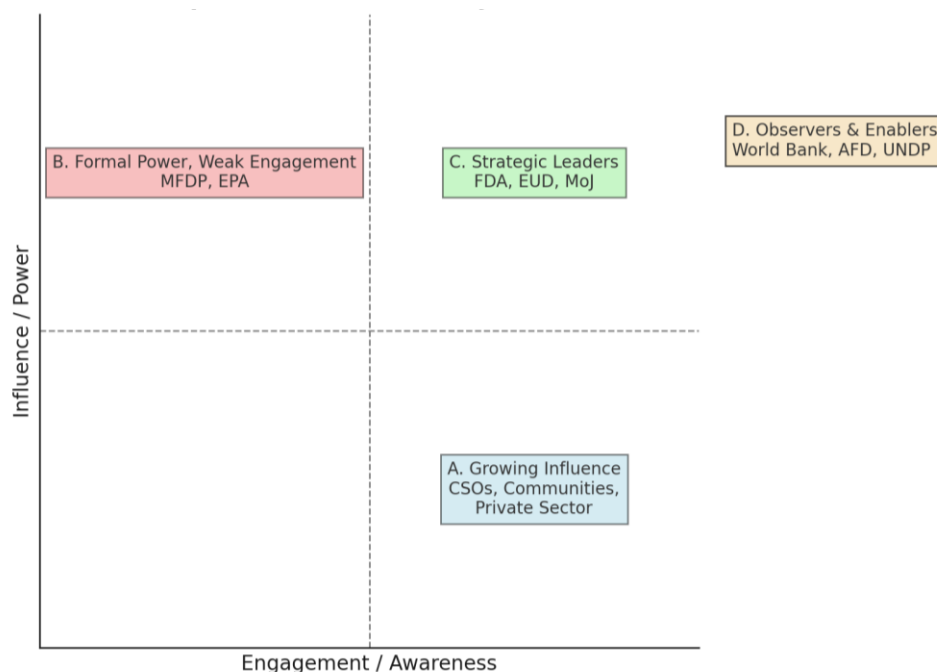


Figure 1: Stakeholders trajectories

4.4 PERCEIVED ABILITY TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS (QUESTION 5)

While FDA, EUD, and the Secretariat reported stable or growing influence, others—particularly technical ministries and donors—continued to express frustration with their limited role in shaping VPA outcomes.

Stakeholders such as CSOs, NBSTB, and EPA noted incremental gains in visibility or influence but often qualified them as symbolic. The private sector and MFDP described a structural disconnect from VPA platforms. The VPA Secretariat has influence but lacks formal decision-making authority, which constrains its effectiveness.

This illustrates that agenda-setting and structural inclusion, more than just presence, determine real power within the VPA ecosystem.

Perceived shift in their power to influence VPA structures (JIC, LIC, NMSMC)

Yes: EUD, FDA, MFGAP, VPA Secretariat

Partially: CSOs, EPA, Communities, NBSTB, MoJ

No: MFDP, Private Sector, AFD, UNDP, World Bank

The analysis reveals a **mixed perception** among stakeholders regarding their ability to influence decisions within the VPA architecture since November 2023. While a few actors have **consolidated or expanded their influence**, others remain **on the margins**, or feel their power has remained static or **symbolic**.

Table 4: Stakeholders' perceived shift in power to influence VPA structures

Category	Stakeholder
Stakeholders reporting clear shift in influence	FDA reaffirmed its dominant role in implementation and coordination, recognizing its institutional authority within all VPA structures
	The EU Delegation maintained strategic influence, particularly in agenda setting, reflecting its position as a contracting party and primary donor
	MFGAP noted growing leverage through its support to other actors and its role in convening and facilitating spaces like the JIC preparatory meetings.
	VPA Secretariat and Facilitation continues to play an essential role in guiding decision-making through coordination and agenda facilitation.
Stakeholders reporting partial or emerging influence	CSOs expressed a sense of growing empowerment, citing increased participation in LIC and JIC, though their influence is still constrained by structural and political limitations.
	The EPA acknowledged that participation in recent JIC meetings raised its visibility and reinforced links to the legality verification process.
	Community representatives (CFDCs, NUCFDC, NUCFMB, etc.) reported being heard more often but pointed to lack of capacity and preparation as ongoing barriers.
	NBSTB noted that while their engagement has deepened, their actual influence is contingent on timely government disbursements and inclusion in decision spaces.
Stakeholders reporting no change in influence	MoJ maintain formal role present in most VPA-specific forums, but largely limited influence on outcomes.
	MFD maintain formal role but are largely absent from VPA-specific forums, with limited to no perceived influence on outcomes.
	The private sector expressed strong frustration, noting a lack of coordination and limited participation in key decision-making.
	World Bank, AFD, and UNDP emphasized their observer or support roles, noting that while they engage with the sector, they are not embedded in VPA governance mechanisms.

This distribution reflects broader governance dynamics: **core implementers and funders retain leverage, support institutions facilitate but rarely decide**, and **grassroots actors and line ministries face systemic barriers to influence**, despite their relevance. The findings suggest an opportunity to further **democratize decision-making** and ensure **greater balance and inclusivity** within the VPA institutional architecture.

"As the EU, we don't just participate—we shape the agenda, fund the platforms, and push for implementation. So yes, we have influence." — European Union Delegation (EUD)

"We have some influence, yes, but it depends on whether the FDA listens. Sometimes we talk, but there's no follow-up." — Community Representatives

4.5 ORGANIZATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER THE VPA (QUESTION 6)

Stakeholders reported a **broad spectrum of organizational achievements** under the VPA process, ranging from **institutional coordination and reform**, to **technical implementation**, **community engagement**, and **oversight contributions**. These achievements reflect each actor's mandate and degree of involvement in the VPA structure and can be summarized as follows:

Table 5: Summary of Stakeholder Roles and Organisational Achievements under the VPA

Role	Actor/Group	Reported Achievements / Contributions
Core Implementers and Decision Makers	FDA and VPA Secretariat	Rollout of legality grid, engagement in legality audits, Forward Planner implementation
	EU Delegation	Restarting the JIC, advancing institutional reform dialogue, leadership as contracting party
Monitoring, Oversight, and Support Roles	CSOs	Independent monitoring, contributing to legality matrix revisions, accountability, transparency
	MoJ	Continued engagement through contract review and legal attestation, supporting enforcement
	MFGAP	Financial and logistical support to multi-stakeholder platforms, maintaining dialogue and participation
Community-Level Progress	Community representatives	Participating in JIC discussions, gaining visibility
	NBSTB	Advances in benefit tracking, local capacity-building
Emerging and Peripheral Actors	EPA	Progress in inter-agency coordination
	UNDP	Alignment with SDGs and REDD+, not directly embedded in VPA
	AFD and World Bank	Limited or indirect contributions through observation, alignment, or learning exchange
Minimal or No Reported Achievements	MFDP and private sector actors	No clear VPA-related achievements, lack of engagement, frustration with the process

These responses show that technical, civic, and donor actors have played key enabling roles, while some policy institutions and private operators remain underleveraged within the VPA structure. This highlights a need to balance operational execution with broader inclusion and follow-through.

"Through our role, we've ensured that the legality grid and the Forward Planner are now being implemented on a rolling basis." — Forest Development Authority (FDA)

"We've increased transparency in how benefits are disbursed to the communities. Now people can ask questions." — National Benefit Sharing Trust Board (NBSTB)

4.6 GENERAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE VPA PROCESS (QUESTION 7)

Stakeholders identified a wide range of achievements under the VPA process, especially in the last two years, reflecting the process's revitalization, technical progress, and growing inclusivity. These were ranked based on frequency of citation across the 14 interviewed institutions.

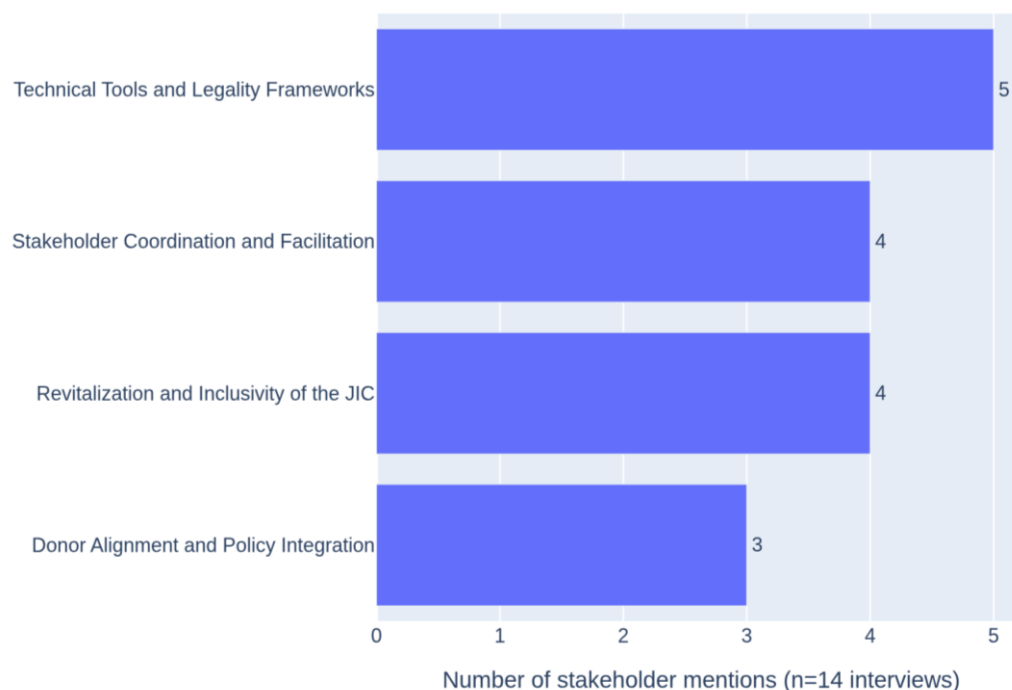


Figure 2: Perceived achievements under Liberia VPA

4.6.1 Technical Tools and Legality Frameworks (Cited by 5 stakeholders)

The most widely praised achievement relates to the deployment and consolidation of core legality instruments. The legality grid, coordinated by FDA, was cited as a milestone, as was the revision of the legality matrix, led by the LIC Special Committee in collaboration with the VPA structures. EPA and others also pointed to improved alignment with the Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS). These tools are seen as essential to any future issuance of a FLEGT license or overall forest governance.

4.6.2 Revitalization and Inclusivity of the JIC (Cited by 4 stakeholders)

Several stakeholders, including EUD, FDA, EPA, and community representatives, emphasized the resumption and strengthening of the Joint Implementation Committee (JIC) as a turning point. This includes the return of high-level dialogue, the inclusion of new actors and/or expansion of existing actors (e.g. EPA, communities), and a more structured platform for feedback and coordination.

4.6.3 Stakeholder Coordination and Facilitation (Cited by 4 stakeholders)

The VPA Secretariat, the Facilitation Unit and MFGAP were commended for maintaining momentum through logistical support, meeting facilitation, and agenda continuity. This was particularly important in the face of institutional fatigue and uneven commitment from government partners.

4.6.4 Donor Alignment and Policy Integration (Cited by 3 stakeholders)

UNDP, AFD, and EUD referenced improvements in cross-program coordination. Notably, stakeholders appreciated efforts to align the VPA with REDD+ initiatives, SDG goals, and other governance reforms, helping place forest legality in a broader development context.

Other Notable Gains:

- *Transparency and Benefit Tracking (NBSTB, communities)*: tools to monitor and disclose community payments have become more effective, though still dependent on disbursement.
- *Community Inclusion*: community representatives now hold seats in national VPA bodies (e.g. NMSMC), a major symbolic and participatory step.
- *Legal Advisory Functions*: MoJ noted its ongoing role in ensuring legal compliance in procurement and contract attestation.
- *Strategic Advocacy*: World Bank and CSOs emphasized their advocacy and watchdog roles, which influenced sector reform conversations.

Overall, the VPA process has made visible progress in rebuilding its core structures and tools, with broad appreciation for its renewed technical and institutional foundation. However, many of these gains remain fragile and contingent on continued political will and financial support.

Table 6: Examples of best achievements by type of stakeholders

Stakeholder	Best Achievement 1	Best Achievement 2
FDA	Legality assurance system operationalized	Forward planner developed and implemented
EUD	Revived JIC platform	Strengthened policy dialogue on legality and sustainability
CSOs	Legality matrix revised	Greater oversight role via LIC/JIC participation
VPA Secretariat	Ensured continuity of VPA dialogue	Coordination and facilitation of key structures
MFGAP	Technical/logistical support to stakeholders	Consistent facilitation of VPA dialogue spaces
NBSTB	Increased transparency in benefit sharing	Monitoring of community fund management
Community Representatives	Increase representation in JIC and NMSMC structures	Raised local voices on benefit concerns
EPA	Alignment of EPA mandates with TLAS	First-time JIC participation
UNDP	Linked VPA to climate and SDG frameworks	Supported inter-agency forest governance
World Bank	Participation in concession review process	Raised governance issues in sector dialogue
Private Sector	Communicated operational challenges to FDA	Requested coordination improvement (no formal achievement cited)
MFDP	–	–
AFD	Brought regional perspective to dialogue	Supported VPA-adjacent learning events

MoJ	Provided legal advice for contract procedures	Ensured legal attestation of VPA-related contracts
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“The JIC is functioning again. After a long silence, we now have a platform to raise concerns.” — Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

“The process is more inclusive. For the first time, EPA is actually part of the discussions at JIC level.” — Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

4.7 GENERAL FAILURES OR SHORTFALLS OF THE VPA PROCESS (2023–2025) (QUESTION 8)

Despite visible progress, the VPA process in Liberia continues to face deep-seated systemic challenges, many of which were flagged across multiple stakeholder interviews. These challenges cut across technical, institutional, participatory, and financial dimensions. Below are the main failure areas, ranked by frequency of citation.

4.7.1 Failure to Issue a FLEGT License After 10+ Years (Cited by 4 stakeholders - World Bank, EUD, CSOs, FDA)

Liberia’s inability to issue a single FLEGT license since signing the VPA is perceived as its most symbolic and strategic failure. For international partners like the World Bank and EUD, this calls into question the effectiveness of the legality assurance system. CSOs and FDA also acknowledged the reputational risks this poses and the resulting erosion of stakeholder confidence.

4.7.2 Lack of Follow-up and Implementation of JIC Decisions (Cited by 4 stakeholders - CSOs, NBSTB, UNDP, Private Sector)

While JIC meetings resumed, stakeholders consistently reported that decisions taken are often not implemented or lack enforcement mechanisms. CSOs pointed to a pattern of “recommendation without consequence.” The NBSTB and UNDP highlighted missed opportunities to institutionalize critical reforms—particularly those relating to the benefit-sharing mechanism, where the government continues to delay the disbursement of communities’ rightful shares, and to the persistent non-compliance with legal and regulatory requirements repeatedly reported at JIC meeting, and the private sector expressed concern over a disconnect between deliberation and execution.

4.7.3 Fragmented Stakeholder Engagement and Weak Inter-Ministerial Coordination -Cited by 5 stakeholders - MFDP, EPA, Private Sector, Communities, AFD)

Several actors noted a persistent exclusion or marginalization of key institutions and groups:

- Private sector remains under-involved, particularly in JIC and TLAS design.
- Communities feel heard but not equipped to influence.
- AFD noted poor harmonization among donor-supported projects.

This fragmentation fuels inefficiencies, confusion, and duplication.

4.7.4 Financial and Operational Bottlenecks (Cited by 3 stakeholders - NBSTB, Communities, AFD)

Lack of predictable and timely funding is a core constraint:

- NBSTB cannot distribute benefits without GoL transfers.

- Communities lack resources to participate meaningfully in national processes.

These financial obstacles undercut the credibility of both benefit-sharing and stakeholder engagement.

4.7.5 Additional Challenges (Cited by 1–2 Stakeholders Each)

- Weak legal enforcement (*MoJ, World Bank*): Limited prosecutions and unclear accountability.
- Limited authority of the Secretariat (*Secretariat*): Coordination exists, but enforcement power is lacking.
- Over-dependence on EUD support (*EUD, UNDP*): Some actors rely excessively on EU leadership and facilitation.

Stakeholders agree that the gap between structure and substance remains the VPA's core weakness. While meetings occur and tools exist, implementation is inconsistent, coordination uneven, and key deliverables—like a FLEGT license—remain unmet. Without addressing these institutional and financial barriers, even the VPA's strongest achievements risk being undermined.

Table 7: Shortfalls by Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Shortfall 1	Shortfall 2
World Bank	No FLEGT license issued	Gaps in enforcement mechanisms
CSOs	Weak follow-up of JIC decisions	Structural exclusion from implementation phases
Private Sector	Disconnected from policy process	Permit and legality delays
MFDP	Weak participation in JIC	Lack of coordination with forest institutions
NBSTB	Benefit disbursement delays	Lack of budget autonomy
Community Representatives	Limited influence in decision spaces	Capacity constraints not addressed
AFD	Donor fragmentation	No integration of lessons learned with local actors
UNDP	Weak synergy between VPA and national forest strategy	Disconnect from climate/REDD+ frameworks
EPA	Still peripheral in decision-making	LAS role not institutionalized
MoJ	Marginalized in forest-related legal enforcement	Little involvement in sector coordination
MFGAP	Limited influence beyond logistics	Seen as facilitator rather than actor in decision-making
VPA Secretariat	No formal authority over decisions	Reliant on cooperation from dominant stakeholders
EUD	Over-dependence by others on EU support	Frustration over lack of ownership from GoL institutions
FDA	Perceived resistance to structural reform	Selective engagement with stakeholders

"After more than ten years, we still haven't issued a single FLEGT license. That's the biggest failure." — World Bank.

"We are not taken seriously in the process. No matter what we say, the decisions are already made." — Private Sector Actors.

The continued absence of a FLEGT license is the most symbolic failure. Stakeholders are disillusioned by the limited-binding nature of decisions, the lack of ministerial accountability, and the underfunding of engagement mechanisms. These failures risk eroding trust and undermining recent gains.



5 OBJECTIVE II – OPPORTUNITIES FOR VPA PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

5.1 FUNCTIONALITY OF VPA INSTITUTIONS

Stakeholders were asked to assess whether the VPA structures (Joint Implementation Committee - JIC, Liberian Implementation Committee - LIC, and the National Multistakeholder Monitoring Committee - NMSMC) are functioning in a relevant, coordinated, and efficient manner.

There is broad agreement that the JIC, LIC, and NMSMC remain relevant, especially as spaces for dialogue and policy engagement. However, functionality is hampered by poor coordination, limited efficiency, and weak follow-up mechanisms.

1. Coordination is described as “reactive” or “fragmented” by several actors including CSOs, FDA, and MFDP.
2. Meetings are held, but agenda duplication, poor resolution tracking, and project-dependent funding weaken continuity and effectiveness (MFGAP, UNDP, Private Sector).
3. Some institutions, like MoJ and World Bank, had more positive assessments, citing observable flows of discussion. and decision-making.
4. However, voices like CSOs, community actors, and NBSTB noted that decisions are often not implemented, and the same people dominate participation.
5. The EPA expressed concerns about politicized discussions and questioned the efficiency of broad-based participation, suggesting a leaner model might be more functional.

Table 8: Comparative Stakeholder Table: Perception of VPA Institutional Functioning

Stakeholder	Relevant	Fluid	Coordinated	Efficient
CSOs	Yes	No	Partially	No
Community Representatives	Yes	No	No	No
EPA	Mixed	No	No	No
MoJ	Yes	Partly	Yes	Yes
VPA Secretariat	Yes	No	No	No
UNDP	Yes	No	No	No
AFD	Yes	-	-	Yes
MFDP	Yes	No	No	No
FDA	Yes	No	No	No
Private Sector	Yes	Mixed	No	Mixed
EU Delegation	Yes	No	Mixed	Mixed

MFGAP	Yes	Mixed	No	No
World Bank	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NBSTB	Yes	No	No	No

"They are relevant, but not fluid. Coordination exists, but it's reactive. You'll see overlap in agendas but no shared outcomes." — Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

"Meetings are not regular. There's no feedback loop. The same people attend over and over again, so nothing changes." — Community Representatives

"Coordination is there. Issues flow from the NMSMC to the LIC to the JIC. It's not perfect, but there is a process." — Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

5.2 PERCEPTION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE JIC

Stakeholders were asked to provide their perception of the representation of the Joint Implementation Committee (JIC), with attention to three interrelated aspects: (1) the composition of stakeholders represented in the JIC, (2) the level of participation of those stakeholders in discussions and decision-making, and (3) the extent to which various stakeholders have meaningful influence on outcomes.

While most respondents acknowledged the JIC as a broadly inclusive structure, many pointed to substantial gaps between formal representation and actual power. Several actors noted that while groups may be physically present, they are not always enabled to contribute effectively, either due to limited preparation, lack of support, or procedural marginalization.

1. Stakeholder Composition:

Most respondents acknowledged that the JIC is formally inclusive. However, several noted that some key institutions (e.g., Mines) remain structurally absent, while others (e.g., private sector or community groups) are formally present but inconsistently represented or supported.

"On paper it's inclusive... but not everyone comes prepared or represents their constituencies." — FDA

2. Level of Participation:

Participation varies greatly. CSOs and communities are present but often under-supported. Donors are often observers. Government ministries like MoJ and MFDP are sometimes peripheral.

"Some actors... speak more and get more attention. Community voices are symbolic." — MFGAP

3. Influence on JIC Decisions:

Stakeholders noted that influence is highly uneven. Power often correlates with capacity, political capital, and funding leverage.

"Representation is there, but influence is uneven, depending on how organized or supported the groups are." — EUD.

Table 9: Stakeholder Perceptions of JIC Representation

Stakeholder	Composition Adequate?	Participation Level	Influence Level	Key Observations
CSOs	Yes (on paper)	Present, limited	Symbolic	"Communities are there but often silent."
Communities	Partial	Uneven	Weak	"No clear system for choosing community reps."
FDA	Yes	Mixed	High	"Some actors don't come prepared or report back."
EUD	Yes	High	High	"Influence depends on organization and support."
Private Sector	Yes	Inconsistent	Medium-High	"Good mix, but not equal influence."
MFDP	No	Absent	Low	"Should be involved at agenda-setting level."
MFGAP	Yes	Regular	Informal	"Playing field is not level."
MoJ	Yes	Present	Moderate	"Each stakeholder brings influence depending on the issue."
EPA	Yes	Recently involved	Emerging	"Participation is improving but still new."
NBSTB	Yes	Present	Limited	"Community reps need stronger voice."
VPA Secretariat	Yes	Regular	High	Plays a facilitative role, shapes decisions informally
World Bank, UNDP, AFD	No (observers only)	Marginal	None	Not part of formal decision-making structure

5.3 EFFICIENCY OF JIC DECISIONS

Stakeholders were asked to assess the efficiency of decisions made by the Joint Implementation Committee (JIC), specifically in relation to: (1) the relevance of agenda setting, (2) the quality and structure of meeting procedures, (3) the binding nature of decisions, and (4) the effectiveness of follow-up and implementation. While the JIC is widely recognized as a critical governance mechanism, stakeholders expressed concerns about its functional impact.

1. Relevance of Agenda Setting

Many stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with how agendas are formulated for JIC meetings. They argued that agendas often lack focus and are driven by external interests. The Ministry of Justice remarked: "Every time you go to the JIC, there are different issues on the agenda... It should be based on anticipated deliverables." CSOs similarly noted that agendas were "mostly donor-driven," and not necessarily reflective of the priorities of domestic stakeholders. The EUD observed that agendas are "too broad and ambitious," making it difficult to focus on implementable actions.

2. Meeting Procedures

In contrast, most stakeholders described the procedural structure of JIC meetings as sound. The Ministry of Justice praised the “parliamentary structure” of discussions, and AFD described JIC meeting organization as “quite good and well done.” Nevertheless, many felt that good procedures do not ensure impact. CSOs and community representatives emphasized that while meetings are organized, they often lack mechanisms for consistent decision tracking and follow-up.

3. Bindingness of Decisions

Stakeholders were nearly unanimous in pointing out that JIC decisions are not effectively binding. MFGAP noted: “No one is held accountable.” MFDP reinforced this view, saying: “There are no consequences for inaction.” The Ministry of Justice added that “JIC decisions are too voluminous... not everything should be considered a JIC decision.” This sentiment was echoed across multiple institutions, reflecting widespread scepticism about the enforceability of resolutions.

4. Follow-up and Implementation

This was considered the weakest link in the JIC process. Private sector representatives noted: “There is no tracking. No one reports on what happened after the last JIC.” CSOs said bluntly: “Follow-up is the weakest part.” Community voices echoed the same concern: “Implementation is the problem.” Even actors with more resources, such as the VPA Secretariat and FDA, agreed that follow-up mechanisms are poorly institutionalized and overly dependent on project cycles rather than formal mandates.

Table 10: Stakeholder Perceptions of JIC Efficiency

Stakeholder	Agenda Setting	Meeting Procedures	Bindingness of Decisions	Follow-up & Implementation
MoJ	Not focused enough	Formal and structured	Depends on parties	Capacity and funding limits
EUD	Too broad and ambitious	Formal, well-convened	Not clearly enforced	Needs better responsibility
CSOs	Donor-driven	Structured	Binding in theory only	Weakest part of process
Community Reps	Well organized	Inclusive	Not felt locally	No feedback to community
Private Sector	Technically sound	Well run	No tracking	Decisions delayed
MFGAP	Negotiated	Sufficient	No accountability	No decision log
NBSTB	Commendable	Positive	Weak implementation	Follow-up needs improvement
MFDP	Too technical	Excludes fiscal voices	No consequences	Weak implementation
FDA	Appropriate	Structured	No enforcement	Needs tracking mechanism
VPA Secretariat	Relevant	Effective facilitation	Coordination but no authority	Follow-up not institutionalized
AFD	Good first impression	Efficient (from 1 meeting)	Action points noted	Can't assess from outside

5.4 IMPORTANCE OF THE JIC PLATFORM FOR FOREST GOVERNANCE

Stakeholders were asked: “How would you rate the importance of the JIC platform for forest governance in general Liberia (high, medium, low)?” This question helped gauge perceptions of the JIC as a national forum for dialogue, decision-making, and coordination across the forest governance landscape. Responses reflect both appreciation for the JIC’s convening power and criticism of its limitations in influencing systemic outcomes. Below is a thematic summary followed by a stakeholder-specific comparison.

Most stakeholders rated the importance of the JIC as 'high'. They recognized the JIC as the only national-level platform that brings together diverse forest actors—including government ministries, civil society, the private sector, and communities. The JIC was widely seen as providing legitimacy to forest governance discussions and ensuring that stakeholder voices can be heard.

However, some respondents emphasized that the JIC’s influence is undermined by inconsistent follow-up, unclear mandates, and the exclusion or marginalization of critical players such as the Ministry of Finance. Community representatives and CSOs stressed the symbolic nature of their participation, while actors like the FDA, EUD, and MFGAP viewed the JIC as a cornerstone of inclusive governance. Notably, a few stakeholders rated the JIC as 'medium', citing concerns about access, follow-through, and broader interministerial coordination.

Table 11: Perceived Importance of the JIC Platform

Stakeholder	Importance Rating	Key Justification or Quote
EUD	High	It is one of the few structured, multi-stakeholder governance platforms that exists in Liberia.
FDA	High	Without the JIC, we’d have no national space for dialogue. It’s imperfect, but essential.
MFGAP	High	It is the only space where people from different sectors and interests sit together with some sense of equality.
VPA Secretariat	High	Serves as a central forum for dialogue, decision-making, and coordination.
CSOs	High	The structure didn’t collapse... community and CSO voices stronger than ever before.
Community Reps	High	All stakeholders are there. But it must be more accessible and inclusive.
Private Sector	High	The only national platform where we are all in the same room. That is essential.
UNDP	High	One of the only platforms where all forest stakeholders meet regularly. It’s a valuable asset.
AFD	High	Essential. It allows all stakeholders to meet. It gives life to the project.
NBSTB	High	Central forum for dialogue, decision-making, and coordination.
MoJ	Medium	The JIC platform is a forum that embraces exchange of ideas FDA still drives the sector.
MFDP	Medium to High	It has potential to be very useful if it becomes more inclusive.
EPA	Not rated	Acknowledged value through participation and recognition, but did not give a specific rating.
World Bank	Not rated	No formal role in JIC; views inferred from broader governance feedback.

5.5 INSTITUTIONAL OR PROCEDURAL WEAKNESSES AFFECTING THE VPA PROCESS

Stakeholders were asked: “What would you identify as the main institutional or procedural weaknesses currently affecting the VPA process in Liberia?” This question elicited some of the most direct and critical observations across the interviews. While appreciation for existing structures remained, most stakeholders emphasized that systemic barriers continue to undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of the VPA process. These weaknesses can be grouped into key thematic areas, as presented below.

1. Weak Enforcement and Non-Compliance Follow-up.

Multiple respondents emphasized the gap between identifying infractions and enforcing consequences. The Ministry of Justice and World Bank cited limited resources for legal prosecution, while the VPA Secretariat and CSOs described a pattern of unresolved non-compliance cases. Stakeholders expressed concern that the system ‘identifies, but doesn’t bite.’

2. Limited Institutional Capacity and Accountability.

Stakeholders such as EUD, EPA, and NBSTB noted that agencies lack the technical, logistical, and human resources to fulfil their roles. The EU Delegation underscored that ‘institutions are understaffed and under-resourced,’ and that ‘there is limited consequence for inaction.’

3. Fragmented Stakeholder Coordination.

Five stakeholders, including MFDP, Communities, and AFD, highlighted poor inter-agency coordination and limited collaboration between government, donors, and CSOs. EPA’s role in TLAS is not institutionalized, and the MFDP is absent from key forums. This fragmentation leads to duplication and slow reform.

4. Unreliable Financial Flows.

Funding bottlenecks were described by NBSTB, UNDP, and Communities. Delayed disbursements from the government impact community benefit sharing and institutional operations. There is no dedicated national budget line for VPA institutions, making the process overly reliant on donor funding.

5. Dependence on External Facilitation.

Many actors expressed concern that the VPA process still depends heavily on EU logistical and political support. As UNDP noted, ‘these platforms are not self-sustaining.’ MFGAP and AFD raised issues around sustainability and the absence of institutional memory when facilitators or project staff leave.

Table 12: Key Institutional and Procedural Weaknesses by Stakeholder

Stakeholder	Key Weaknesses Identified	Illustrative Quote or Observation
EUD	Weak follow-up and limited institutional accountability	‘Decisions are taken, but not followed through.’
FDA	Resistance to reform; selective engagement	‘Reform proposals are sometimes ignored.’
MoJ	Lack of prosecution funding	‘No funds for witnesses or legal follow-up.’

MFDP	No engagement in forest policy; low coordination	'We're not at the table for JIC.'
CSOs	Structural exclusion from implementation	'Our role ends after recommendations.'
Communities	Lack of support to engage or follow up	'We talk, but don't see action afterward.'
Private Sector	Disconnected from VPA design	'We raise issues, but see no change.'
NBSTB	Delayed benefits and no budget autonomy	'Can't pay staff or run M&E without funds.'
MFGAP	No authority beyond facilitation	'We shape discussions, but can't enforce outcomes.'
EPA	Peripheral role in legality assurance	'EPA role in LAS not yet institutionalized.'
VPA Secretariat	No enforcement mandate	'Coordination without decision-making power is a constraint.'
World Bank	No FLEGT license; weak compliance culture	'The system doesn't punish violations.'
UNDP	Process not self-sustaining	'Too much dependency on donor support.'
AFD	Fragmented project alignment	'Lessons from other VPAs not applied here.'

5.6 THEME-BASED FREQUENCY MATRIX – WEAKNESSES AND SUCCESSES IN THE VPA PROCESS

5.6.1.1 Key Weaknesses

Table 13: Key weaknesses in the VPA process

Theme	Type	Mentions Count	Stakeholder Mentions (Examples)
Weak decision follow-up	Weakness	10	CSOs, FDA, Private Sector, EUD, NBSTB, MFGAP, Community Reps, MoJ, MFDP, Secretariat
Lack of enforcement mechanisms	Weakness	7	MoJ, World Bank, Secretariat, CSOs, FDA, MFDP, VPA Secretariat
Institutional capacity gaps	Weakness	8	EPA, NBSTB, UNDP, CSOs, EUD, Secretariat, MFGAP, FDA
Poor inter-agency coordination	Weakness	6	MFDP, AFD, EPA, UNDP, MoJ, Community Reps
Stakeholder marginalization	Weakness	5	CSOs, Communities, Private Sector, NBSTB, MFGAP
Donor dependency	Weakness	4	UNDP, AFD, Secretariat, MFGAP
Unclear agenda setting	Weakness	4	MoJ, EUD, CSOs, MFDP
Symbolic inclusion (e.g., communities)	Weakness	3	CSOs, Communities, NBSTB
No national VPA budget line	Weakness	3	NBSTB, MFDP, Secretariat
Legal/policy ambiguity	Weakness	3	MoJ, FDA, CSOs

In addition to the weaknesses identified through stakeholder interviews, the FDA emphasizes the importance of addressing deeper **systemic factors** that shape Liberia's VPA performance. The FDA asserts that this stakeholder assessment, while thorough in identifying symptoms of non-performance, does not fully explore their root causes—such as technical feasibility constraints, structural complexity, and the breadth of Liberia's verification framework. Liberia's VPA architecture, which features 11 principles, 49 indicators, and 132 verifiers, is significantly more demanding than those of Ghana (5 principles, 15 indicators, 16 verifiers), Guyana (7 principles, 12 indicators, 12 verifiers), or Indonesia (4 principles, 10 indicators, 13 verifiers). This disparity partly explains persistent implementation challenges and highlights the need for **systemic performance reviews** that go beyond financial assessments to examine functionality, deliverables, and institutional readiness. Moreover, lessons from other VPA countries demonstrate that streamlining goals and strengthening technical capacities are critical to overcoming

early implementation barriers—an insight that Liberia must adapt to its unique post-conflict context and governance realities.

5.6.1.2 Key Successes

Table 14: Key Successes in the VPA process

Theme	Type	Mentions Count	Stakeholder Mentions (Examples)
Legality grid/matrix and other technical/monitoring tools	Success	5	FDA, CSOs, Secretariat, EUD, EPA
Resumption of JIC	Success	4	CSOs, FDA, Community Reps, EUD
Multi-stakeholder coordination	Success	4	MFGAP, Secretariat, UNDP, EUD
Increased community/CSO voice	Success	2	CSOs, Community Reps
Technical facilitation (MFGAP, FU, Secretariat)	Success	3	MFGAP, Secretariat, EUD
Improved donor alignment	Success	3	UNDP, AFD, EUD
Recognition of community rights	Success	2	CSOs, NBSTB
Integration with REDD+/climate	Success	2	UNDP, EUD



6 OBJECTIVE III – ENTRY POINTS FOR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

6.1 SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT MODELS UNDER THE VPA PROCESS

Stakeholders were asked: “What specific procedures or engagement models have proven most effective in sustaining your participation and commitment to the VPA process?” This question revealed a rich set of practices and mechanisms that stakeholders credited with keeping them actively engaged in the VPA. While perceptions varied, several common engagement strategies emerged, including pre-meeting briefings, logistical facilitation, community-level outreach, and structured participation in JIC and LIC forums.

Key Patterns of Success :

1. Pre-meetings and Preparation:

Both FDA and CSOs highlighted pre-JIC/LIC briefings as critical to improving participation quality.

2. *Facilitation Unit Support:* The Facilitation Unit (FU) was seen as instrumental in providing logistical support, coordination, and access to information—especially for CSOs, EUD, and MFGAP.

3. Decentralized and Inclusive Meetings:

Field-based consultations and county-level sessions were praised by community stakeholders as key to enabling rural participation.

4. Direct Bilateral Engagement:

FDA, EUD, and UNDP emphasized the importance of trust-building and informal dialogue alongside formal platforms.

5. Donor Coordination Forums:

Donors such as UNDP and AFD noted the value of inter-agency exchanges and embedding the VPA within broader climate and governance agendas.

Table 15: Stakeholder Feedback on Effective Engagement Models

Stakeholder	Successful Models or Practices Identified
EU Delegation	Structured JIC/LIC meetings; advance documentation; dialogue with FDA; facilitator support
FDA	Pre-JIC/LIC briefings; bilateral engagement outside formal structures
VPA Secretariat	Regular stakeholder consultations and participatory processes
NBSTB	Inclusive stakeholder platforms and regular decision-making consultations
CSOs	Pre-meetings before LIC/JIC; Facilitator Unit support; monthly coordination
Community Reps	Field-based county meetings; pre-meeting training and stakeholder mapping
MFGAP	Facilitated platform access; financial/logistical coordination; capacity building

Private Sector	Access to JIC meetings; structured space to raise concerns
UNDP	Donor coordination meetings; VPA integration in broader governance dialogue
AFD	Regional exchanges and comparative learning across VPAs

6.2 STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders were asked: “From your perspective, how can coordination among stakeholders—particularly between government agencies, CSOs, and the private sector—be strengthened to improve the outcomes of the VPA process?” Responses highlighted a **strong demand for better structure, formalized roles, and more inclusive and consistent engagement mechanisms**. While there was general agreement that coordination has improved, most stakeholders pointed to enduring gaps—especially the absence of dedicated coordination bodies, clarity of mandates, and logistical and capacity support.

1. *Permanent Coordination Bodies:*

FDA, UNDP, and MFDG proposed a government-anchored coordination mechanism, ideally institutionalized through a legal instrument (law/regulation/executive order) and inclusive of all ministries and sectors.

2. *Clear Terms of Reference and Roles:*

Stakeholders including MFGAP and EUD called for TORs that define who participates in each platform, with what mandate, and how decisions are implemented.

3. *Joint Field Missions and Cross-Stakeholder Visits:*

Community Representatives, FDA, and CSOs highlighted joint monitoring as both a confidence-building and accountability mechanism.

4. *Enhanced Communication Platforms:*

NBSTB and the VPA Secretariat recommended streamlined channels—online dashboards, regular summaries, and timely feedback loops.

5. *Capacity Building and Translation:*

Community actors and MFGAP emphasized that non-state actors need more training, translation of documents, and support to engage fully.

6. *Quarterly or Thematic Coordination Forums*

Proposals from MFGAP and AFD included forums outside of JIC/LIC, dedicated to themes like enforcement, finance, or climate linkages.

Table 16: Stakeholder-Specific Recommendations

Stakeholder	Coordination Proposals
FDA	Establish a permanent VPA secretariat within government, empowered to convene and coordinate.
EUD	Capacity building, equal access to information, and possibly independent facilitation to maintain trust.
MoJ	Continue monthly multi-stakeholder platforms; track concerns raised through follow-up tools.
MFDP	Create a cross-sector steering body including finance, justice, internal affairs; embed VPA in national budget planning.
VPA Secretariat	Clear communication and feedback platforms between government, CSOs, private sector.
NBSTB	Collaborative platforms with equal voice for communities and feedback mechanisms.
CSOs	Strengthen monthly LIC pre-meetings; create feedback pathways post-JIC.
Communities	Joint field monitoring and local language communication channels like radio.
MFGAP	Multi-actor board overseeing coordination; define TORs for all forums.
AFD	Ensure JIC meetings remain convened regularly and include all partners, especially donors.
UNDP	Create a national coordination mechanism housed in government; link VPA to climate governance.
Private Sector	Improve transparency and structured dialogue in JIC and LIC; provide preparation support.

6.3 REFORMS AND TOOLS TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE VPA PROCESS

Stakeholders were asked: “Are there specific reforms, tools, procedures or mechanisms you believe would significantly improve your engagement in the VPA process?” This question produced a diverse array of recommendations from government, civil society, donor partners, and communities. Key suggestions focused on monitoring systems, financial transparency, structural reforms, communication mechanisms, and better inclusion of local stakeholders. The range of proposals reflects the different operational needs and engagement levels across the stakeholder spectrum.

1. Monitoring and Accountability Tools

A dashboard or tracker to monitor JIC decisions and follow-up was proposed by EUD, FDA, and MFGAP.

2. Legal and Structural Reforms

Stakeholders such as FDA and MFDP called for government regulatory instrument(s) institutionalizing VPA bodies and clarifying mandates.

3. Dedicated Budget Lines and Financial Autonomy

MFDP, CSOs, and NBSTB emphasized the need for budget support in national frameworks like Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

4. Capacity Building and Inclusion

Community actors and CSOs called for training, translated materials, and feedback sessions at local levels.

5. Formalization of Coordination Roles

Stakeholders supported a national coordination mechanism—potentially hosted at FDA or MFDP.

6. Conflict Resolution and Feedback Loops

MFGAP and communities asked for grievance mechanisms and regular follow-up at the local level.

Table 17: Stakeholder-Specific Reform Proposals

Stakeholder	Proposed Reform or Tool
EU Delegation	Monitoring dashboard; clarity in implementation responsibilities; stronger NMSMC as feedback loop.
FDA	Legal recognition of VPA platforms; dashboard to track decisions; national budget allocation for VPA.
VPA Secretariat	Financial transparency systems; training and M&E for community projects.
MFDP	Integration of VPA priorities into the MTEF; formal planning roles for finance sector.
CSOs	Funding allocations for participation; capacity building; meeting feedback mechanisms.
Community Representatives	Budget for community participation; materials in local languages; feedback after JIC.
NBSTB	Capacity building for CFDCs; logistical support; transparent fund disbursement tracking.
MFGAP	Public VPA dashboard; structured training for community reps; conflict resolution mechanism.
AFD	Continuation of formal dialogue forums (JIC/LIC) even after VPA; stakeholder coordination maintained.
UNDP	More structured inclusion of forest governance in climate and REDD+ frameworks.
Private Sector	Preparation support for meetings; legal clarity on permits and obligations.

The word cloud below visualizes the most frequently cited concepts and mechanisms that sustained stakeholder participation in the VPA process. It draws from 14 interviews across civil society, government, donor institutions, and the private sector.



Figure 3: Engagement Drivers Word Cloud

6.4 CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders were asked: “Looking ahead, what would be essential for your organization to remain actively involved in a reconfigured or future EU-GoL forest governance initiative, especially if the current VPA framework is revised or replaced?” Responses emphasized the need for institutional clarity, sustainable financing, operational platforms like the JIC, and clear stakeholder mandates. Stakeholders offered a mix of strategic expectations (e.g., legal reform, alignment with climate policy), operational preconditions (e.g., logistics, funding), and political imperatives (e.g., government ownership, accountability).

Table 18: Summary of Key Conditions by Stakeholder

Stakeholder	Essential Conditions for Continued Engagement
EU Delegation	Political will from GoL; accountability mechanisms; flexibility and results-based frameworks.
FDA	Clear roles; continued technical leadership; stable funding structure.
VPA Secretariat	Operational mandate preserved; funding guarantees; inclusive coordination.
MFDP	Formal recognition as core actor; budget integration; planning roles.
CSOs	Sustained funding for participation; retained voice in LIC/JIC; protection of legal provisions.
Communities	Voice at JIC/NMSMC; local languages used; transport/logistics provided.
NBSTB	Legally binding benefit-sharing; financial support; inclusive platforms.
Private Sector	Market incentives (e.g., access to EU); level playing field; clear compliance guidelines.
EPA	Institutional voice and enforcement power; funding for county-based operations.
MFGAP	Shared vision with donors/Government; continuation of JIC; link to climate agendas.
AFD	Transparent access to platform dialogue and donor coordination.
UNDP	Forest governance integrated into REDD+/climate structures.
MoJ	Streamlined legal backstopping role; continuity of FDA-MoJ MoU.
World Bank	Clear GoL framework to engage; relevance to investment priorities.

CASE STUDY I: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE BASSA COMMUNITY FOREST

This case study offers insights into the realities of community forest management under a Commercial Use Contract (CUC), providing lessons that are relevant to both the current VPA-FLEGT process and the proposed Forest Partnership in Liberia. The Bassa (Masaguevah) Community Forest in Liberia, comprising four communities (Malloy, Varmo, Gweazueh, and Sorbein), has entered into a Commercial Use Contract (CUC) with the CNC Corporation to harvest timber for export. While some community benefits have begun to materialize, numerous governance, communication, and benefit-sharing issues persist.

Summary of Key Challenges

- Disputed community leadership and election legitimacy undermine collective governance.
- Frozen community bank accounts hinder the flow of financial benefits and fuel mistrust.
- Lack of transparency and poor communication mechanisms lead to uninformed decision-making.
- Healthcare benefits, though initiated, were poorly delivered and not sustained.
- Promises of social services (e.g., hand pumps, scholarships) were implemented inconsistently.
- Local employment benefits were viewed as insufficient and unstructured.
- Land use for agriculture remains a concern, especially in balancing forest and food security.
- Environmental monitoring is weak, with unclear boundaries between mining, agriculture, and forestry.

Lessons Learned for the VPA-FLEGT Process

- The VPA must better integrate community forests into its governance frameworks, especially in benefit monitoring.
- Legal clarity and enforcement are essential at the community level to avoid elite capture and mismanagement.
- Independent monitoring mechanisms need to include community-level financial flows and social benefit tracking.
- The current JIC/NMSMC structures should engage directly with community grievances to build legitimacy.
- Dispute resolution processes should be built into the VPA framework with links to local traditional authorities and national institutions.

Opportunities for the Future Forest Partnership

- Design a more inclusive and community-driven partnership that reflects diverse forest stakeholders.
- Create local-level grievance redress and feedback mechanisms in partnership governance.
- Embed social benefit delivery benchmarks in contract compliance verification.
- Invest in community capacity building on financial literacy, legal awareness, and monitoring.
- Develop stronger coordination with county health, education, and agriculture teams to deliver broader co-benefits.



Figure 4: Meeting in Compound #2, Grand Bassa County with the Masavagua Community Forest residents and leadership team

6.5 KEY ELEMENTS TO RETAIN IN A FUTURE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Based on the interviews, the following elements were most frequently cited as essential components to preserve in any revised VPA or a new forest governance framework:

- JIC and LIC platforms – multi-stakeholder structure is vital for dialogue and decision-making.
- Legal and policy clarity – institutional roles and mandates must be embedded in national law.
- Funding mechanisms – integration in national budgets or secured donor support is critical.
- Monitoring and follow-up systems – tools like dashboards or decision trackers should be institutionalized.
- Community and CSO inclusion – platforms must safeguard equal participation for non-state actors.
- Technical facilitation – neutral bodies (e.g., FU, Secretariat) are vital for coordination.
- Market access – continued linkage to EU timber markets provides compliance incentives.
- Alignment with climate and REDD+ frameworks – VPA should intersect with broader forest governance.

6.6 RISKS OF DISENGAGEMENT IF REFORMS ARE NOT MADE

Several stakeholders expressed concern that without meaningful reforms and institutional safeguards, their continued engagement in the VPA or any future forest governance framework could diminish significantly. These risks were often tied to persistent gaps in accountability, funding, recognition, and platform functionality. Below are key disengagement risks identified:

- Loss of CSO and community trust - due to repeated exclusion from follow-up and tokenistic participation.
- Private sector withdrawal - if market access and compliance clarity are not sustained.
- "Donor fatigue" - resulting from low GoL ownership and reform inertia.
- Community disengagement - if local-level participation remains underfunded or unsupported logistically.
- Institutional fragmentation - as coordination weakens in the absence of a central platform or decree.
- Reduced GoL credibility - in global climate and governance forums if stakeholder alignment falters.

6.7 STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS VS. FOREST PARTNERSHIP PROVISIONS [FREELY DEVELOPED BY THE FACILITATION UNIT]

Table 19: Comparison of stakeholder priorities and forest partnership provisions

Stakeholder Priority	Addressed in FP	Conditions for Functioning	Current Gaps	Remarks / Risks
Multi-stakeholder coordination (e.g. JIC)	Possibly – via FP Steering Committee	Committee must be inclusive, decision-making, regular, and transparent	No equivalent of JIC, LIC or NMSMC	Risk of centralization without technical/operational layers
Legal/policy basis for stakeholder roles	Partially – linked to VPA reform agenda	Steering structure must be embedded in legal/policy frameworks	No clear legal roadmap in FP draft	Needs GoL legal instrument or formal MoU
Sustainable funding for engagement	Yes – via EU, Team Europe, blended finance	Dedicated budget lines for FP participation, including CSOs/communities	No details on national co-funding mechanisms	Relies heavily on external support
Protect community representation & benefits	Yes – through community forestry & tenure reform pillars	Must ensure consultation and benefit transparency	Lacks strategy for CFDC/NU-CFDC/CFMB/NUCFMB & NBSTB inclusion	Mechanism design is still pending
Preserve technical coordination (Secretariat/FU)	Partially – Secretariat role not specified	Needs designated coordination body with operational mandate	No operational equivalent to VPA Secretariat	Risk of weakened day-to-day coordination
Link to climate finance and REDD+	Yes – embedded in FP vision	Align reporting with NDCs and existing platforms	Requires harmonization with existing climate institutions	Needs inter-ministerial alignment
Decision tracking and accountability	Not specified clearly	Dashboard or M&E log needed across FP themes	No monitoring platform detailed	Implementation risk if follow-up is not built-in

CASE STUDY II: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SALAYEA COMMUNITY FOREST

Historical Context

The Salayea Community Forest in Lofa County obtained formal community forest status in 2019, covering 8,270 hectares. After conducting due diligence on potential forest use models, the community opted for conservation forestry over commercial use due to the unsustainable outcomes observed in other commercial community forests. The community has since engaged in various conservation and livelihood support initiatives, including forest inventory, village savings and loan programs (VSLA), beekeeping, livestock rearing, and guesthouse construction.

Summary of Key Challenges

- Illegal mining (Class C license with Class B equipment) by both Liberians and foreign nationals
- Limited to no support for forest guards
- Unregulated coal burning activities
- Weak collaboration between neighbouring communities
- Inadequate institutional support (e.g., no coordinating office)

Lessons Learned for the VPA-FLEGT Process

- Commercial forestry can result in limited community benefits and unsustainable exploitation if not properly managed.
- Conservation forestry, coupled with alternative livelihood programs, strengthens community cohesion and builds sustainability.
- Effective forest governance requires enforcement structures (like forest guards) and institutional support.
- Community consultation and ownership are critical to forest resource management success under the VPA-FLEGT framework.

Opportunities for the Future Forest Partnership

- Strengthening support for forest monitoring and law enforcement to tackle illegal mining and coal burning.
- Enhancing inter-community collaboration mechanisms for broader landscape governance.
- Scaling up livelihood and enterprise development activities to improve community resilience.
- Providing dedicated institutional support, such as a community forest management office, to improve coordination and oversight.



Figure 5: With Salayea Community at the entrance of the meeting hall

7 CROSS-CUTTING OBSERVATIONS ACROSS ALL OBJECTIVES

7.1.1 Commonalities Across Stakeholder Groups

Across nearly all interviews, stakeholders expressed consistent support for the continuation of a structured, multi-stakeholder platform like the JIC and LIC, as well as for greater clarity in institutional roles and responsibilities. There was broad recognition that community voices had improved but required more systematic support. Most stakeholders also welcomed the potential transition to a Forest Partnership model, provided it preserved participatory structures and funding for engagement. Monitoring, enforcement, and follow-up were repeatedly flagged as the weakest elements.

7.1.2 Tensions or Contradictions in Perspectives

Notable tensions emerged between formal representation and actual influence. While many acknowledged the JIC as inclusive on paper, CSOs, community actors, and even some donors described their roles as symbolic or sidelined during decision-making. Another contradiction appeared between high ratings of procedural efficiency and persistent complaints about weak implementation. Government institutions often rated coordination as strong, while non-state actors and donors found it fragmented or project-dependent.

7.1.3 Structural Patterns

Three structural patterns were evident:

1. Exclusion from decision-making – Particularly among MFDP, communities, and private sector actors.
2. Donor-dependence – VPA structures remain heavily reliant on EU or project-based funding, creating uncertainty.
3. Lack of institutional memory – Without permanent coordination structures, knowledge and momentum are lost between cycles or staff changes.

7.1.4 Recurring Themes

Several themes emerged repeatedly across all objectives and questions:

Legitimacy – JIC and LIC retain symbolic and practical legitimacy, but their authority is undermined by poor enforcement.

Transparency – Stakeholders consistently called for dashboards, decision logs, and clarity on financial flows and follow-up.

Enforcement – The inability to enforce decisions or penalize non-compliance was a universal concern.

Representation – Despite formal inclusivity, practical power and voice remain uneven, especially for community and CSO actors.

8 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 KEY FINDINGS

1. The JIC remains the cornerstone of Liberia's forest governance but suffers from weak follow-up and poor decision enforcement.
2. While most stakeholders have increasing awareness and interest in the VPA, influence and empowerment remain uneven—especially for communities and CSOs.
3. Institutional coordination is fragmented, with key ministries like MFDP and EPA underrepresented in decision-making platforms.
4. Stakeholder engagement is sustained primarily through donor facilitation and technical platforms such as the Facilitation Unit and Secretariat.
5. There is stakeholder support for transitioning into a Forest Partnership model, provided that participatory structures, funding, and legal safeguards are maintained.
6. Weak implementation, lack of national budget allocations, and minimal accountability continue to undermine the VPA process.
7. The risk of disengagement is high if institutional reforms and financial support mechanisms are not addressed in future frameworks.

8.2 CONCLUSION

The findings of this Stakeholder Performance Analysis come at a pivotal moment for Liberia's forest governance. As the VPA enters its final phase and discussions on transitioning to a Forest Partnership intensify, stakeholders are both more engaged and more expectant than ever before. The VPA process has fostered essential institutions like the JIC, opened spaces for community and civil society voices, and brought Liberia into closer alignment with international standards. Yet its core weaknesses namely lack of enforcement, fragmented coordination, and overreliance on external support, remain unresolved. Without timely reform, these weaknesses risk eroding the hard-won legitimacy of the process.

To sustain momentum and credibility, the Government of Liberia and the EU must urgently act on three fronts: first, by institutionalizing multi-stakeholder platforms through clear mandates and national budget support; second, by ensuring that monitoring and follow-up systems are not symbolic but functional and binding; and third, by anchoring the Forest Partnership in a governance model that protects participation while delivering results. Failure to address these priorities risks not only stakeholder disengagement, but also the weakening of Liberia's international standing and the derailment of critical climate, biodiversity and forest objectives.

As Liberia and its partners move toward the envisaged Forest Partnership, this transition should be embraced as an opportunity to consolidate gains made under the VPA while addressing persistent structural and operational gaps. However, the shift must be informed by a **broader analytical perspective** that goes beyond stakeholder perceptions to include a comprehensive review of systemic

factors—such as technical practicability, institutional performance, financial sustainability, and the complexity of Liberia’s legality framework. Integrating these deeper assessments into the transition process will ensure that the new partnership framework is not only aspirational but also grounded in the realities of implementation capacity and governance context. By coupling the momentum for transition with evidence-based reforms, Liberia can position the Forest Partnership as a more **credible, effective, and sustainable platform** for achieving its forest governance, climate, and development objectives.

9 ANNEXES

Annex I : TORs for the SPA (short version)

Annex II: Interview guide

ANNEX I : TORS FOR THE SPA (SHORT VERSION)



Mobilisation of Facilitation Units for the Voluntary Partnership Agreements on FLEGT

Liberia Facilitation Unit

Terms of References :

FLEGT VPA Stakeholders Performance Analyses (SPA)

12 May 2025

1. Introduction

The strategic priorities of the Liberia VPA FLEGT Facilitation Unit (FU) for 2025 center on maintaining and, as much as possible, fostering EU-Liberia collaboration in relation to the VPA Process and whatever other form it might take as an EU support program in the future.

The nearly 13 years of implementing the VPA FLEGT initiative in Liberia have led to the development of critical legislation, institutions, tools, and procedures. These elements have been successfully integrated into the regular operations of the Forest Development Authority (FDA) and other relevant ministries, including those of Justice and Finance. The VPA process has also established important platforms for non-governmental stakeholders, such as NGOs, forest communities, the private sector, and other partners in the sector. Notably, the Joint Implementation Committee (JIC), Liberia Implementation Committee (LIC), and the National Multi-Stakeholder Monitoring Committee (NMSMC) have become essential venues for dialogue and collaboration. Among these, the JIC stands out as the premier high-level, multi-stakeholder forum dedicated to forestry matters in Liberia.

The present terms of references describe a Stakeholders Performance Analyses to be conducted as part of the mission of the EU VPA FLEGT Facilitation Unit in Liberia in order to “assess performances within VPA structures” (Activity A.5 of the AFD project document), building on the Inception report Stakeholder Mapping conducted in November 2023, and with the intention to feed the Parties (GoL and the EU) in particular with constructive data on evolution of the performances, perceptions, needs and perspectives of stakeholders.

2. Stakeholder Performance Analyses (SPA)

Our Facilitation Unit met the Stakeholders during the inception phase. In November 2023, a stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted, based on a power/interest matrix, and it will serve as a reference point for the present SPA.

The list of **Stakeholders** will be updated and adapted to changes in names and/or new types of stakeholders involved, if any, but it will include all VPA FLEGT traditional players acting in Liberia: The European Union Delegation, the Forest Development Authority FDA and related Government of Liberia GoL ministries and agencies, other international institutions and development partners, Liberia Timber Association (LibTA), Communities Group (NBSTB, NUCFMB, NUCFDC), Liberia Media Center (LMC) and other civil society organizations, etc. The SPA thus embrace the VPA process as a whole.

Objectives of the SPA are threefold:

- i.) To measure the evolution of “interest”/“power” and “interest”/“awareness” of the different players since the initial stakeholder mapping conducted in November 2023;
- ii.) To identify opportunities for VPA process improvement in general and
- iii.) To identify entry points, procedures and institutions under the VPA process that are key for a continued engagement of the players in an EU/GoL forest governance collaboration at large. We will focus here on perceptions and performances of the VPA process institutions and groups, namely the JIC, LIC & tLIC, NMSMC as well as more informal channels for collaboration.

The short term **Outcome** is to deliver qualitative results to the two Parties of the VPA, namely the EU and the GoL, in order to assess the stakeholder’s dynamics, levels of power, will and influence, compared to the start of the project. On the medium-term, some outcomes of this SPA will help VPA Parties adjust future decisions and they will potentially use these findings to evaluate which key elements or institutions of the VPA process may need further support and/or capitalization in a future collaboration and/or transposition in Liberian legislation or institutional architecture.

We will work through questionnaires shared in advance and used in in-person interviews, both individual interviews and group interviews, as necessary.

3. Calendar & contacts

Mission: June 2 to 8, 2025. Monrovia, Liberia.

Decontee King-Sackie (Facilitator, Liberia) : DEKS@NIRAS.FI

Laurent Granier (Backstopper, France) : LAGR@NIRAS.DK

ANNEX II : QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE SPA

Government of Liberia (GoL) and European Union Delegation (EUD) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) – Forest Law Governance Enforcement and Trade (FLEGT) Facilitation Unit Stakeholders Performance Analysis (SPA) Mission

Mission: Monday, June 2 – Saturday, June 6, 2025

Questionnaire

Based on the objectives outlined in the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Stakeholders Performance Analyses (SPA) under the Liberia VPA FLEGT Facilitation Unit, the following insightful questions are proposed. These are grouped under each of the three stated objectives to guide the NIRAS Team in collecting deep, reflective insights during interviews. These questions are designed to elicit qualitative insights that can inform both the immediate assessment and longer-term strategic decisions by the EU and the Government of Liberia.

Objective i: To measure the evolution of “interest”/“power” and “interest”/“awareness” of the different players since the initial stakeholder mapping conducted in November 2023

1	How would you describe your awareness of the current status, challenges, and opportunities within the VPA implementation? (good, average, bad)
2	Has this awareness increased, remained constant, or decreased since November 2023?
3	How has your level of interest in the VPA process evolved over the past year, and what factors have influenced any change in your engagement?
4	Do you have the perception to have been empowered through VPA process since November 2023 ? Give examples
5	Do you perceive a shift in your organization’s ability (power) to influence decisions within the VPA structures (e.g., JIC, LIC, NMSMC)? Please explain why or why not.
6	What are the biggest achievements for your organization under the VPA process in the last 2 years (name 2)
7	What are the best achievements of the VPA process in general in the last 2 years (JIC decisions, institution such as JIC, product, etc.)
8	What are the biggest failures / shortfalls of the VPA process in general in the last 2 years (name 2)

Objective ii: To identify opportunities for VPA process improvement in general

9	What is your perception on the functioning of the diverse VPA institutions (JIC + LIC + NMSCM, etc.): Relevant? Fluid? Coordinated? Efficient?
10	What is your perception of the representatives of the JIC (stakeholders composition, level of participation and influence of the different stakeholders)
11	What is your perception on the efficiency of the JIC Decisions. Relevance of the Agenda setting? Meetings procedures? Bindingness of decisions? Efficiency of Decisions follow-up and implementation?
12	How would you rate the importance of the JIC platform for forest governance in general Liberia (high, medium, low)

13	What would you identify as the main institutional or procedural weaknesses currently affecting the VPA process in Liberia?
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Objective iii: To identify entry points, procedures, and institutions under the VPA process that are key for a continued engagement of the players in an EU/GoL forest governance collaboration

14	What specific procedures or engagement models have proven most effective in sustaining your participation and commitment to the VPA process?
15	From your perspective, how can coordination among stakeholders—particularly between government agencies, CSOs, and the private sector—be strengthened to improve the outcomes of the VPA process?
16	Are there specific reforms, tools, procedures or mechanisms you believe would significantly improve your engagement in the VPA process?
17	Looking ahead, what would be essential for your organization to remain actively involved in a re-configured or future EU-GoL forest governance initiative, especially if the current VPA framework is revised or replaced?