

# NICFI Mid-Term Review

## ClientEarth's Management Response

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### Background

The Mid-term evaluation of the NICFI Project took place from August 2023 to February 2024. The Mid-term evaluation report issued eight recommendations to ClientEarth. ClientEarth's response to the recommendations will contribute to the effective use of the evaluation findings and the promotion of organisational learning and accountability. The actions identified provide a written record of the planned response to the evaluation and enable the implementation of the agreed recommendations to be tracked and monitored. ClientEarth's response will be reviewed and considered in the final evaluation of the Project.

The response indicates whether ClientEarth accepts, partially accepts, or rejects the recommendations in the evaluation report.

- Fully Accepted: ClientEarth considers that this recommendation should be completely implemented, and the response will show how and by when it will be completed.
- Partially Accepted: ClientEarth considers that the recommendation is only partly relevant/true but accepts it and will act on other parts; an explanation for a partial acceptance will be provided.
- Rejected: ClientEarth considers that the recommendation is based on inaccurate findings or does not address the findings in the correct way; the reason for rejection will be explained.

## Recommendations and responses

### **Recommendation 1: Continue capacity strengthening support to national and local stakeholders.**

**Response:** Fully Accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** In both Liberia and Gabon, we intend to continue capacity strengthening support to national and local stakeholders. Especially as governance structures in communities change - with new people coming to leadership roles, e.g. - there is a need for continued capacity strengthening including on topics such as governance, financial management, legal education on forest laws, and gender equity. We will also be creating new capacity strengthening resources in Year 4 and 5 (e.g. a guide on community forestry management in Gabon and a guide to support different community forest groups in Liberia (CLDMCs and CFMBs) to work together. We will also continue to host two regional forums per year in Liberia, and four regional workshops in Gabon in Year 4 to encourage exchange of information between community forest groups, management groups and local administrations.

We agree young people are an important group to reach. However, in Liberia, community trainings are mostly provided for members of community forest governance structures and therefore we have no control over the age range of persons currently elected to the community governance structure. The Liberian consortium will nonetheless encourage communities to elect all stakeholders within the community, including young people and women, to its governance structures. Having trainings based in the communities or regional centres, rather than only in Monrovia, has been one measure already taken by the Consortium to increase youth engagement, as youth participation may be prevented by the need to travel away from communities. The Liberian consortium will also consider how to undertake more community-wide trainings, rather than the current focus on community forest governance structures.

### **Recommendation 2: Maintain and strengthen focus on gender, youth and people with disabilities.**

**Response:** Fully accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** In Gabon, we were already planning to strengthen our gender transformative approach for the last two years of the project. At the start of 2024, a gender expert delivered in-depth training to the project team. The next key actions are:

- Support communities to integrate gender in community forestry management documents (e.g. considering women's needs in local development plans).
- Support civil society to develop templates of community forestry management plans that are gender-sensitive (e.g. including non-timber forest products which are typically linked to women's livelihoods).
- Organise two provincial workshops with women involved in community forestry management for leadership training. Focus groups will be conducted during the workshops for MEL.
- Support the creation of women's associations (Year 5).

In Liberia, we continue to encounter challenges in forest communities due to entrenched cultural norms and traditional gender roles. To address this, we will focus interventions on the following areas to address shifting awareness on gender:

- Raising awareness through information broadcast via national and local radio shows with partners FCI and NUCFMB (Year 4/5). This provides a platform for both men and women to discuss issues related to gender.
- Continue to provide Gender trainings at all joint activities in Liberia (Year 4/5)
- Review Women's Charter document to identify challenges and ensure it is used in practice by communities. (Year 4/5)

With regard to youth, our experience in practice in both Gabon and Liberia is that a wide range of ages attend community activities. However, to date we have not collected this data (in participant lists, e.g.).

Nor have we collected data on people with disabilities in our project. We will support partners to enhance their knowledge on data collection for inclusion, in line with the Washington questions. We will connect with specialised organisations on inclusion and disability to learn from best practices in the sector.

In Years 4 and 5, we will expand the information collected from participants of community trainings to include age and disability data. Based on that data, we will be better able to determine what steps are needed to strengthen our focus on youth and people with disabilities.

**Recommendation 3: Develop a stakeholder engagement plan to strengthen coherence of interventions and maximise the project's value-added, outreach and impact.**

**Response:** Partially accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** We have comprehensively mapped stakeholders from civil society, government and communities, and we believe that we are engaging with the appropriate stakeholders within these groups (within the time and resources available in this project). Nevertheless, we agree that there is more opportunity to leverage stakeholder expertise, especially in the areas of alternative livelihoods and the private sector. Therefore, given our limited capacity and resources, we will focus our response to recommendation 3 on these two areas.

We will develop a stakeholder engagement plan of projects, donors and international technical and financial partners (including private sector) that may be able to support livelihood initiatives in our target communities, in line with recommendation 5. ClientEarth and partners believe that the provision of alternative livelihoods to communities is an important next step for target communities in our project. However, ClientEarth's primary expertise does not lie in livelihoods (see our response to recommendation 5 for more information) and so we plan to develop a stakeholder engagement plan to identify others who do have this expertise. Our aim is that these projects, donors, technical and financial partners may be able to directly support livelihoods initiatives and/or support resource mobilisation to our target communities. This will also form part of our exit strategy (recommendation 8).

Regarding the private sector, ClientEarth and partners are currently working on updating our internal Africa programming strategy. This includes context analyses and stakeholder mapping in our focus countries (which include Gabon and Liberia). We will include the private sector in this exercise. Depending on the outcome of the strategy, we will consider what other types of intervention we may be able to undertake to engage with the private sector more strategically.

**Recommendation 4: Enhance responsiveness and alignment to emerging issues and relevant related ongoing forest governance, biodiversity conservation and climate processes in target countries.**

**Response:** Fully accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** We are already aligning our NICFI Project to emerging issues. For example, the Legal Working Groups have proven good platforms to respond to emerging issues and address new areas such as carbon markets and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

In Liberia, we have been supporting communities to understand the positive and negative implications of carbon offset projects and have worked with a coalition of national and international CSOs to highlight the threats associated with one specific carbon project. We have also planned a LWG to raise awareness of the Global Biodiversity Framework to increase community awareness of, and therefore facilitate community participation in, the implementation of measures the Liberian Government takes as part of fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In Gabon, we are planning to support the Gabonese government with the development of biodiversity legislation, for which we have received an invitation prior to the coup in August 2023. This legislative initiative is still a high priority on the transition government's law reform agenda, currently under review. Gabon has made serious pledges to reach the 30x30 target of the Global Biodiversity Framework, along with plans to issue biodiversity credits, for which this law is fundamental.

More comprehensively, ClientEarth and partners are currently working on updating our internal Africa programming strategy. This includes assessing many of the ongoing and emerging issues and forest governance, biodiversity conservation and climate processes mentioned in the MTR that impact our target countries. This assessment will result in an identification of priorities and opportunities for engagement in each geography, which we will implement in our NICFI Project in Years 4 and 5. For example, we plan to undertake more community trainings in Liberia on carbon offset projects.

It is important to note that there are many processes ongoing and emerging, and it is only possible to engage with some within the time and budget of our NICFI Project. At this point (and subject to the completion of our strategy), our priority in Liberia is the threat of carbon markets to community forests and the integrity of legal frameworks that regulate them. In Gabon, our priority is biodiversity conservation and the Global Biodiversity Framework, including reframing national legislation to conserve biodiversity and improve community benefit sharing.

**Recommendation 5: Strengthen livelihoods support to communities to maintain their motivation, engagement and commitment towards inclusive forest governance and biodiversity conservation.**

**Response:** Partially accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** Although livelihoods support is not our primary domain of expertise, we have a role to play in removing barriers for forest communities. We will not provide direct livelihood support to communities, but we will:

- Value and encourage non-timber forest products (NTFPs) harvesting and trade via the integration of NTFPs in community forestry management in Gabon.
- Support the creation of women's associations in Gabon.
- Support communities to allocate funds from logging activities to invest in sustainable livelihoods.
- Continue to carry out livelihood assessments by partners FCI, SDI in Liberia.

Additionally, in line with our responses to the recommendations 3 and 8, we will develop a stakeholder engagement plan to identify potential technical and financial partners who may be able to directly support livelihoods initiatives and/or support resource mobilisation to the project's communities.

**Recommendation 6: Maintain the multistakeholder focus on supporting EUDR implementation at EU and country levels.**

**Response:** Partially accepted

**Completion date:** December 2024

**Actions Planned:** We fully agree with the recommendation to continue strengthening existing relationships with our Brussels-based NGO coalition and national NGOs in strategic Member States. This work is already underway. We also fully agree with the recommendation to continue coordinating with broader NGO networks and providing technical / legal support when needed and when capacity allows. We do this through informal networking and exchanges with NGO partners, online presentations, informal knowledge-sharing and publications.

While we already have producer-country networks in some key producer countries (Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire) and are slowly building direct relationships with stakeholders in others (mostly through awareness raising and capacity building activities) we do not necessarily see a need to actively invest capacity and resources in creating producer-country networks or partnerships. We also work closely with European NGOs with established partner networks in key producer countries and see limited value in replicating those networks. We see our added value in supporting our European partners in their collaboration with local partners, rather than needing to work with local partners directly, outside of the key producer countries in which we already work.

We fully agree with the recommendation to further engage with Member States on the establishment and resourcing of their competent authorities. This work is already underway.

We fully agree with the recommendation to conduct one (or several) rapid capacity needs assessment of key stakeholders in target countries and geographies to inform our awareness raising and capacity building

interventions. We propose to do this by inviting participants in our interventions to complete a simple needs assessment questionnaire during the planning phase of our interventions.

**Recommendation 7: Update the project results framework to monitor, document and report on progress and achievements at the outcome level and emphasise learning.**

**Response:** Partially accepted

**Completion Date:** July 2024

**Actions Planned:** We recognise that the indicators of the project results framework are only quantitative and that more is needed to understand changes. However, we feel that qualitative and process indicators would be better captured in reports and research papers. Unless Norad disagrees, we will not change the results framework, but we will strengthen our MEL framework to collect Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP), participation, leadership and empowerment changes as well as changes at outcome level for the last two years of the project. This will include:

- Learning exchanges between partners in Liberia and in Gabon (online with live translation) in Year 4 and Year 5;
- A qualitative research paper on our gender approach in community forestry management; and
- The disaggregation of data per gender, age, and disability.

**Recommendation 8: Develop an exit strategy to land the gains achieved and strengthen ownership and sustainability.**

**Response:** Fully accepted

**Completion Date:** November 2024

**Actions Planned:** We agree that an exit strategy will help consolidate the achievements of the project and ensure ownership and sustainability. To do this, we will:

- Conduct reflection exercises internally using Intrac resources on responsible exit strategies to apply best practices from the sector.
- Initiate discussions with partners in relation to scenarios with or without future programme funding in order to understand their needs.
- Develop exit strategies for Gabon and Liberia based on country strategies and the updated Africa strategy, which will include capacity strengthening plans, funding strategies, end of grant checklist, etc.
- Develop a stakeholder engagement plan to identify potential technical and financial partners who may be able to directly support livelihoods initiatives and/or support resource mobilisation to the project's communities in line with our responses to the recommendations 3 and 5.



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