

CASE STUDY 6.3

ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF NEW RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND REGULATIONS IN LIBERIA'S POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING PROCESS

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The Liberian economy is highly dependent on natural resource exports from the mining, forestry, and rubber sectors.¹⁷⁴ The timber economy played a significant role in the civil war between 1980 and 2003. As revenues from timber and other high-value natural resources were used to support and prolong the conflict, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions to prohibit trade in logs in 2003. It also provided a mandate to the peacekeeping mission (UNMIL) to monitor governance of Liberia's natural resources and the environment. In doing so, the international community recognized natural resource reform as key to the country's transition to peace.

Sapo National Park is the largest and first national park in Liberia and is a biodiversity hotspot within the Upper Guinea Forest ecosystem. However, the park has faced long-standing threats from illegal farming, hunting, logging, and mining, including by ex-combatants. During the post-conflict peacebuilding process, international programming efforts prioritized the park to protect and enhance its governance through a series of regulatory reforms, policies, and projects.

To assess the sustainability of those initiatives, geospatial analysis was conducted based on time series of satellite

images taken of the park and its surrounding ecosystems. Results indicated positive and sustained forest conservation trends in project areas. **FIGURE 6.4** shows almost no deforestation within the park boundary (flat green line), and only minimal forest loss in the buffer zone. These results can be explained by the prohibition of all economic activities, including mining, enacted by the reformed national park legislation.

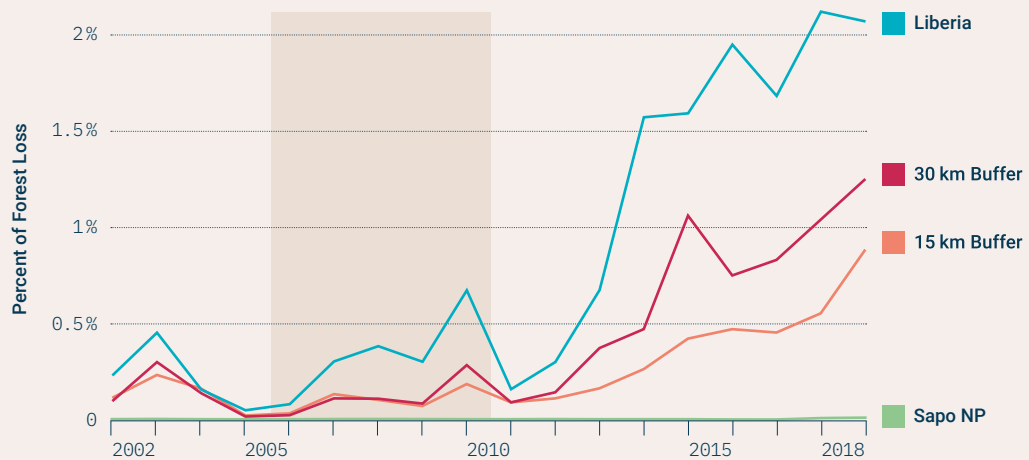
The results indicate that the efforts to protect the park's resources were sustained beyond the project duration and supported through subsequent interventions. This trend inside the park contrasts with the phenomenal increase in forest loss outside the park, mainly driven by illegal activities such as mining and logging combined with some legal mining concessions in the buffer zone. The two dips in forest loss outside the park (around 2005 and 2010) coincide with the eviction of illegal gold miners and settlers.¹⁷⁵ The depletion of forest areas in the buffer zones of Sapo National Park can be attributed to several factors, including insufficient financial, technical, and human resources as well as an insufficient legal protection.¹⁷⁶ These limitations hinder effective monitoring and management of artisanal and small-scale mining sites, as well as other illegal activities that contribute to forest loss.

FIGURE 6.4: SATELLITE IMAGE OF THE SAPO NP AND ADJACENT BUFFERS.

Deforested areas are visible in red color around Sapo NP, adjacent 15 km, and 30 km buffers (2001-2018)



Deforestation trend in Sapo National Park, adjacent 15 km and 30 km buffers and Liberia (2001-2018)



Source: Satellite data from University of Maryland and the Global Environment Facility Independent Evaluation Office 2020.