



PAYMENT FOR STEWARDSHIP

Enabling Community-Led Forest Conservation in Liberia

A Proven Model Ready to Scale.

Donor Investment Brief

The Opportunity

Liberia holds the largest remaining tract of Upper Guinea rainforest — 6.6 million hectares (ha), over two-thirds of which is on community customary land. Yet deforestation exceeds 2% per year, driven by unregulated mining and the expansion of migrant cocoa production. The logging concession model has clearly failed: US\$43m in unpaid taxes, abandoned concessions, communities owed about 75% of their share of area fees, and accelerating forest loss. REDD+ payments are unlikely anytime soon. **Integrated Development and Learning (IDL)** has developed a simpler alternative: **Payment for Stewardship**; direct area-based payments to communities who protect their forest, backed by support for livelihood enhancement and better community governance.

How It Works

Communities receive **US\$1.50/ha/year** (more than they would receive from companies logging their land) for the forest they agree to protect. In return they refrain from opening new farms or contracting with logging/mining companies in the protected area. The income funds community-chosen projects, including infrastructure. Livelihood enhancement initiatives target food security and income diversification. The program builds from donor-funded engagement towards results-based climate finance in three phases:

Phase 1: Engagement	Phase 2: Design & Action	Phase 3: Results-Based
Land rights. Area-based payments. Benefit sharing. Community monitoring.	Activity-based payments. Conservation & enterprise development. Project Design Document. Introduction of Measuring, Reporting and Verification (MRV).	Results-based climate & biodiversity payments. Full MRV. Replicable model for other landscapes.

Proven Results: Year One Pilot

With seed funding from Irish Aid, IDL launched the pilot in Sinoe County in 2025. Results after one year¹:

50,674 ha under two Cooperation Agreements	Leading to demarcated forest and active community patrols.
US\$152,022 in direct finance to pilot communities	Year 1 & Year 2 payments (2025 – 2027).
1,200 households benefiting from livelihood support	90% of participants are women.
US\$52,465 in revolving grants	Funds go to 246 small business owners (90% women).
5 hubs processing cassava into the staple food garri	Hubs support 200 women producing garri for the market.
3 motorbikes in a self-sustaining transport scheme	To improve market access for garri producers.

Neighbouring communities are actively requesting to join. As one leader asked: “*Why are you taking so long to get to us?*”

¹ Limited to the two pilot communities. Results from other districts are not included.

What Makes This Different

- **Simple and universally understood.** No complex carbon accounting needed. Communities of all literacy levels grasp the concept and know exactly what they are committing to.
- **Built on land rights.** Communities are organised as legal entities under Liberia’s Land Rights Act, giving them standing to manage resources, resist predatory investors, and hold corporations accountable for environmental damages.
- **Scale through clustering.** Small community blocks cluster into large landscapes. The initial target covers 200,000 hectares across five neighbouring districts, making the model efficient and attractive to climate investors.
- **Livelihoods are the magnet.** Village Saving & Loan Associations, revolving grants for small-business development, and transport schemes attract and secure communities' interest. Conservation follows from economic security.
- **50% of the budget reaches communities in cash, and 20% in creating income-generating opportunities.** A radical departure from typical forest projects where under 10% is spent locally.
- **Bridge to biodiversity and climate finance.** Builds community-level governance and readiness monitoring for results-based payments when climate finance mechanisms mature.

The Ask: Scaling to 200,000 ha

IDL seeks partners to scale from 50,000 to **200,000 ha by 2027**, with a pathway to 500,000 ha by 2030. The Phase 1 budget for a two-year engagement is **US\$2.57 million**, of which 58% would go directly to community payments. Key funding priorities:

Priority	What It Delivers
Stewardship payments (US\$1.5m)	200,000 ha protected across 5 districts (2027-2030).
Governance & technical support (US\$290k)	Capacity building for 15 Community Management Bodies.
Landscape Management Facility (US\$384k)	Payment operations, benefit sharing, and program management.
Biodiversity and climate finance preparation (US\$210k)	Project Design Document: Positioning communities for results-based payments.
Small Business Development Fund	Growing the revolving grant basket, reaching women entrepreneurs.
Immediate core support (Jul–Dec 2026)	Salary continuity — current funding ends 30 June 2026.

Why Now

Liberia’s forests are disappearing. But communities are in a unique position to help turn the situation around. The foundations are in place: strong land rights legislation, established community governance bodies, a proven payment model, and communities requesting to join.

IDL’s current funding to maintain its team expires on 30 June 2026. Without continuity, the team and the trust it has built will be lost. Investment now will secure a proven approach and position Liberia as a pioneer in community-led forest conservation

About IDL: Integrated Development and Learning is a Liberian non-profit led by Silas Kpanan’Ayounng Siakor, a Goldman Environmental Prize laureate and veteran of Liberian forest governance reform. IDL operates in Sinoe and Lofa counties, working with communities on land rights, forest management, livelihoods, and governance.

