Forest Monitoring Technology Launched

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CS-IFM's Roland Pokoyou Harris presents a Laptop to Andrew Zelemen of the NUCFDC

A Real Time ForestLink Monitoring Technology training has been conducted and subsequently launched in Liberia with a call on beneficiaries to ensure proper use of the mobile phone application.

The platform/technology was developed by Rain Forest Foundation United Kingdom (RFUK) in collaboration with the Independent Forest Monitors of Liberia, which comprise civil society organizations and forest communities. RFUK conducted the week-long Training of Trainers (TOT), which ran from March 30 to April 3, 2020 using Blue Jeans online video application. Eight persons from both the communities and CSOs benefited from the training.

The training was funded by the European Union under the Non-State Actors Project, implemented by VOSIEDIA and Tropenbos International (TBI). The implementation of the Community Based Real Time Monitoring (CBRTM) project is being managed by the Civil Society-Independent Forest Monitor Incorporated (CS-IFM) in partnership with the National Union of Community Forestry Development Committee (NUCFDC), National Union Community Forest Management Body (NUCFMB), and CSOs working on forestry issues including: VOSIEDA, the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU). The TOT training is considered as one of the significant capacity building supports to non-state actors in the forestry sector in Liberia.

The topics of the five-day intensive training covered General Introduction to Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) in Liberia, Introduction to ForestLink Monitaur, ForestLink RTM User Package; Deployment logistics and User Coordination. Other topics include, documenting and promoting ForestLink RTM initiative in Africa; RTM Africa community of best practices, etc.

Details of the training focused on the background information of the objectives, development history and current deployment state of the ForestLink system in other countries, methodology of community monitoring, selection criteria for community observers, principles of community incentives and security aspects for observes and IFM staff or verifiers.

Additionally, specific attention was paid to Monitaur-Users and Alerts management, Presentation of data and User Agreements, Ethical standards and Branding Guidelines, form management and creation; end-to-end alert life cycle, documenting the deployment and the use of ForestLink in its various aspects, data collection and transmission via the internet and SMS and internet, extracting images from the phone and uploading to Monitaur, etc.

The Program Manager of the CS-IFM Roland Pokoyou Harris said that following the training, laptops and smart phones were distributed to National Union of Community Forest Management Body (NUCFMB) and National Union of Community Forestry Development Committee (NUCFDC) as initial support for information and data collection, analysis and transmission, noting, data and information gathered will form the basis for advocacy.

Mr. Harris disclosed that more community forest monitors, particularly those from active logging concessions will be trained to use the new technology as a way of strengthening their IFM capacities and also enhancing their direct participation and involvement in the day to day forestry operations at local and national levels.

For his part, the Program Coordinator of VOSIEDA, Abraham Billy indicated to journalists that trainee beneficiaries are expected to transfer knowledge acquired to Community Based-Independent Forest Monitors (CBIFMs), who have been earmarked under the IFM Coordination Mechanism Committee as alerts' collectors and transmitters using their assigned laptops and smart phones.

"As members of the IFM Coordination Mechanism, the NUCFDC and NUCFMB will be responsible to conduct pre verification of monitoring alerts transmitted by CBIFMs while the CSOs, relevant government entities (FDA, EPA, Labor, LLA, etc.) and community unions are responsible to conduct joint verification mission to support development of reports and policy briefs", Abraham Billy said.

The idea of IFM Coordination Mechanism was generated in October 2018 following a 2-day workshop facilitated by an International Technician on forestry, David Young. The workshop was funded by the European Union Non-State Actors Project to strengthen coordination among stakeholders in independent forest monitoring. The two-day workshop, according to organizers, was more of a brain storming session to conceptualize; who does what, when, where and how the IFM Coordination Mechanism can synchronize reports from forestry operations in order to avoid overlapping or duplication of IFM activities relating to monitoring and advocacy in the forestry sector in Liberia.

"The IFM Coordination Mechanism as a framework is intended to strengthen existing relationships among actors, promote common understanding, networking and ensure effective independent forest monitoring. It will also positively affect the distribution of forest resources through collaborative education and awareness programs thus ensuring reduce illegality", said David Young.

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