INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS TOOL (IMET)

BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF THE GOLA FOREST NATIONAL PARK (GFNP)

REPORT
FDA & SCNL
July 24, 2025

Global Gateway

FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Table of Contents

List of fgures and tables

List of acronyms

C4C- Communities for Conservation

CBO: Community-Based Organization

CF- Community Forest

CFMB - Community Forestry Management Board

CPW - Chief Park Warden

DPAM- Deputy Protected Area Manager

EU- European Union

FDA - Forestry Development Authority

GFNP: Gola Forest National Park

GPS: Global Positioning System

IMET - Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool

IMET: Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

MIA - Ministry of Internal Affairs

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PA: Protected Area

PAM - Protected Area Manager

PB- Park Biologist

PC - Project Coordinator

PM- Program Manager

REDD+: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

SCNL - Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia

SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the assessment conducted for Gola Forest National Park, Liberia. The assessment was led by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) with technical support from the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) and funded by the EU Citizens for Conservation (C4C) project, implemented by SCNL.

The IMET tool evaluates the effectiveness of protected area management across six key elements: Management Context, Planning, Inputs, Process, Outputs, and Outcomes. Each element is scored and color-coded to reflect performance levels, using a traffic light system (green for strong, yellow for moderate, red for weak).

Key findings include:

Management Context scored 73.4% (Green), indicating a strong foundation in terms of legal status, ecological value, and stakeholder recognition.

Planning achieved 66.9% (Yellow), showing moderate effectiveness in strategic and operational planning.

Inputs scored 31.1% (Red), highlighting significant gaps in staffing, infrastructure, and financial resources.

Process received 45.6% (Yellow), reflecting partial implementation of management systems and stakeholder engagement.

Outputs and Outcomes both scored 65% (Yellow), suggesting that while some conservation and community benefits are being realized, ecological conditions and long-term impacts remain areas of concern.

The Outcomes element revealed that although progress is being made toward conservation goals, the condition of key ecological features and benefits to local communities requires further attention and investment.

This assessment provides critical baseline data for adaptive management and strategic planning. It highlights both achievements and priority areas for improvement, guiding future actions to enhance the park's ecological integrity and its contributions to local and global conservation goals.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool assessment conducted for Gola Forest National Park, Liberia. The assessment was led by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) with technical support from the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL). It was funded by the European Union Citizens for Conservation (C4C) project, which is being implemented by SCNL.

The assessment was carried out in June 15-17, 2025, with the final update recorded on July 31, 2025. It involved a participatory process engaging key stakeholders in evaluating the effectiveness of the park's management systems and conservation outcomes.

Gola Forest National Park, gazetted in 2016 and covering 888.73 km², is a nationally and globally significant protected area. It is recognized as a Transboundary Protected Area, an Important Bird Area, and a Key Biodiversity Area, contributing to biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and sustainable development.

The IMET assessment evaluates six core elements of protected area management: Management Context, Planning, Inputs, Processes, Outputs, and Outcomes. Each element is scored and color-coded to reflect performance levels, enabling stakeholders to identify strengths, gaps, and priorities for action.

This report aims to inform strategic decision-making, guide resource allocation, and support adaptive management to ensure the long-term conservation of Gola Forest National Park and the well-being of surrounding communities.

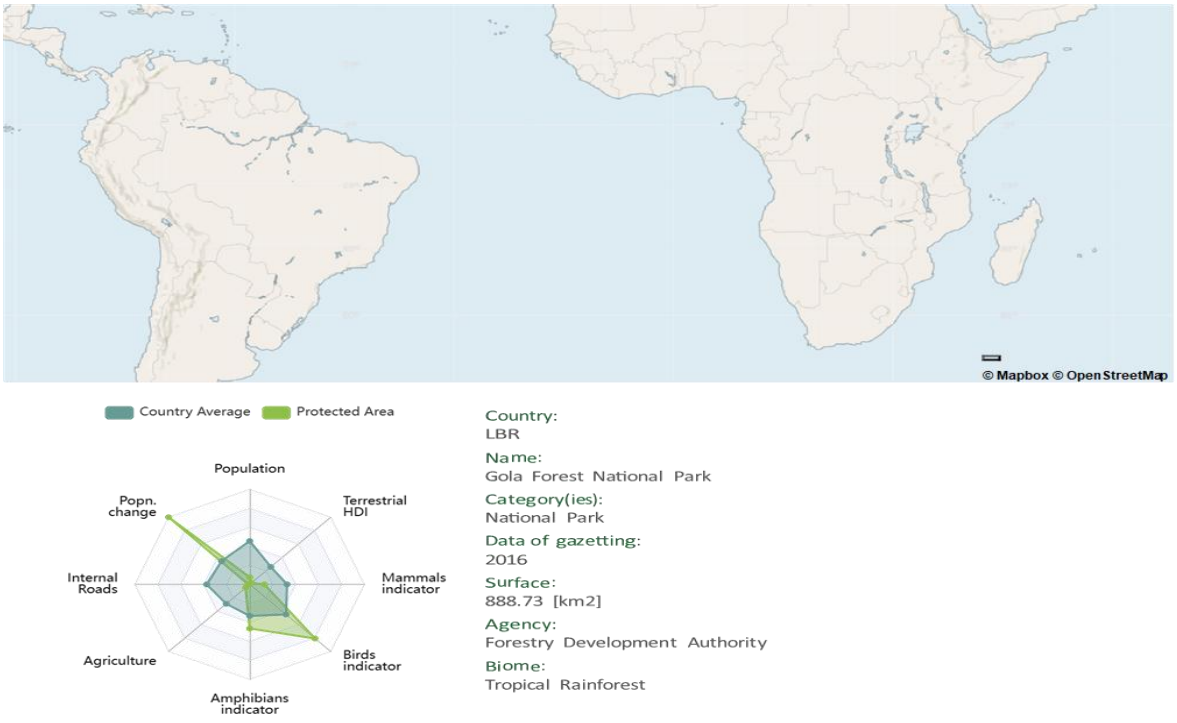


Figure 1: General element description of the GFNP

Main values for which the protected areas have been gazetted:

The Gola Forest National Park is crucial for several reasons, making its gazettement a significant conservation effort. Firstly, as a **transboundary park**, it fosters cooperation between Sierra Leone and Liberia in biodiversity conservation but also in strengthening social cohesion and cultural relevance. It is recognized as an Important Bird Area due to its habitat for numerous endemic and migratory bird species, contributing to global avian diversity (BirdLife International, 2020). Additionally, it qualifies as a Key Biodiversity Area, highlighting its role in preserving threatened species and ecosystems (IUCN, 2019). The park is in a Biodiversity Hotspot, emphasizing its exceptional levels of plant and animal diversity under threat from habitat loss (Myers et al., 2000). As a great watershed, it plays a vital role in regulating water flow and quality for surrounding communities (UNESCO, 2018). Furthermore, Gola offers significant ecotourism potential, that when fully developed, will attract visitors interested in wildlife and conservation, which can drive local economies while promoting environmental awareness (World Wildlife Fund, 2021). Its huge and intact forest cover and capacity for carbon sequestration also contribute to climate change mitigation efforts, making it an essential area for both ecological and socio-economic sustainability (IPCC, 2021).

Vision: In partnership with principal partners, stakeholders and the wider community, the key biological, cultural and globally important habitats, biodiversity and ecological functions of the Gola Forest National Park and wider landscapes are better understood and conserved in perpetuity, through effective governance and a participatory and sustainable management system that delivers current benefits for nature, local communities and, globally, through carbon storage.

Mission: Conserve and protect the biodiversity, cultural, ecological, and environmental functions and values of the park and its natural resources and support its integrity and longevity through research and the creation of effective co-management arrangements with the FDA, SCNL and local communities.

Objectives: Conserve and protect the biodiversity, cultural, ecological, and environmental functions and values of the park and its natural resources and support its integrity and longevity through research and the creation of effective co -management arrangements with the FDA, SCNL and local communities.

- Assemble and introduce an effective conservation and protection strategy and a governance and sustainable management system to mitigate and/or interdict threats and maintain the Park's full range of ecological functions.
- Create an enabling environment for local communities to serve as suitably qualified and committed environmental stewards of the critical natural resource base of the park that supports their livelihoods, through activities that enhance, generate value, and materialize the benefits from the park's forests and sustainable land use practices.
- Develop an open and transparent mechanism, agreed upon by all partners and stakeholders, to resolve and manage cases of conflict between the effective governance and management of the park and local communities, and all related disputes and conflicts.
- Develop and maintain a monitoring system based on a comprehensive database of biodiversity, threats, and relevant social factors to ensure the availability of accurate, relevant, and timely information to guide and enhance Park management and the effective delivery of outcomes.
- Strengthen environmental education and awareness, and increase public understanding and support for biodiversity, cultural and local knowledge systems and the service and product functions of the park, through training and capacity building.
- Ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits of improved governance and sustainable management and utilization of buffer-zone forests and forest resources, by identifying and documenting the various benefits and keeping communities informed about such benefits.
- Support integrated land use practices which eventually would stem the expansion of shifting cultivation, by establishing, developing, and managing site- and people-specific agroforestry systems and component technologies in park fringe landscapes and communities, and possibly beyond.
- Monitor and document the park's impact on the local environment, economy, and cultural cohesiveness of inhabitants of park fringe communities through socio-economic assessments.
- Build local institutional capacity to improve environmental awareness and compliance, biodiversity conservation, and natural resource governance and management.
- Establish and support community forestry and enhance community-based livelihoods derived from sustainable forest- and agriculture-based enterprises in park fringe communities.
- Develop ecotourism for the park's promising ecotourism attractions, which have already been identified, through encouraging and promoting sports, recreation, cultural activities, and special events in park fringe communities and beyond.
- Restore deforested and degraded habitats of the park affected by farming, human settlements, mining, and timber extraction, through assisted natural regeneration, reforestation, and other robust methods.

Methodology

The IMET assessment was conducted over the course of one week outside of Monrovia to ensure the full participation of key stakeholders. The session was supported by the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) with funding from the European Union's "Communities for Conservation (C4C)" Project. Led by Madam Evangeline Swope and Abenego Gbarway, two trained IMET coaches from the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), with technical backstopping from an international IMET coach, Leonidas Nzigiyimpa, the assessment brought together key personnel from the Conservation and Community Forest Departments, park management staff, regional foresters, and rangers. Local authorities were also actively involved, including the District Commissioner of Kongba District (Gbarpolu County), the Paramount Chief of Porkpa District (Grand Cape Mount County), and representatives from the leadership of the Tonglay and Norma Community Forests.

The inclusion of these diverse stakeholders was critical to the success of the assessment process. Their collective perspectives ensured a comprehensive understanding of the site's management effectiveness, promoted shared ownership of the process, and strengthened coordination between government, local communities, and conservation partners. This collaborative approach helps foster transparency, improve decision-making, and support the long-term sustainability of protected and community-managed forests.

The Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) is a decision-support tool intended to develop the planning-monitoring-evaluation process to improve protected areas (PA) management effectiveness. IMET has 28 sections for the intervention context and 43 for the assessment part. It is suitable for all PAs, regardless of their management and governance category. IMET is a computer application that can be downloaded for free, installed on a PC and used without an Internet connection. IMET collects, organizes, and visualizes PA data to facilitate analysis and guide decision-making for the planning, management and organization of operations. IMET is organized into a series of questions and each question provides a scale that allows assessment participants to respond as objectively as possible

This scale helps ensure responses aren't too subjective and gives everyone the same measuring stick.

It includes several forms which organize data from many sources: management documents, research reports, digital observatories, and personal knowledge of PA stakeholders such as management teams, scientists, and community members.

3. Management Context

Key Species

- *Chordata|Mammalia|Proboscidea|Elephantidae|Loxodonta africana*
- *Chordata|Mammalia|Primates|Hominidae|Pantroglodytes*
- *Chordata|Mammalia|Cetartiodactyla|Hippopotamidae|Choeropsisliberiensis*
- *Chordata|Aves|Passeriformes|Ploceidae|Malimbusballmanni*
- *Heritiera utillis*
- *Brachystegia leonensis*
- *protomegabaria stafiana*
- *Erythrophleum ivorense*
- *Parinari excelsa*
- *Parkia bicolor*
- *sacoglottis gabnensis*
- *cacia fikifiki*
- *Tieghemella heckelii*

3.2 Terrestrial and marine habitats - land-cover, land-change, and land-take

- *forest dry*
- *swamp*
- *wetlands*
- *rivers*
- *rocky*

3.3 Ecosystem Services

- *Wind erosion control*
- *Symbolic or historic*
- *High value timber - illegal*
- *Gas regulation (Carbon sequestration)*
- *Waste burial / removal / neutralization*
- *Waste regulation (nutrient uptake)*
- *Flood control*
- *Drought control*
- *Storm protection*
- *Water erosion control*

- *Nutrient cycling (litter decomposition and mineralization)*
- *Important habitats (bird nesting sites - sea spawning grounds - nursery habitats)*
  Pollination (plants)
- *Water cycling*
- *Educational*
- *Science - Research*
- *Water supply - legal*
- *Fuelwood and biofuels - illegal*
- *Cultural heritage*
- *Net primary production (vegetation)*
- *Human food - animal (wild / farmed meat, insects) - illegal*
- *Cultivation land (agriculture, livestock, forests) - illegal*
- *Human food - vegetal (tubers, fruits, honey, mushrooms, seaweed, etc.) - illegal*
  Medicines and blue biotechnology (fish oil) - illegal
- *Timber for local construction - illegal*
- *Specified traditional fishing*
- *Aesthetic (ecosystem integrity) benefits*
- *Ecotourism and nature watching*
- *Walking, hiking, and general recreation*

3.4 Threats

- *Hunting of land animals*
- *Human-Wildlife Conflict*
- *Enclave areas*
- *Roads*
- *Smallholder farming*
- *Mining or quarrying operations*
- *Shifting cultivation*
- *Plant harvesting*
- *Changes in abiotic conditions*
- *Changes in biotic conditions*
- *Tourist and recreational areas*

4. Analysis of the results

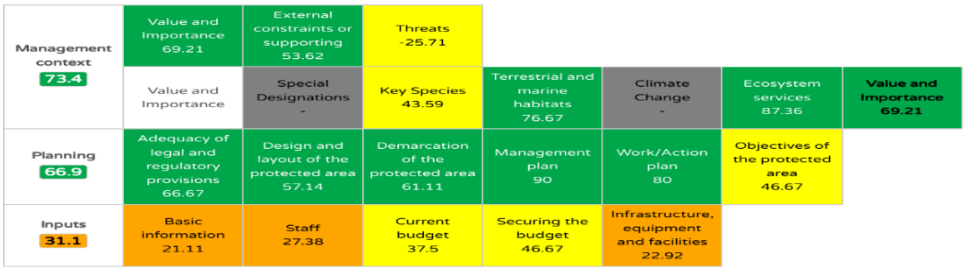
As seen below in figure 1, in the Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET), color coding is used as a visual aid to quickly convey the level of performance across various components of protected area management. These colors and scores were determined by the values of a summary indicator using mathematical statistics built into the IMET tool according to the COMIT Guide. This color system helps assess and interpret management effectiveness by categorizing results into clear performance bands:

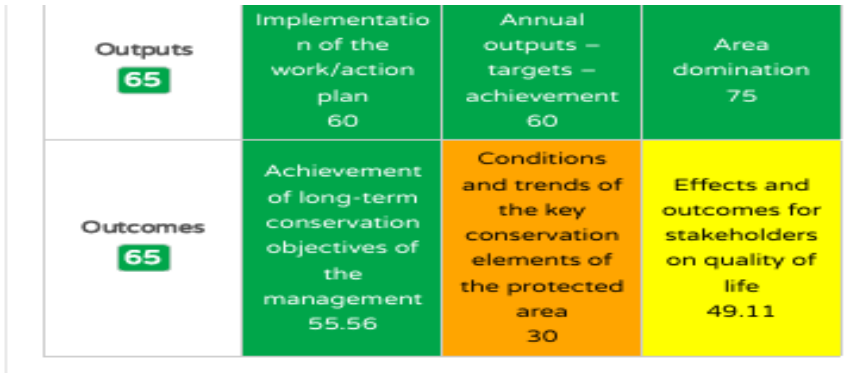
- **Green (70–100%)** indicates **strong or good performance**, suggesting that the area is well-managed with adequate systems, resources, and practices in place.
- **Yellow/Orange (40–69%)** reflects **moderate performance**, meaning some progress has been made, but management actions may be incomplete, inconsistent, or require strengthening.
- **Red (0–39%)** signals **poor or weak performance**, highlighting serious gaps or deficiencies that need urgent corrective measures.
- **Grey** may be used when information is **not available**, **not applicable**, or has **not yet been assessed**.

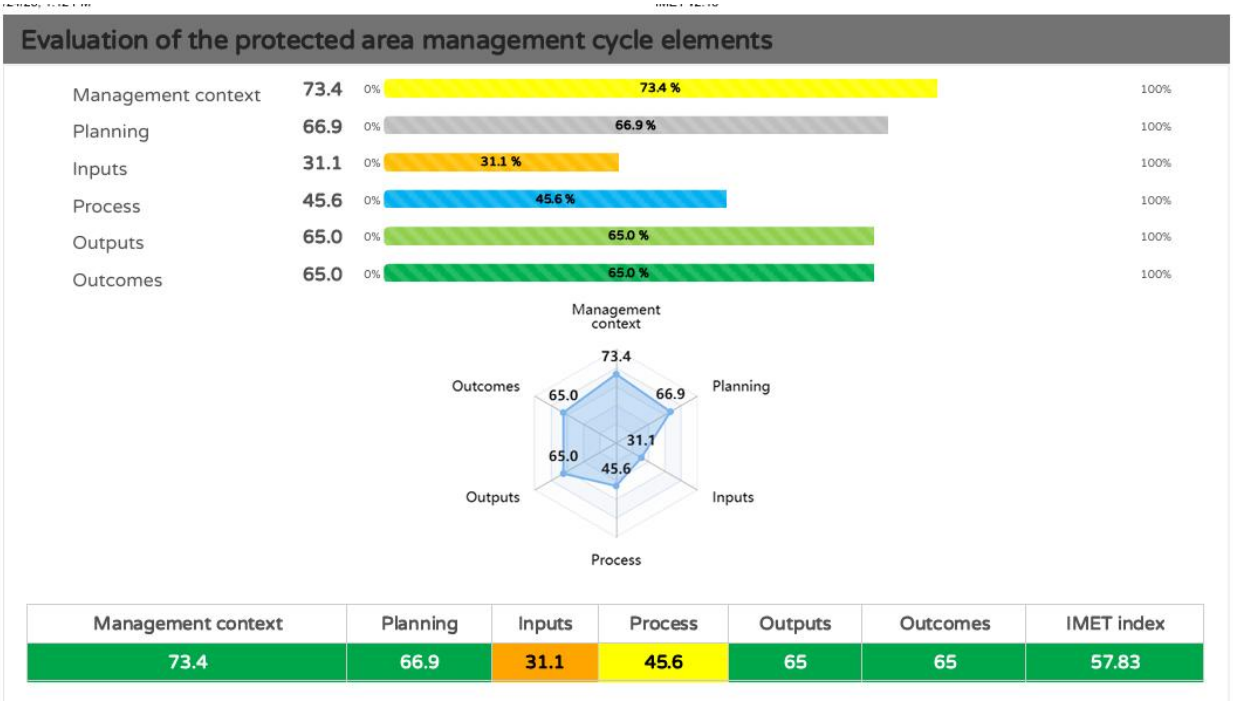
This color-coded approach allows managers, stakeholders, and decision-makers to easily identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas needing attention. It also facilitates comparison across time periods or between protected areas, thereby supporting more effective, informed, and adaptive management strategies.

Figure 2 below shows the scores of the six key elements of the IMET assessment included in the analysis of the intervention context and the management effectiveness.
Element 1- Management Context
Element 2- Planning
Element 3- Inputs
Element 4- Process
Element 5- Outputs
Element 6- Outcomes

Figure 2: Results by element







Management context	Planning	Inputs	Process	Outputs	Outcomes	IMET index
73.4	66.9	31.1	45.6	65	65	57.83

Figure 3: Protected Area management cycle element results

4.1 Management Context

The management context assessment result is **73.3%**, and it shows that the GFNP has high conservation values. This element uses key indicators below to determine the above score for GFNP.

1. *Values and importance*
2. *External constraints/support*
3. *Key species*
4. *Threats*
5. *Climate change*
6. *Ecosystem services*

The above score shows that GFNP is a home for several important species. It is exceptionally rich in biodiversity, and it holds national, regional, and international values with ecological importance that need effective conservation and sustainable management. The Ecosystem values from this park provide benefits such as water regulation and carbon sequestration for both biodiversity and humans. Amidst all these national and international benefits, there is limited or insufficient

financial and human resources to integrate key ecological values into management practices, especially the conservation of flagship species and keystone species.

Because of these limitations, the park continues to face serious threats including poaching, unauthorized mining, unsustainable agriculture practices, and pit-sawing. There is a need for immediate intervention to curb the impact of climate change. We need to increase access to grants and sustainable financing, and through national budgetary allocations, to strengthen park management and improve biodiversity and ecosystems' health.

4.2 Planning

The GFNP IMET planning score of **66.9%** is quite impressive and welcoming considering the interpretation of scorecard indicator above. The analysis of inputs makes it possible to assess the adequacy between the interventions, the objectives defined in the planning and the resources available to GFNP by using key indicators below:

1. *Adequacy of legal regulatory provisions*
2. *Design and layout of protected area*
3. *Demarcation of the protected area*
4. *Management plan, work or action plan*
5. *Objectives of the protected area.*

This score tells us that there are adequate legal and regulatory documents to support the park's protection. The park was gazetted by legislation; GFNP is strategic in size, and its geographical location in West Africa is suitable for the protection of species, habitats, and other natural resources/values. The park is well known and demarcated by boundaries in both counties (Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount), but there is a need to make demarcation more visible and recognizable through beacon planting across the park. The park has a management plan that has been used in the last five (5) years but expired in 2024 and needs to be reviewed and updated to address current management challenges and guide the operations for the next five (5) years. The management plan will be updated in 2025 by the GEF-8 CHILD project and the co management plan finalized by the NaturAfrica Project. The annual operational plan for the park is available but has not been fully implemented due to the limited funding and resources available.

4.3. Inputs

The input element of management context of the IMET result shows the lowest score of **31.1%**. The analysis of inputs makes it possible to assess the adequacy between the interventions, the objectives defined in the planning and the resources available to GFNP by using key indicators below:

1. *Basic Information*
2. *Staff*
3. *Current budget*
4. *Securing the budget*
5. *Infrastructure, equipment and facilities*

There is limited basic information for the park management, and the park management is understaffed. The current number of park staff is insufficient to effectively maintain the park considering the size of more than 88,000 hectares. There is limited national allotment for park management from central government, which is mostly on personnel but little on operations. Most of the support for the park has come from partners and donors over time. Notwithstanding, there's potential to secure sustainable funding for GFNP with adequate management through REDD+, trust funds, and other forms of long-term funding mechanisms.

Efforts have been made to upkeep and motivate the park staff; however, there is a greater need to do more. The park staff's capacity has been built significantly in biomonitoring patrol using smart and other research techniques, but there is a need for intensive training in the protection of values, key species, habitats, climate change management, and ecosystem services. There has been continuous research work/study ongoing in partnership with SCNL and some research institutions including universities in and out of Liberia.

Maintenance of infrastructure, equipment, and facilities 30.63%

This component under element **4.3 Input** has the 2nd lowest score. There are limited infrastructures, equipment, and basic maintenance supplies for park staff adequacy. However, progress was made through the construction of four rangers' accommodation posts under the LFSP project in 2022, and these buildings need basic equipment and maintenance to function properly. There is a need to furnish the rangers' building, provide regular maintenance and supplies, and build additional structures for rangers' sub posts during law enforcement.

4.4 Process

The management process is the most important part of the management cycle that helps introduce the different aspects of direct intervention addressed in the management process. This section of the IMET score has an average score of 45.6% resulting from the below key indicators:

1. *Internal management system and process*
2. *Management/protection of values*
3. *Stakeholder relations*
4. *Ecotourism*
5. *Monitoring and research*
6. *Management of the effect of climate change and ecosystem services*

This result means that there is a strong relationship and cooperation between park management and key stakeholders, including the local communities around the park. Local communities are gradually understanding the concept of environmental education and conservation, and they are also gradually receiving the appropriate benefits of having protected areas around them. However, there is a need for more tangible livelihood interventions to promote conservation.

Tourism management 0%

Despite the potential tourism sites identified in GFNP, ecotourism is the least developed element under **the 4.4 Process. Considering** the rapid global growth and evolving dynamics of ecotourism around the world, there is a pressing need to invest in and actively promote ecotourism activities for the sustainability of the park. There are limited ecotourism activities currently ongoing in the GFNP inspite of the initial efforts made by the EU-PAPFor project at the Elephant Falls where trails were developed, and an initial two mini ecolodges were established. The EU-C4C project will improve the work the PAPFor project started at Elephant Falls. Additional lodges will be build, camping tent platforms will be erected, monkey bridge and trail will be establish and maintain, a management plan for the Elephant Falls will be develop, and the local community dwellers will be train in hospitality to cater to tourist at the facility to improve their livelihood within the community. This activity will generate revenue/income for the park and support conservation efforts by creating livelihood opportunities for the locals within and around the park. Despite these initial investments, there is still more to be done in terms of infrastructures to make the place functional to attract more tourists to increase community assets and income.

4.5 Outputs

The "Outputs" component of the IMET assessment reflects the tangible results achieved through the implementation of park management actions and plans. With a score of 65%, Gola Forest National Park demonstrates moderate progress in delivering expected results, but there remains significant room for improvement in achieving operational and conservation goals. The output can be looked at from three lenses:

1. Implementation Work/Action Plan: 60%

This suggests that the park has carried out its planned operations with a fair level of progress. However, the 60% score also indicates some operational constraints (e.g., finance, logistical, and staff concerns) have resulted in the delay, incomplete completion, or non-implementation of some planned measures. Planning and execution must be more closely aligned. Additionally, it is safe to say this element is achieved due to a significant portion of the annual work plan being implemented with funding from the WABiLed, Ecological Restoration Fund (ERF), and UNDP CBFM projects.

2. Target Achievement and Annual Outputs: 60%

According to this score, the park is fulfilling a respectable amount of its yearly performance goals. Consistently meeting benchmarks is still difficult, though, particularly in fields like community outreach, infrastructure upkeep, and species monitoring. This grade might be improved with clear annual targets, better milestone tracking, and more targeted resource allocation.

3. **Area Domination (Spatial Coverage and Control) – 75%**

This relatively high score signifies that the park has effective spatial control over most of its designated territory, through Eco-guards surveillance missions, ranger patrols, and enforcement presence. This is a positive indicator of field-level management and law enforcement, though it must be reinforced with better intelligence systems and community collaboration to address illegal encroachment like new settlements, pit-sawing, poaching, and mining.

4.6 Outcomes

The "Outcomes" section of this report evaluates the long-term effects and impacts of the park management interventions on biodiversity conservation, ecological integrity, and stakeholder well-being. With a total score of 65%, Gola Forest National Park shows moderate progress in delivering lasting conservation results. However, this score also indicates that improvements are needed in monitoring ecological changes, stakeholder impacts, and in tracking progress toward management objectives.

The outcome score is based on 3 major indicators:

1. Achievement of Long-Term Conservation Objectives – 55.56%

This score shows that the park is only partially meeting its strategic conservation goals, which include preserving habitat integrity, safeguarding endangered species, and promoting ecological connectedness. This is caused by several factors, such as a lack of funding, the need for more enforcement, and insufficient scientific data to monitor changes in important indicators. Strong outcome-based monitoring mechanisms and improved coordination of activities that directly support long-term objectives are required.

2. Conditions and Trends of Key Conservation Elements – 30%

This is one of the lowest scores in the outcomes section and signals a serious concern. It implies that either:

- The condition of critical habitats and species is deteriorating.
- There is insufficient data to determine trends.
- Or existing monitoring systems are weak or non-functional.

For a biodiversity-rich site like GFNP—home to Western chimpanzees, pygmy hippos, and endemic birds—this gap is critical. Strengthening biodiversity monitoring, especially through regular surveys, camera trapping, and ecological assessments, is essential for informed management.

3. Effects and Outcomes for Stakeholders (Quality of Life) – 49.11%

The score reflects the degree to which park management positively impacts local communities and stakeholders, particularly through benefits such as livelihood support, employment, ecosystem services, or community involvement. While some progress has been made (e.g., community empowerment, co-management, Eco guard employment), many local stakeholders may still feel disconnected from or burdened by conservation activities. Livelihood alternatives and sustainable benefit-sharing mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure holistic outcomes.

5. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis provides a strategic overview of internal and external factors influencing the effective management of Gola Forest National Park. It helps identify where management can build upon existing assets, address limitations, leverage emerging opportunities, and mitigate risks threatening the park's integrity and sustainability.

Table 1: SWOT analysis

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Existence of the protected area's staff • Support from the government, traditional authorities, and partners • Some infrastructures are available • A management plan exists • GFNP established by law	• Inadequate logistics for effective park management • Inadequately trained staff • Lack of operational budget • Inadequate livelihood interventions
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Donor willingness to support activities. • REDD+ project • Ecotourism potential • Transboundary protected area • International recognition (IBA, KBA) • Potential for World Heritage Site	• Mining • Hunting • Inadequate livelihood for communities • Settlements • Agriculture/farming (shifting cultivation) Chain sawing

The SWOT analysis of Gola Forest National Park highlights a complex interplay of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that shape its management and conservation landscape. By leveraging its strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and threats, GFNP can enhance its effectiveness in conserving biodiversity and supporting local communities. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and resource mobilization will be key to overcoming challenges and achieving sustainable conservation outcomes. Below are the detailed discussions of SWOT analysis table:

Strengths

The presence of staff committed to the management of GFNP is a significant asset. These individuals are essential for implementing management plans, conducting research, and engaging with the community. The park also enjoys backing from central government, traditional authorities, and international partners. This support is crucial for resource mobilization and enhancing the park's visibility and importance on national and international platforms.

In terms of infrastructures, GFNP has some existing infrastructures that support its management and conservation activities. This includes facilities for staff, and basic logistical support, which are vital for effective park operations. The existence of a management plan provides a structured framework for conservation activities. It outlines objectives, strategies, and actions needed to protect the park's biodiversity and cultural values.

Weaknesses

The park faces significant logistical challenges that hinder its operational effectiveness. This includes insufficient transportation means like vehicles and motorbikes, equipment, and supplies necessary for effective patrolling and monitoring. While there is a dedicated workforce, the numerical strength is less, some are aging, and others lack adequate training in specific areas of park management. These gaps lead to inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness in managing biodiversity and engaging with communities. A critical weakness is the insufficient budget allocated for daily operations and long-term impact. This financial constraint limits the ability to implement management plans fully and respond to emerging challenges.

Opportunities

There is a growing interest from international donors in supporting conservation initiatives in GFNP. This presents an opportunity to secure funding for various projects aimed at enhancing management effectiveness and community engagement. The potential for involvement in the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) initiative offers a significant opportunity for GFNP to generate resources for conservation while contributing to climate change mitigation efforts. The park has considerable potential for ecotourism development, which could provide alternative livelihoods for local communities and generate revenue for conservation activities. Promoting sustainable tourism in Gola will enhance local support for conservation. As part of a transboundary conservation initiative, GFNP collaborates with neighboring country Sierra Leone to enhance biodiversity conservation efforts. This collaboration leads to shared resources, knowledge, and strategies for managing ecosystems that cross national borders. The unique biodiversity and cultural significance of GFNP position it as a candidate for World Heritage Site status. This designation could attract global attention, funding, and increased protection measures.

Threats

The threat of mining operations in and around GFNP poses significant risks to its biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. This activity leads to habitat destruction and pollution, undermining conservation efforts. Hunting protected wildlife within the park and corridors is a critical threat that impacts species populations and disrupts ecological balance. Addressing poaching through effective law enforcement and community engagement is essential.

Limited sustainable livelihoods for local communities also leads to increased pressure on park resources. When communities do not benefit from conservation, they may resort to activities that harm the park's biodiversity. Encroachment by settlements and agricultural activities threatens the park's boundaries and its ecological integrity as well. Implementing strategies to manage land use around the park is crucial to mitigating this threat. Ongoing deforestation, driven by pit-sawing and agricultural expansion, poses a significant threat to the park's forest cover and biodiversity. Stronger enforcement of regulations and community-led reforestation initiatives will help combat this issue.

6. Key Management Actions and Recommendations

Based on the Gola Forest National Park (GFNP) IMET assessment results, several key management actions and recommendations are proposed below for consideration. These recommendations and key actions are tailored to address the specific challenges and opportunities highlighted in the report.

1. Enhance Stakeholder Engagement

Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan that includes local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other relevant parties that will facilitate the conduct of regular meetings and workshops to gather input from stakeholders, ensuring that their perspectives and needs are integrated into management decisions. This will foster a sense of ownership and collaboration in conservation efforts.

2. Secure Sustainable Funding

A need to identify and pursue diverse funding sources that are sustainable, including grants from international organizations, foundations, partnerships with NGOs, increase in central government budgetary allocation, and revenue from ecotourism. This could be done through the development of a funding strategy that outlines potential funding opportunities and specific projects that require financial support. This should include developing proposals for REDD+ and other climate-related funding initiatives.

3. Capacity Building and Training

Recruit additional park staff and implement training programs to enhance their skills in areas such as biodiversity monitoring, community engagement, and law enforcement through collaboration with conservation organizations and universities to provide workshops and training sessions that focus on best practices in park management and conservation strategies.

4. Improve Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of management actions and the status of key biodiversity indicators through the utilization of technology, such as remote sensing and GIS, to track changes in land cover, forest health, and wildlife populations. Regularly report findings to stakeholders to maintain transparency and accountability.

5. Strengthen Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Measures

Increase the capacity of park rangers and law enforcement personnel through training and resource provision to combat illegal activities such as poaching and logging by promoting partnerships with local law enforcement agencies and community groups to enhance patrols and surveillance efforts. Implement community-based monitoring programs to involve local residents in conservation efforts.

6. Promote Ecotourism Development

Develop an ecotourism strategy that outlines potential tourism activities, infrastructure needs, and marketing plans to attract visitors to GFNP by engaging local communities in ecotourism initiatives to ensure they benefit economically from tourism activities. This could include training locals as guides and promoting local crafts and products.

7. Address External Threats

Develop a comprehensive land-use plan that includes buffer zones around the park to mitigate encroachment from agriculture and settlements. Collaborate with local leaders to promote sustainable agricultural practices and land-use planning that reduces pressure on park resources.

8. Implement Conservation Education Programs

Launch educational programs aimed at raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation among local communities, schools, and visitors. Utilize various platforms, including workshops, social media, and community events, to disseminate information about the ecological and cultural significance of GFNP.

9. Conduct Research and Adaptive Management

Encourage research initiatives that focus on the park's biodiversity, ecosystem services, and the impacts of climate change. Use research findings to inform adaptive management strategies,

allowing the park to respond effectively to emerging challenges and changing environmental conditions.

10. Designating Gola Forest National Park as a World Heritage Site

Assess the eligibility of GFNP for World Heritage status by conducting a comprehensive feasibility study that evaluates its unique biodiversity, cultural significance, and conservation challenges. Collaborate with UNESCO and conservation organizations to ensure that the dossier meets all required criteria and standards. Implement and document successful conservation projects that can be highlighted in the nomination process, highlighting the park's management effectiveness. Conduct awareness campaigns to educate communities about the benefits of World Heritage designation, emphasizing potential economic and social benefits through sustainable tourism.

11. Making the Boundary of GFNP Visible and Recognizable by Planting Beacons

Plan and execute the installation of visible and durable boundary beacons or markers at strategic locations along the park's perimeter. Use environmentally friendly materials for the markers that blend with the natural landscape while they are clearly visible to visitors and local communities. Use signage and educational materials to explain the importance of respecting park boundaries for conservation and biodiversity protection. Involve local communities in monitoring efforts, fostering a sense of stewardship and responsibility for the park’s boundaries.

12. Review and Update the Management Plan of GFNP

Initiate a thorough review of the existing management plan to assess its effectiveness, relevance, and alignment with current conservation goals and challenges. Gather input from stakeholders, including park staff, local communities, and conservation experts, to identify areas for improvement. Integrate recent research findings, ecological data, and monitoring results into the updated management plan. Use adaptive management principles to ensure the plan remains flexible and responsive to changing environmental conditions and conservation needs. Define clear, measurable objectives and targets for conservation actions within the updated management plan. Use the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to guide the formulation of these objectives. Ensure that the revised plan reflects the needs and aspirations of local communities, enhancing their involvement in conservation efforts. Develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the implementation of the updated management plan and its effectiveness. Schedule regular reviews of the management plan to adapt strategies based on monitoring results and emerging challenges.

7. Conclusions

The IMET Index score for Gola Forest National Park stands at 57.83%, which is a little over average from the overall assessment. The Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) assessment of Gola Forest National Park (GFNP) provides a comprehensive overview of the park's management strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The findings highlight a mixed landscape, where notable strengths such as community engagement, government support, and existing infrastructure coexist with critical weaknesses, including inadequate funding, logistical challenges, and training gaps for staff.

The assessment indicates that while GFNP has a solid foundation for effective management, significant improvements are necessary to enhance its conservation outcomes. The moderate scores in planning, outputs, and outcomes suggest that while some objectives are being met, there is substantial room for growth in achieving long-term conservation goals. In particular, the low score in inputs underscores the urgent need for sustainable funding and resource allocation to support daily operations and strategic initiatives.

Opportunities for GFNP, such as the potential designation as a World Heritage Site, involvement in REDD+ initiatives, and the development of ecotourism, present avenues for bolstering financial resources and community involvement. However, these opportunities must be pursued alongside proactive measures to address external threats, including illegal hunting, mining activities, and agricultural encroachment.

To move forward effectively, it is crucial for the management team to implement the key recommendations outlined in this report. These include enhancing stakeholder engagement, securing sustainable funding, improving monitoring and evaluation systems, and developing a comprehensive strategy for ecotourism. Additionally, addressing specific concerns regarding World Heritage designation, boundary visibility, and the review of the management plan will further strengthen GFNP’s conservation efforts.

In conclusion, Gola Forest National Park stands at a pivotal juncture where strategic actions can significantly enhance its management effectiveness. By leveraging its strengths, addressing weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities, and mitigating threats, GFNP can achieve its conservation objectives and contribute to the preservation of its rich biodiversity for future generations. The commitment of all stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and conservation organizations, will be essential in driving these efforts forward and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this vital natural resource.

Annex 1: List of participants

Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia – SCNL
Tubman Boulevard Congo Town, Care Compound
P.O. Box 2628 Monrovia, Liberia

Project: C4C Location: BOMI

Type of activity: ▯ Formal training ▯ Sensitization/Awareness ▯ Community meeting ▯ Workshop ▯ Other, specify

Activity Title: IMET TOOL Assessment of GFNP Day TWO (2) Date: June 17, 2025

Objective:

ATTENDANCE

No.	Name of Participants	Sex	Title	Organization	Contact #	Email	County/Location	Signature
1.	Emmett K. Dehkee	M	M&E Officer	SCNL	0880818885	edehkee@scnliberia.org	Mont	
2.	Kollie K. Bomer	M	RF	FDA	0555507356	kpakdo345@gmail.c	Bomi	
3.	LAWRENCE V. SHERBO	m	DISTRICT COMMISSIONER	MIA	0886341316		GBARPOLU	
4.	Michael E. Taire	M	PM	SCNL	0777520110	mtaire@scnlliberia.org	Mon	
5	James P. Mulbah	M	Landscape manager	SCNL	0886975538	jmulbah@scnlliberia.org	/mon	
6.	Dickarmien A. Doemie	M	SCC	SCNL	0888829596	ddoemie@scnlliberia.org	mon	
7.	Jallah J. Johnson	M	DPAM	FDA	0880828286	j0880828286@yahoo.com	Mon	
8.	Evangeline Swope Nya	F	PAM	FDA	0778535244	evglnswope@yahoo.com	Monrovia	
9.	Jerry G. Yonmah	M	Technical Manager	FDA	0886462564	ymah1968@yahoo.com	Monrovia	
10.	Benjamin W. Queminee	M	Chief Park Warden	FDA	0886408902	bqueminee@gmail.com	Monrovia	
11.	Oretha A. Roaves	F	MO	FDA	0886111763	orethaa...63@gmail.com	Bomi	
12.	MOSES S. KOIBE	M	EO	FDA	0886595329	kotoemosesskoibe1970@gmail.com	Bomi-R-1	
13.	MORRIS James	M	"	FDA	0887227283	JRiver	BOMI	
14.	Peaches Y. Suah	F	Awareness officer	FDA	0886534592 0770917273	Peasuah3@yahoo.com	Monrovia	
15.	Oliver Gibson	M	CPIxl	FDA	0886457909	ogibson1975@gmail.com	Gbapolu	

Total Female = 3
Total Male = 12

Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia – SCNL
Tubman Boulevard Congo Town, Care Compound
P.O. Box 2628 Monrovia, Liberia

Project: C4C Location: BOMI

Type of activity: ▯ Formal training ▯ Sensitization/Awareness ▯ Community meeting ▯ Workshop ▯ Other, specify

Activity Title: IMET Assessment for GFMP Day TWO (2) Date: June 17, 2025

Objective:

ATTENDANCE

No.	Name of Participants	Sex	Title	Organization	Contact #	Email	County/Location	Signature
1.	Jamiyatu K. Watson	F	Paramount Chief	MIA	0886580999	—	Cape Mount	
2.	Jameklita Cheaur-Boryan	F	PC	SCNL	0886205083	[illegible]@scnlliberia.org	Mon	
3.	Robert B. Lecure	M	FAO	SCNL	0886205511	rlee@scnlliberia.org	Monrovia	
4.	Kayjay S.T. Gmatoh	M	RCW FDA	FDA	0886817446	[illegible]	Bomi Co	
5	Abednego Gbarkey	M	Wildlife Manager	FDA	0880820808	[illegible]	Mon	
6.								
7.								
8.								
9.								
10.								
11.								
12.								
13.								
14.								
15.								

Total Female = 1
Total Male = 4

Annex 2: Photos of participants

Figure 1: FDA, SCNL, and community authorities during the IMET session in Bomi.

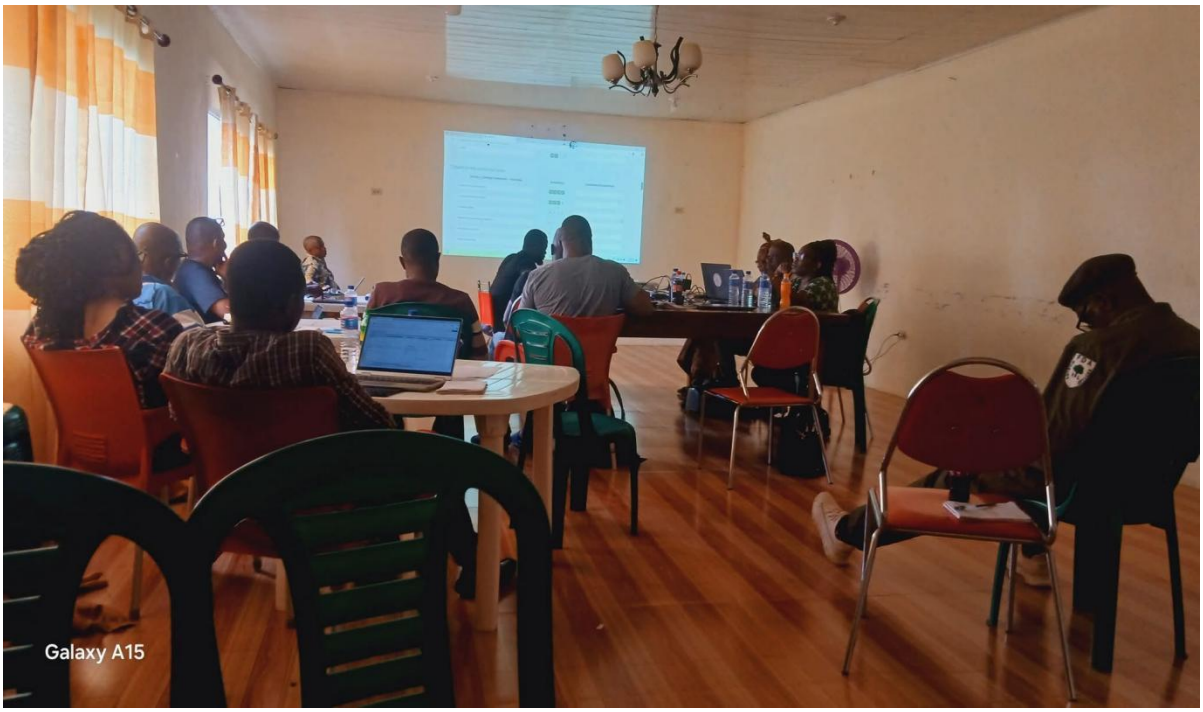


Figure 2: FDA, SCNL, and community authorities during the IMET session in Bomi.