



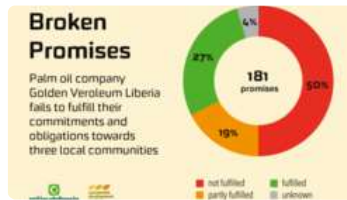
Golden Veroleum Liberia comes under spotlight again for not living up to MOU

Tags: Golden Agri Resources | Liberia

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Golden Veroleum Liberia comes under spotlight again for not living up to MOU

IPNEWS – Monrovia: Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and Milieudefensie, a Dutch NGO, have accused the oil palm company Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) of not living up the full commitment of the memorandum of understanding it signed with communities in within its concession areas. At a press conference on Thursday, August 12, both organizations called upon the Government of Liberia to ensure agribusiness in Liberia halts deforestation and rights violations. New analysis from community exercises indicate palm oil company Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) structurally fails to comply with obligations and commitments from the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) that were signed in 2014 with affected communities. The findings exemplify broken promises and lack of development during a decade of oil palm plantation development in Liberia.



New Report Finds Golden Veroleum Breaches MoUs with Communities



SDI and Milieudefensie conducted community exercises earlier this year to assess GVL's compliance with specific obligations and commitments on a healthy environment, jobs, education, health care, development funds and the possibility to start community farms. GVL is currently re-negotiating the MoUs with communities and the research aims to provide oversight to communities to stand stronger in these negotiations. And show to government authorities that enforcement actions are needed. The research indicates that half of the commitments are not met by GVL and another 20 percent only partially.

James Otto from the Liberian NGO Sustainable Development Institute: 'GVL is treating Liberian communities like dirt and the worst thing is that they get away with it. Communities give away their customary land for plantation

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development because of all the promises made by GVL. Such as plenty jobs, a community development fund, health facilities, schools and a clean environment. But GVL instead takes the land at very low cost, exploits workers and communities and continues to deforest. The Government of Liberia is not doing anything about it, so communities don't know anymore where to go for justice and redress.'

GVL is controlled by Singapore stock listed Golden Agri-Resources (GAR). Both companies are members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and publicly pride themselves on their sustainability credentials. Yet, GVL's operations in Liberia have been anything but sustainable. Since 2012, communities have raised numerous formal complaints and grievances alleging sustained environmental and human rights abuses. Unfortunately, GVL's shortcomings in compliance with the MoU's are consistent with its failure to follow recommendations from the RSPO complaints panel decision in February 2018 and the findings on large scale deforestation from the High Carbon Stock Approach (HCSA) executive committee in January 2021.

Danielle van Oijen from the Dutch NGO Milieudefensie: 'Financiers and governments that back up controversial palm oil companies like GAR and GVL should radically change their practices. Currently they are contributing to human rights abuses and deforestation in the palm oil sector. This has to stop. Benefits from natural resources should go to the people in Liberia, not to shareholders in faraway countries. The sector should be subject to stringent due diligence regulations and governments should start promoting community based agriculture and forest management instead.'

In Liberia, over 765 thousand hectares of land sits in the landbank or concession area of four large industrial palm oil plantation companies. Oftentimes with foreign ownership or investments to expand the plantation area and build the mills. This is almost seven percent of Liberia's land surface for industrial oil palm plantations alone. Industrial palm oil companies have MoUs with communities that lay down the benefits to communities in return for access to their land for plantation development. Much of this land is still forested with the last remaining patches of the highly valuable and threatened Upper Guinean forest and is at risk of clearance.

SDI and Milieudefensie call upon the Government of Liberia to ensure that royalties are paid to affected communities and to promote an agriculture sector that puts communities at the centre of agriculture development, respects rights, improves community livelihoods, and ensure food sovereignty through agro-ecology and community-based forest management.

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