



# Liberia Forestry Development Authority:

## An Institutional Capacity Assessment

January 2020



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report presents the findings from an institutional capacity assessment of Liberia’s Forestry Development Authority (FDA) based on a survey of FDA employees.** The FDA plays a pivotal role in managing Liberia’s forest resources, and its Strategic Plan (2018–2030) prioritizes institutional strengthening for achieving its vision of “sustainable forestry for sustainable development.” The FDA employee survey was conducted to provide scientific evidence on the main organizational and personnel dimensions of institutional capacity, including staff skills, management practices, staff attitudes and behaviors, experiences of corruption and undue political interference, stakeholder interaction, and factors determining project success. A total of 438 FDA employees, or approximately 82 percent of the staff, were interviewed, and the sample covered Monrovia and the field offices.

**The survey’s findings are relevant to key FDA strategic pillars of improving staff productivity, strengthening internal governance, and improving the agency’s customer service charter.** On productivity, the survey found the following:

- FDA staff have weaker educational qualifications than staff in other Liberian ministries or international comparators, and they lack adequate access to in-service training.
- Staff motivation levels vary widely across the FDA, with 69 percent of staff reporting lower motivation levels compared with when they joined the FDA.
- The perceived opaqueness and inequity of the FDA’s compensation structure is a large source of tension and dissatisfaction. Only 40 percent of staff are satisfied with their salary, and 70 percent of them state that they are not paid fairly or equally, the main reason being that pay setting is highly discretionary.
- The quality of management, particularly staff performance evaluations, is a main determinant of staff motivation. Seventy-five percent of staff view performance evaluations as an effective tool to

improve performance, but only 31 percent state that their managers conduct these evaluations. Staff who have managers who evaluate their performance are 13 points more motivated than staff whose managers do not evaluate performance.

- Management practices and access to facilities affect FDA outputs such as success rates for projects.

On internal governance and the customer charter, the survey’s main findings were the following:

- FDA staff report high levels of rent-seeking in the organization, with 55 percent believing that there is a practice of regularly collecting informal fees from citizens and companies for solving problems.
- Better management is associated with safer and more trustworthy work environments. While most employees believe that it is acceptable to report unethical behavior, only half of them feel safe to do so. Staff are 15 percent more likely to feel safe reporting on an unethical colleague in units characterized by above median management quality as compared with units with below median management quality.
- FDA staff value community engagement that reinforces the importance of the FDA’s customer service charter. Staff view community interaction as vital to project success, with 44 percent reporting that insufficient engagement is the main reason for project failure.

**These findings identify four key reform pillars that, when supported by a strong foundation of better data and more regular monitoring and evaluation, will help strengthen FDA’s institutional capacity:** improving skills through merit-based recruitment and competency-based training; stronger management practices, in particular, performance assessments, targeting and monitoring; more equitable pay; and greater community engagement. Administrative data and regular staff surveys can be the basis of a key set of indicators on public employment and management that the FDA can use to assess progress toward institutional strengthening.

# CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE

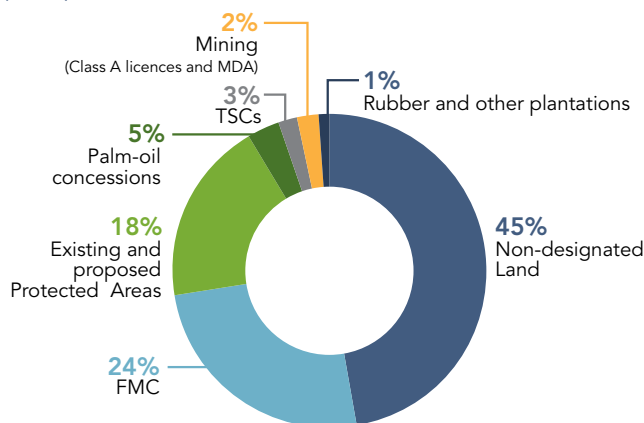
## Liberia's Forests and Their Significance<sup>1</sup>

### Liberia is the most forested country in West Africa.

In 2015, forests (defined as greater than 30 percent tree canopy cover) made up 6.5 million hectares, or 68 percent, of Liberia's land surface (Metria and GeoVille 2016). This includes some areas under tree crops such as oil palm, rubber, and cacao. Out of this, about 4.3 million hectares are categorized as dense tropical forest with a canopy cover of more than 80 percent.

**Existing forests have different uses (Figure 1).** Of the total forest area (nearly 6.6 million hectares), almost 28 percent is designated for commercial timber production (under Forest Management Contracts [FMCs] and Timber Sale Contracts [TSCs]), 18 percent is under existing and proposed protected areas, 5 percent is under palm oil concessions, and 1 percent is under rubber and other plantations. The nondesignated category accounts for about 45 percent of the forest area. This land is used in a variety of ways by communities, smallholder cultivators, and transitory populations.

**FIGURE 1. ALLOCATION OF FOREST LAND IN LIBERIA (2015)**



### The forest sector contributes significantly to national development, and there is the potential for even greater gains.

Liberia's forest sector is uniquely placed: It contributes a relatively high share (10 percent) of the national economy compared with other sectors (Figure 2) and serves as an important source of employment; Liberia has the highest forest cover (68 percent) (Metria

<sup>1</sup> This section and the next draw heavily from the Country Forest Note for Liberia (Hooda, Kishor, and Verheijen 2018).

and GeoVille 2016) as percentage of land area in West Africa; and the forests have a high biodiversity value and a high commercial value.

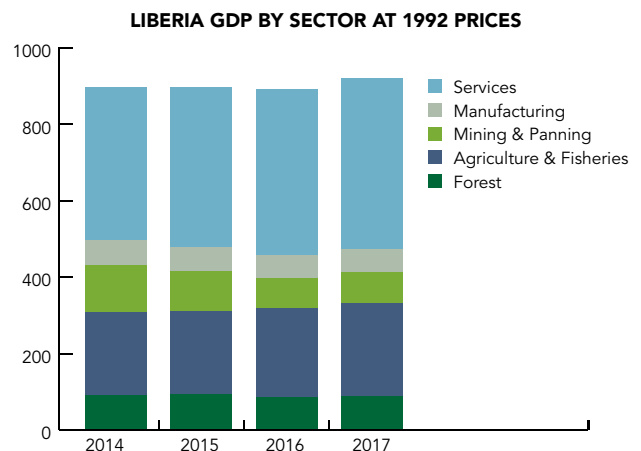
### The forest sector is also a large employer and an important source of livelihoods for rural Liberians.

More than a third of Liberia's population lives in forested areas. The formal sector contributes to gross domestic product (GDP) and formal employment. The informal sector contributes significantly to incomes and employment, through activities such as chainsaw milling and charcoal production. The annual revenue generated by chainsaw milling alone is estimated to be US\$31–\$41 million, or about 3–4 percent of GDP (USAID 2015).

### Despite the important contributions they make to the economy and to livelihoods, forests are under threat and need to be better managed.

Overall, net forest depletion (as percentage of gross national income), a measure of unsustainable use of the forest, increased from 0.5 percent in 2005 to 32 percent in 2015 (World Development Indicators 2015). The deforestation (forest loss) rate is estimated at 0.46 percent per year over 2005–2015 (Winrock International 2016). Deforestation and forest degradation (depletion of existing forests) are caused by shifting agriculture, chainsaw milling, charcoal production, poor enforcement of regulations governing forest concessions, expansion of commercial agriculture concessions (for example, palm oil), and widespread mining. Additionally, ineffective management of protected areas poses a risk to biodiversity and critical ecosystem services.

**FIGURE 2. FOREST SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO LIBERIA'S ECONOMY**





**Significant progress has been made toward institutionalizing forest management and establishing a conducive legal framework.**

The establishment of the Forestry Development Authority in 1976 and the enactment of the National Forestry Reform Law in 2006 and the Community Rights Law with respect to forest lands in 2009 have helped better institutionalize forest management in Liberia. The National Forestry Reform Law has provided a new framework for identifying, allocating, and managing logging concessions; it also ushered in the era of the “three Cs” approach, giving equal balance to *community*, *commercial*, and *conservation* aspects of forestry. It has provided a solid foundation for the operation of the sector and its sustainable contribution to the economy. The Community Rights Law provides a strong basis for engagement of communities in forest management. However, implementation and enforcement of forest policy, laws, and regulations that would result in sustainable forest management and benefits to communities are lacking.

**The sector still faces several challenges that need to be addressed before it can become an engine of growth for the economy.** The factors contributing to the underperformance of the sector pertain to weak implementation of the existing legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks; poor governance; and limited capacity and budgetary constraints of the FDA. These are compounded by cross-sectoral challenges from mining and agricultural concessions because of a lack of national and regional land use planning.

## Forestry Development Authority

**The FDA has a pivotal role in sustainable forest management in Liberia.** The agency was established as a state-owned enterprise, with a broad remit to conduct research, provide training, and “devote all publicly owned forest lands to their most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people, considering their direct and indirect values” (FDA Act, Section 3 (b)). The agency’s vision, as stated in its Strategic Plan (2018–2030), is “sustainable forestry for sustainable socioeconomic development,” with a core emphasis in the plan on institutional capacity building, particularly in the first five-year phase. Pillar 1 of the plan focuses on optimizing the institutional efficiency and effectiveness of the FDA by enhancing staff skills and productivity, developing complementary infrastructural facilities, and exploring improved revenue collection options.

**The FDA’s central management team is based in Monrovia, with a network of district offices across the country.** The agency is headed by a managing

director and two deputy managing directors and is overseen by a Board of Directors; it is organized into five major departments—Legality Verification, Commercial, Conservation, Community Forestry, and Research and Development—to effectively discharge its mandate. Each department is led by a technical manager, who reports to the deputy managing director of operations. The total staff strength of the FDA is about 550, distributed between Monrovia and four regional offices (FDA 2016). The central offices determine policies, whereas the field offices generally focus on implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. The FDA monitors the movement of timber and forest products around the country and maintains a presence at road checkpoints to issue waybills and collect related revenues. The various field teams are managed from the central offices in Monrovia and report to managers within the various departments.

## Study Objective

**The objective of this study is to undertake an institutional capacity assessment of the FDA through a diagnostic survey of its staff to generate granular-level data on the inner workings of the agency.**

The survey captures the work practices, management approaches, staff motivation, leadership, and work environment at the FDA to highlight specific human resource and institutional weaknesses that constrain its effective functioning. The survey serves as a diagnostic tool to identify the interventions needed to alleviate those constraints and provide the basis for a key set of indicators on public employment and management that the FDA can use to assess *progress toward* institutional strengthening.

Anecdotal evidence points to serious deficiencies in many of the FDA’s operations, including human resource management. The survey allows for a systematic look at the work practices, management approaches, staff motivations, leadership, and work environment to highlight specific weaknesses that constrain the FDA’s effective functioning. The survey findings will also help identify key interventions needed to remove those constraints. In addition, it will provide a baseline measure of civil service productivity against which progress can be measured as interventions get implemented. Specifically, this work will do the following:

- Measure in a scientific manner the attitudes and behaviors of public employees that are known to matter for organizational performance.
- Elicit the experiences and perceptions of FDA employees on management practices, compensation, and other human resource management factors that impact attitudes and behaviors.

- Identify priority reforms to be supported by the Liberia Forest Sector Project.
- Establish a baseline to monitor progress on reforms.
- Suggest key performance indicators to monitor progress toward institutional strengthening.

The study is both an individual (perception-based) and organization (management)-level survey. The survey instrument was developed using a set of core modules designed by the Bureaucracy Lab, which have been validated in various other settings, and which were tailored to the Liberian forest sector context. An assessment of the constraints to citizen engagement would be an important addition to understanding the demand-side accountability mechanisms in place. The survey abstracts from this to focus on workplace practices; however, a future assessment of citizen engagement, transparency, and accountability

mechanisms would be able to provide more insight into this aspect of organizational function.

### Survey Methodology

The FDA survey was undertaken December 2018–February 2019 and included 82 percent of FDA staff. For the FDA, it was more cost-effective to conduct a census of employees owing to the relatively small size of the organization and the wide distribution of FDA staff across the regions. In other settings, a representative sample of the organization’s staff would be surveyed to ensure the survey was a practical exercise but still a useful one.

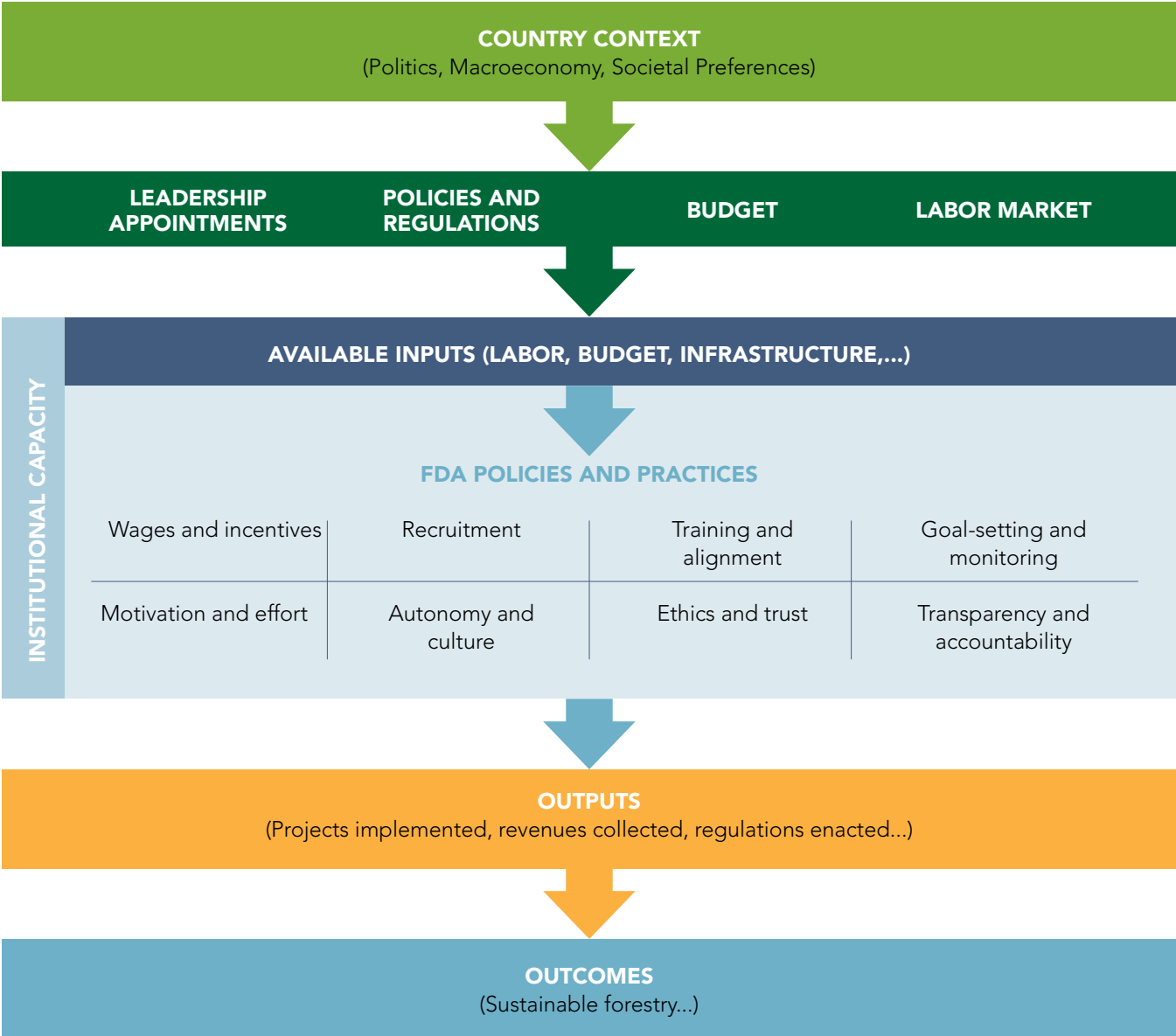
The data collection was carried out by a team of 18 highly trained enumerators, split into four teams. The teams were assigned regions and an itinerary was drawn up based on the location of the selected field offices and sites.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH

**A government agency production function is a useful framework for conceptualizing and measuring institutional capacity (Figure 3).** A production function is the process by which “inputs,” or the human and financial resources available to a public sector organization, are converted to outputs. These outputs can be the number of children educated or, as in the FDA, the number of forestry projects implemented,

the amount of revenues collected, and the type of regulations enacted. Outputs in turn will influence the long-term outcomes of sustainable forestry for sustainable socioeconomic development. Agencies with high capacity are not only those with enough inputs but, more importantly, those efficient in converting the inputs into outputs through effective policies and practices.

**FIGURE 3.** CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF THE FDA



**We define institutional capacity as the agency-level factors that impact the production process.**

Specifically, we zero in on personnel management policies and practices to underline that institutional capacity is only partly a function of the quality of personnel or resources in an agency; it is also, and arguably more importantly, a function of the effectiveness with which these resources are converted to outputs through management practices, wages and incentives, training and alignment, and other agency-level factors. A growing empirical literature has shown that effective organizational and personnel management practices determine organizational productivity in firms and governments (Bloom and Van Reenan 2007; Rasul and Rogger 2018). Merit as the main criterion for selection and promotion is the hallmark of the Weberian bureaucracy and can help create strong professional norms that drive performance. Equally important is the day-to-day management of whether an agency has clear goals with quantifiable targets, and regular monitoring of the achievement of targets; the extent to which staff internalize those goals and effectively work together to achieve them; whether managers effectively involve staff in problem solving and give them autonomy to work; and the regularity and robustness of performance evaluations and performance conversations.

**An extensive academic literature has also shown that motivation and professional norms impact the productivity of government employees.**

These attitudes and behaviors—motivation and effort, ethics and trust—are particularly important in public administration given that it is difficult to monitor the daily work of bureaucrats, which creates unique accountability challenges (Dixit 2002). These attitudes are a function of selection mechanisms that attract and screen for intrinsically motivated workers, in addition to those with the necessary skills, and good management practices that motivate staff and ensure that they work with integrity.

**Institutional capacity is also influenced by country context and government-wide policies outside the agency.**

Country-level influences include the overall political environment and socioeconomic context. These impact government-wide factors such as policies and regulation, the available budget, the leadership appointments in ministries and agencies, and the overall labor market in which the government operates and competes with the private sector for human resources. The political-bureaucratic interface is especially important because while senior bureaucrats need to be accountable to elected officials, this responsiveness needs to be balanced with appropriate rules and protections for civil servants so that their decision making is impartial, and

politicians do not unduly influence their decisions to create bias in the allocation of resources, in the award of contracts, and in the selection and implementation of projects, which can hurt implementation effectiveness.

**For the purposes of this survey, we are most interested in the factors that operate inside a government agency and can be changed by agency leadership, depicted in the blue box in Figure 3.**

Clearly, the linear and unidirectional relationship depicted here is simplistic as agency-level factors also influence the amount of resources an agency will be given and the interaction with the political leadership. However, this conceptual distinction is important to identify reforms that require distinct levels of decision making.

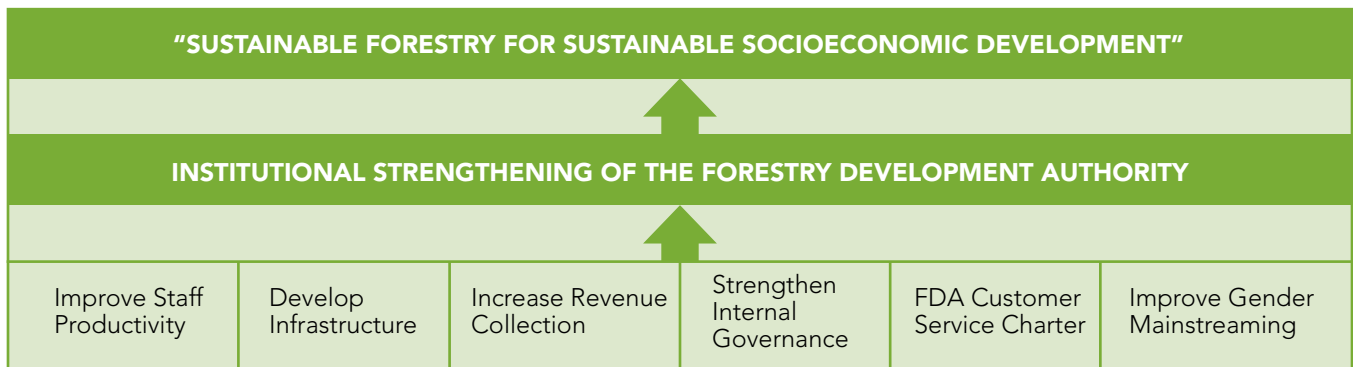
**The conceptual framework utilized is directly relevant to three Pillar 1 activities of the first phase of the FDA's strategic plan (Figure 4).**

The relevance of the production function approach to staff productivity is self-evident. Management practices, the external environment, and staff integrity are also crucial for internal governance and the extent and quality of FDA's interactions with its customers, such as forest-dependent communities, local traditional authorities, nongovernmental organizations, and forest-based enterprises. The FDA's interaction with senior bureaucrats needs to be accountable to elected officials, but this responsiveness needs to be balanced with appropriate rules and protections for civil servants so that their decision making is impartial and politicians do not unduly influence their decisions. In many systems, political factors undermine impartial decision making. Clientelism, or the provision of jobs, contracts, welfare support, budget, and so forth in exchange for political support, is a common feature of the public sector across countries in all regions and income groups. Politicians also often create bias in the allocation of resources, in the award of contracts, and in the selection and implementation of projects, which can hurt implementation effectiveness.

**The empirical approach adopted for this study measures institutional capacity through a survey of the FDA employees.**

The survey is a scientific way to assess the core elements of the FDA's personnel management and enables the identification of priority areas for reform that can then be operationalized through activities funded by the Liberia Forestry Sector Project. The survey findings will help establish a baseline against which the impact of these reform initiatives can then be assessed. The granularity of the survey captures variation in management practices and attitudes and behaviors across units and localities within the FDA that can help better target interventions.

**FIGURE 4. RELEVANT PILLARS OF THE FDA STRATEGIC PLAN**

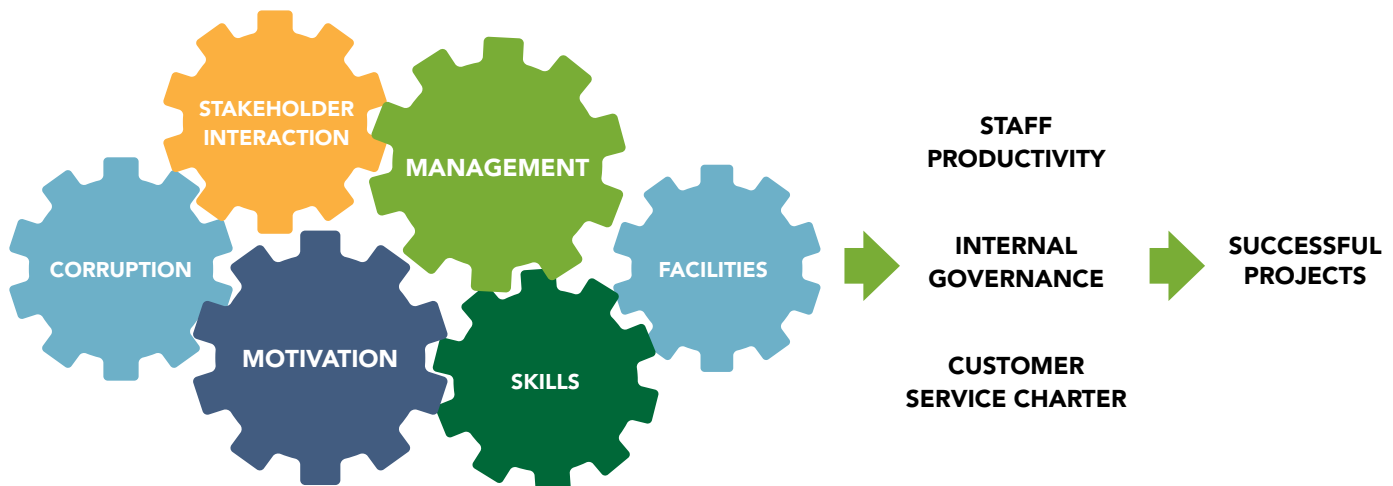


**The survey design draws on the experience of the World Bank’s Bureaucracy Lab (the Lab).** The Lab has conducted and analyzed surveys of approximately 30,000 public employees in 10 countries. Some of the FDA survey modules are derived from core modules that the Lab has developed and refined over the course of implementation in these countries and which have been tailored to the FDA context. These relate to staff skills, management practices, and attitudes and behaviors that are important for all organizations irrespective of their unique functions. Other modules were designed specifically for the FDA to capture aspects of its activities in the forest sector.

**The survey has six modules covering various aspects of the FDA’s institutional capacity and to inform reforms that can be implemented under the strategic plan (Figure 5).** The survey modules on skills and facilities measure staff educational qualifications, demographics, access to training, and IT abilities; the availability of resources such as vehicles; and access to electricity and the internet, and to schools and

hospitals. The module on management draws on the World Management Survey (WMS), a rigorous method of quantifying managerial and organizational practices, which has revealed that the quality of management is the main driver of innovation and productivity in firms across the world (Bloom and Van Reenen 2007; Cirera and Maloney 2017). The survey adapts this tool to measure the quality of management of public sector organizations. The module on motivation measures general job satisfaction, a summary measure that represents a comprehensive assessment of all relevant job aspects that some studies have found are linked to labor productivity; satisfaction with salary; and an employee’s current motivation levels compared with when they first began their job. The survey also asks about the prevalence of rent-seeking, attitudes toward taking bribes and reporting on colleagues that engage in corrupt practices, staff views on the FDA’s interaction with communities, and perceptions of project success. These different modules help provide a comprehensive picture of the quality of outputs of the FDA and the various factors that may be impacting performance and results.

**FIGURE 5. SURVEY MODULES THAT WILL INFORM THE FDA STRATEGIC PLAN**



# MAIN SURVEY FINDINGS

The FDA staff survey was conducted from December 2018 to February 2019 and 438 employees (313 technical and 125 nontechnical staff in Monrovia and the four regional offices), or approximately 82 percent of all FDA staff, were interviewed, with a response rate of 98 percent. The data were collected by a team of enumerators using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPIs). The questionnaire had 10 modules with over 250 questions.

The majority of survey respondents—85 percent of all, and 86 percent of technical—were male, which reflects the demographic composition of the FDA. Women are even less represented in the regional offices. Improving gender mainstreaming is one of the priorities of the FDA’s strategic plan and clearly serious effort will need to be made to attract more women to the organization. Since there are very few female respondents in the survey, the survey findings cannot be disaggregated by gender.

## Staff Productivity

**Weak educational qualifications and the lack of “in-service” training significantly limits the productivity of the FDA staff.** Thirty-one percent of all staff, and 42 percent of technical staff, have an undergraduate degree, which is much lower than staff in other ministries in Liberia or other low- and middle-income countries for which we have data (Figure 6). Staff skills are particularly deficient outside of Monrovia: Only 23 percent of staff in the regions have a university degree. On average, only five individuals can use office software like PowerPoint and Excel across all units in the FDA, and in over half of the units, there is only one staff member with these skills. Furthermore, only 8.5 percent of staff state that training programs are regularly held to improve skills, whereas 41 percent of staff state that they have never received training (Figure 7).

**The lower qualifications of FDA staff compared with those in other Liberian government agencies suggests that the problem has less to do with the overall availability of skilled professionals and more to do with the attractiveness of the FDA as an employer or deficiencies in recruitment practices.** Anecdotal evidence from the field suggests that much of the work carried out by technical staff of the FDA

FIGURE 6. STAFF IN THE FDA HAVE COMPARATIVELY LOW EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

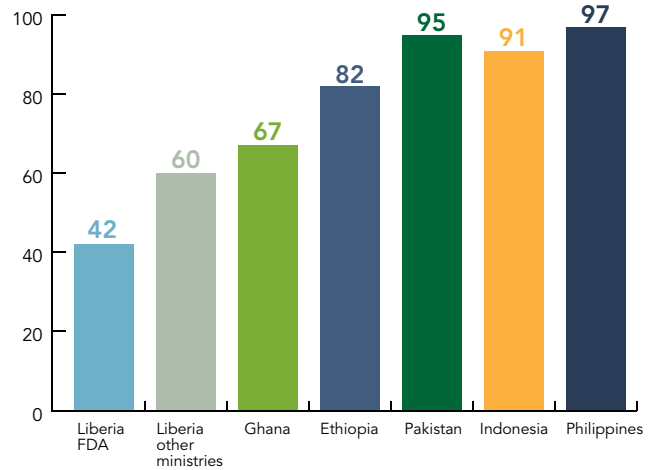
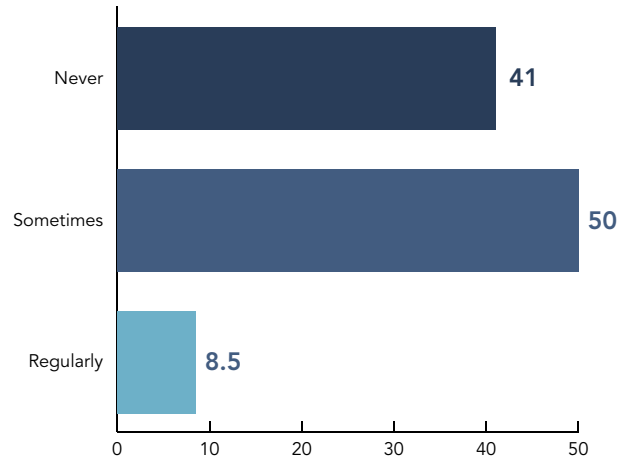


FIGURE 7. “ARE TRAINING PROGRAMS HELD TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE?”



is considered “manual labor,” so schooling is not considered an important requirement of the job by many staff. Limited resources of the Forestry Training Institute and the Forestry School of the University of Liberia, which provide the pool of new entrants for the FDA, is one reason for the limited training opportunities and the poor skills of graduates.

**Staff productivity is also compromised by weak facilities such as limited access to electricity, the internet, health and education facilities, office**

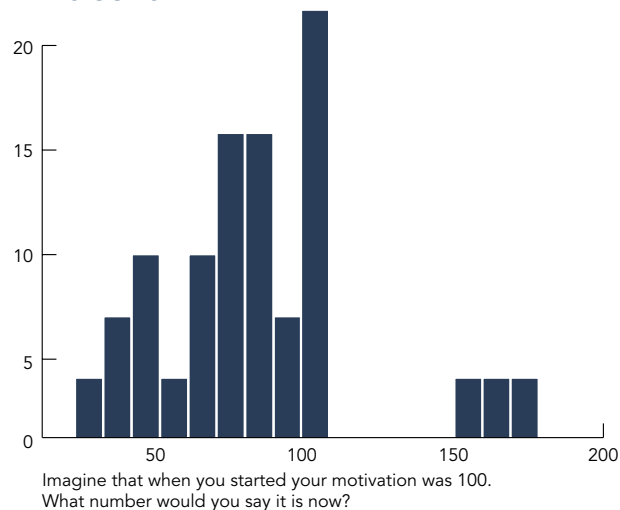
**space, and other resources.** In a typical working day, 90 percent of staff outside of Monrovia report that they never have access to electricity (with 23 percent of all staff reporting no electricity access). Most regional staff have very limited access to their email (that is, every month or every quarter), constraining their ability to ensure regular communication with central offices. While 69 percent of staff in the regions state that they have access to vehicles, only 22 percent state that there is enough fuel to utilize them effectively. Furthermore, only 50 percent of regional staff have relatively easy access to education and health facilities. The absence of basic infrastructure suggests that significant investments in infrastructure and facilities will be necessary in the regions before a significant move toward greater decentralization can be effective, as presented in the second phase of the FDA's strategic plan. The FDA does not receive adequate annual budgetary allocation to develop an effective investment plan for the sector, thus limiting its ability for strategic multiyear planning for its activities. Additionally, the actual disbursements to the FDA are rarely made on time and quarterly disbursements have often been arbitrarily cut back.<sup>2</sup>

**Staff motivation levels vary widely across the FDA.**

The survey aims to measure employee motivation in several ways, ranging from general questions of respondents' satisfaction with their jobs to reasons for joining the public sector and assessment of their current motivation levels compared with when they joined the FDA. While 71 percent of staff are satisfied with their overall experience working in the FDA, this average masks the considerable variation in motivation levels, particularly when individuals reflect on how their motivation has changed over time. On this measure, the survey asks respondents to imagine that when they entered the FDA their motivation was 100; they are then asked what their motivation level is now relative to then. Findings suggest that on average FDA staff are more motivated—the overall motivation score is 103—but there is wide variation in motivation levels, with 31 percent of staff reporting higher motivation levels compared with when they joined the FDA and the remaining stating that their motivation levels were lower (Figure 8).

**A perceived opaqueness of the compensation structure and discretionary implementation of compensation policies work to weaken motivation levels of staff.** The FDA has its own salary scale—the Personnel Classification and Compensation Plan—approved by its Board of Directors, which establishes the classes and grades that determine salaries for 253

**FIGURE 8. STAFF MOTIVATION ACROSS THE FDA VARIES CONSIDERABLY**

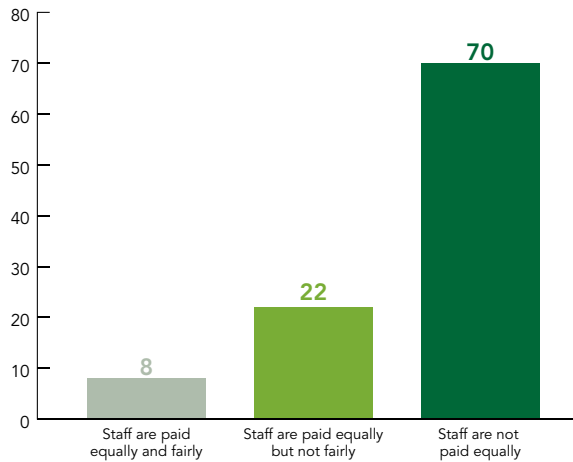


different job titles. Associated with a subset of these job titles are benefits like housing allowances, access to vehicles, fuel allowances, and per diem for travel. Only 40 percent of all FDA staff are satisfied with their salary, and only 10 percent are satisfied with their benefits. Seventy percent of staff state that they are not paid fairly or equally (Figure 9). The main reasons stated are that pay setting is highly discretionary (that is, 30 percent of respondents state that this process is determined by personal relationships between the staff and the manager); there is a lack of clear standards (27 percent); and that decisions are subject to political interference (22 percent) (Figure 10). Sixty-five percent of staff also believe that the compensation system is a source of tension and conflict within the agency. Ultimately, the main source of dissatisfaction is the lack of pay equity and transparency, which is not surprising given the large number of different positions relative to the number of staff in the FDA (253 to 550). Furthermore, the lack of rigorous job evaluations underpinning the class and grade classifications for these jobs exacerbates challenges with the perceived discretion associated with the enforcement of compensation policies.

**While many staff report that decisions around compensation are unfair, the quality of management is the main determinant of staff motivation.** While staff are dissatisfied with their salary, compensation is not associated with motivation—staff who are satisfied with their salary do not report higher levels of motivation than staff who are dissatisfied with their salary. The quality of management, as detailed below, is a more important determining factor of how effectively staff believe they are in implementing their respective tasks.

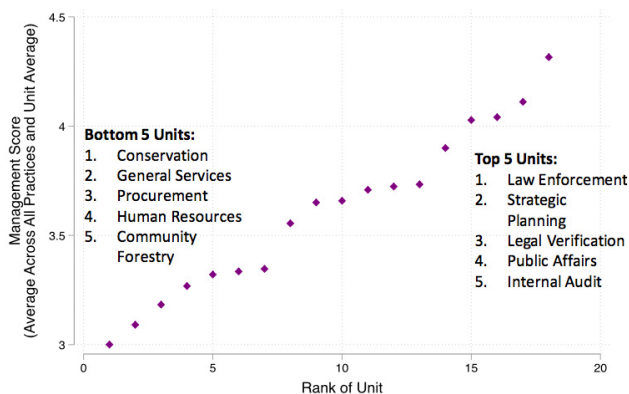
<sup>2</sup> Personal conversations with the managing director and the comptroller at the FDA.

**FIGURE 9. "ARE FDA STAFF PAID FAIRLY AND EQUALLY ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION?"**



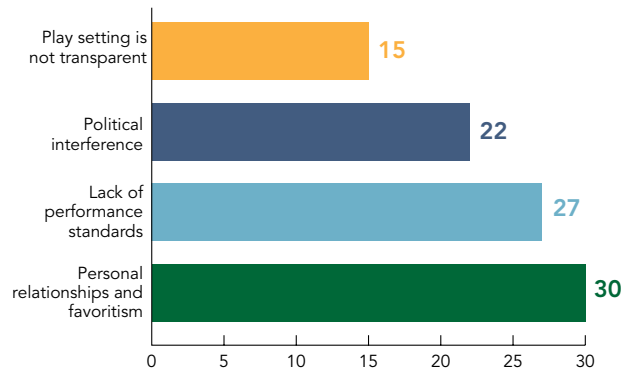
**The quality of management varies widely across units of the FDA.** Several dimensions of management practices are measured in the survey: the extent to which a unit has explicit targets for its goals and whether they are effectively communicated to staff; whether regularly monitoring of these targets takes place; processes around the distribution of tasks across employees, the levels of staff involvement in problem solving, and levels of staff autonomy to carry out their tasks; and the use of incentives, particularly regular performance evaluations, to motivate staff. Survey findings suggest that the average management score across these dimensions varies significantly, with some of the key client-facing units like Conservation and Community Forestry ranking in the bottom five on management (Figure 11).

**FIGURE 11. QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT VARIES CONSIDERABLY ACROSS UNITS**



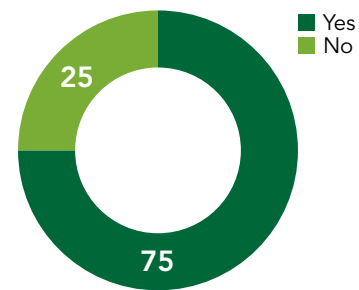
**What particularly stands out is the unevenness in how regularly staff performance evaluations are conducted.** Seventy-five percent of staff view performance evaluations as an effective tool to improve performance (Figure 12), but only 31 percent of staff state that their managers

**FIGURE 10. "WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS WITH THE COMPENSATION SYSTEM?"**

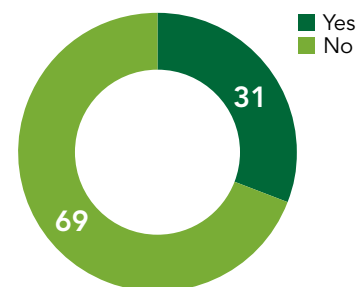


conduct these evaluations (Figure 13). In addition to the infrequency of the evaluations, staff complain that, when they are conducted, they are based on poor criteria and not done fairly by managers. The Bureaucracy Lab surveys from other countries also reveal that performance evaluations and incentives are the weakest aspects of management, compared with organizational targeting and monitoring, which are relatively stronger. Staff in these other countries also highlighted problems of favoritism and lack of objectivity in performance evaluations, though unlike in the FDA, the actual conduct of performance evaluations is relatively high.

**FIGURE 12. "HAS EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IMPROVED BECAUSE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS?"**



**FIGURE 13. "DOES MANAGEMENT OF YOUR UNIT CONDUCT PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS?"**





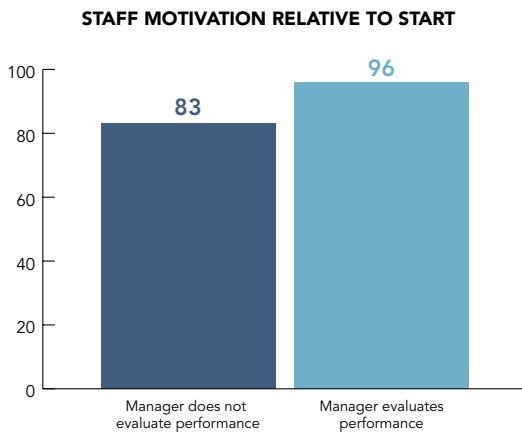
**The conducting of performance evaluations and selection of pro-socially oriented individuals are correlated with staff motivation levels in the FDA.**

We find that staff who have managers who evaluate their performance are 13 points more motivated than staff whose managers do not evaluate performance (Figure 14). The regularity of performance evaluations has a similarly positive association with self-reported staff satisfaction. Other management practices like effective screening for pro-social candidates are also correlated with motivation levels, underlining the importance of effective recruitment practices that select for both skilled and pro-socially motivated staff. Staff who state that they entered the FDA to serve Liberia or to improve the ecosystem are 15 points more motivated than those that entered for extrinsic reasons such as income, benefits, or prestige (Figure 15). Unsurprisingly,

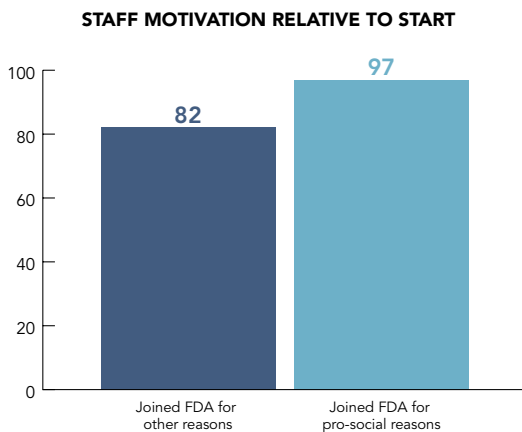
survey findings illustrate a correlation between access to adequate facilities like vehicles and fuel and higher staff motivation levels.

**Management practices and access to facilities affect FDA outputs such as success rates for projects.** FDA staff generally have a poor view of the rates of successful project completion, with only 18 percent of respondents saying that most projects (more than 75 percent) are successfully executed (Figure 16). Better management, especially better targeting, improves likelihood of project success—going from below median to above median targeting is associated with a 3 percentage-point increase in successfully executing at least 75 percent of projects (Figure 17). Staff who say that they have adequate access to vehicles are also 4 percentage points more likely to say the FDA successfully executes at least 75 percent of projects.

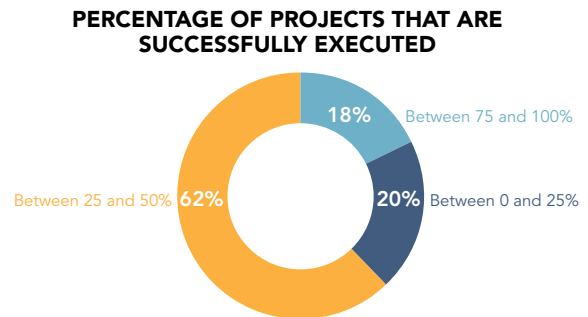
**FIGURE 14. CONDUCTING PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS CORRELATES WITH HIGHER MOTIVATION**



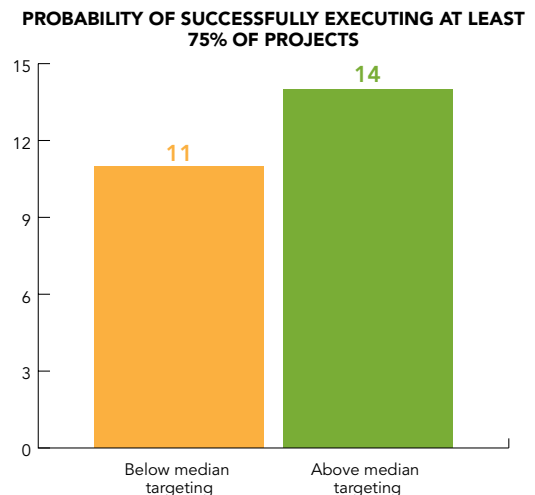
**FIGURE 15. INDIVIDUALS WHO JOINED THE FDA FOR PRO-SOCIAL REASONS HAVE HIGHER MOTIVATION**



**FIGURE 16. LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF PROJECTS ARE SUCCESSFUL MOST OF THE TIME**



**FIGURE 17. BETTER TARGETING IMPROVES THE LIKELIHOOD OF PROJECT SUCCESS**



## Internal Governance and Stakeholder Interaction

**FDA staff report high levels of rent-seeking in the organization.** Fifty-five percent of staff believe that there is a practice of regularly collecting informal fees from citizens and companies for solving problems, though only 23 percent think that there is more rent-seeking in the FDA than in other agencies in Liberia (Figure 18). Several other survey questions confirm the high prevalence of paying and accepting bribes. For example, 50 percent of respondents stated that it was acceptable for an officer to receive a small amount of money or a small gift, and 40 percent said it was fine to accept a large amount of money and an expensive gift, from a citizen for solving their problem. External factors including undue political influence seem to compromise project quality, with 46 percent of FDA staff saying that politicians try to influence staff in their units, such as on decisions related to the choice of projects or procurement. Staff cite the main reasons for rent-seeking as low pay, selection of corrupt or corruptible individuals, too many regulations that enable officers to exercise bureaucratic power, and pressure from their superiors to engage in corrupt practices.

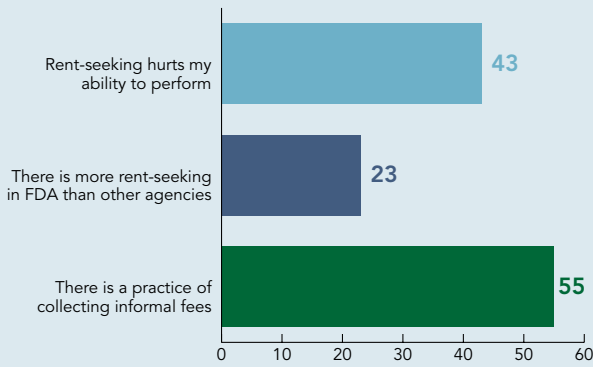
**There are also high levels of political interference in the promotion of staff.** Given the dearth of regular performance evaluations, it is unsurprising that a significant proportion of staff (32 percent) do not believe that merit is a key criterion for promotion. By contrast, 53 percent of respondents believe that promotions in their units are likely to be based on political connections.

**Better management is associated with safer and more trustworthy work environments.** While FDA

staff are aware that a code of ethics exists, very few are knowledgeable about it. Eighty-seven percent of respondents are familiar with the existence of an FDA code of conduct, yet 55 percent said that they had not read the code, and only 10 percent had read the code and were very familiar with its provisions (Figure 19). While most employees believe that it is acceptable to report unethical behavior, only half of them feel safe to do so (Figure 20)—only 15 percent of staff have reported a colleague for unethical behavior. According to the survey, staff are 15 percent more likely to feel safe reporting on an unethical colleague in units characterized by above median management quality as compared to units with below median management quality.

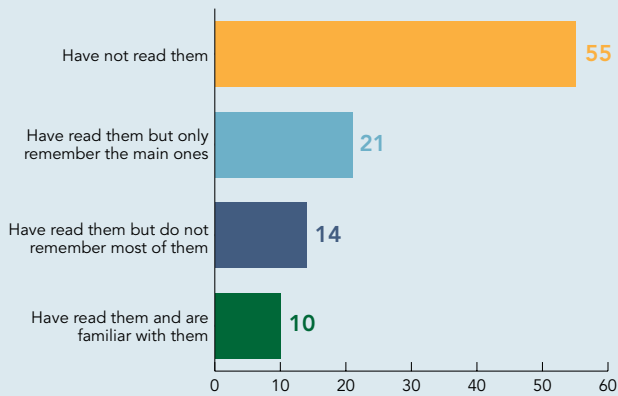
**FDA staff value community engagement that reinforces the importance of the FDA's customer service charter.** The charter lays out a commitment to and a framework for defining service delivery standards, the rights of customers, and how complaints from customers will be handled. FDA staff generally believe that they have a good working relationship with key stakeholders through regular interactions with forest-dependent communities, forest-based enterprises, local traditional authorities, nongovernmental organizations, and development partners. Staff believe that these stakeholders consider the FDA to be trustworthy and competent, except for forest-dependent communities, whom more than half of survey respondents believe do not trust the organization (Figure 21). Staff also view community interaction as vital to project success, with 44 percent reporting that insufficient engagement is the main reason for project failure, followed by corruption (Figure 22).

**FIGURE 18. PERCEPTIONS OF RENT-SEEKING: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SAYING YES**

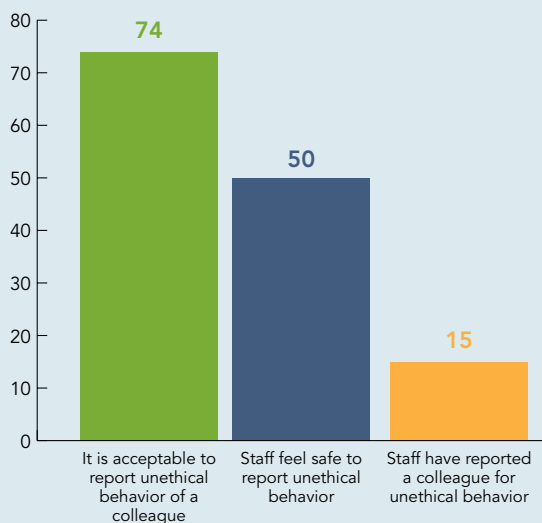


**FIGURE 19. LIMITED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CODE OF ETHICS**

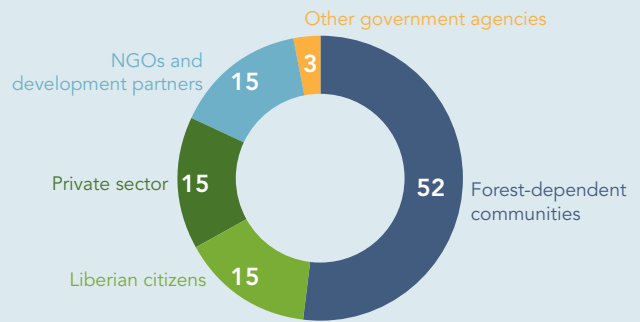
**STAFF FAMILIARITY WITH THE FDA CODE OF CONDUCT**



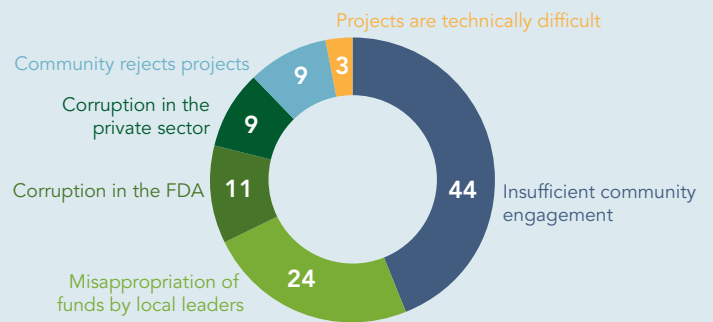
**FIGURE 20. REPORTING UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SAYING YES**



**FIGURE 21. PERCEPTIONS OF THE FDA AMONG STAKEHOLDERS: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS SAYING THEY DO NOT SEE THE FDA AS TRUSTWORTHY AND COMPETENT**



**FIGURE 22. REASONS FOR PROJECT FAILURE**



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**The survey findings identify four key reform pillars that, when supported by a strong foundation of better data and more regular monitoring and evaluation, will help strengthen FDA’s institutional capacity (Figure 23):** improving skills through merit-based recruitment and competency-based training; stronger management practices, in particular, performance assessments, targeting, and monitoring; more equitable pay; and greater community engagement. Recommendations are limited to activities that are within the purview of the FDA and that can be implemented by the FDA within the timeline of Pillar 1 of the strategic plan, with support from the World Bank’s Liberia Forestry Sector Project.

## Improving Skills

**To improve staff productivity, merit-based recruitment practices based on tests are essential to help identify more qualified and public-service motivated individuals.** Merit-based recruitment is a basic pillar of the Weberian bureaucracy model, and research shows that it is associated with lower levels of corruption, higher citizen satisfaction and trust, and greater performance, motivation, and satisfaction among civil servants (Rauch and Evans 2000; Cingolani, Thomsson, and de Crombrugge 2015; Meyer-Sahling, Schuster, and Mikkelsen 2018). While countries have a variety of assessment mechanisms to ensure merit, the recommended approach for low- and middle-income countries with high levels of political patronage, such

as Liberia, is to place relatively greater emphasis on selection through testing via written examinations rather than selection purely on academic qualifications and interviews (Ashraf, Bandiera, and Lee 2014). Written examinations are the most common approach to ensure merit because they limit discretion and the potential for political influence or nepotism, and they can be implemented relatively cheaply.

**Drawing on the experiences of both Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and low-income countries, as well as Liberia’s own President’s Young Professionals Program, a merit-based recruitment policy should include the following elements:** First, there should be open, external advertisement for job vacancies to help ensure transparency and perceived fairness in the recruitment process. Second, the establishment of pre-identified minimum qualification requirements, including education levels for technical staff, will help ensure that new recruits have a university degree. Third, a knowledge-based written examination that tests for key skills is an essential component that will help filter the pool of candidates. These skills should be a combination of basic legal knowledge (Liberia’s constitution and forestry-specific laws) and analytical and problem-solving abilities that can be measured through a psychometric test. The test can be multiple-choice to make it cheaper to implement. While competency-based recruitment has become increasingly common in OECD countries since the early 2000s, it would be more relevant for managers and

FIGURE 23. MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INSTITUTIONALLY STRONGER FDA			
IMPROVING SKILLS	STRONGER MANAGEMENT	MORE EQUITABLE PAY	MORE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Merit-based recruitment Competency-based training	Implement PMS Management training and mentorship Whistle-blower protection	Revised salary structure	More Transparency Strengthen existing engagement platforms
BETTER DATA, KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT			

senior-level employees than for new entrants in Liberia as the screening process is both more demanding and more discretionary. Fourth, candidates who pass the threshold for the test should be assessed for personality traits, particularly pro-social motivation, through essay questions that screen for reasons for joining the FDA. Lastly, final interviews would help identify the final selection of candidates that have passed the above stages of the recruitment process.

**Merit-based recruitment should be complemented with an outreach program to attract motivated and skilled young Liberians to join the FDA.** As discussed, FDA staff who are more pro-socially oriented have higher motivation levels. The experience of the President's Young Professional Program is instructive and inspirational: It reveals that a program that emphasizes service to Liberia, and to the ecosystem and the global climate in the case of the FDA, can be attractive. Pro-socially motivated, qualified candidates are often willing to forgo higher pay in the private sector for such an opportunity. For example, a recent study showed that university graduates are willing to taking relatively lower pay in the Ghanaian civil service as they view government jobs as a unique experience and a long-term investment that could potentially present more lucrative future careers in the private sector, development organizations, or nongovernmental organizations (McDonnell 2017).

**Regular competency-based in-service training is necessary to ensure that staff skills are continuously upgraded and that staff skills remain relevant and up-to-date.** These competencies would not focus on a candidate's topical knowledge, but rather on broader issues such as leadership, teamwork, and strategic, critical, and innovative thinking. The OECD, for example, has identified four necessary skills for civil servants: policy advice, working with citizens, collaboration in networks, and commissioning and contracting. Encompassing these four skill sets are three competencies: strategic thinking, professional expertise, and innovative capabilities (OECD 2017). The necessary competencies for the FDA will likely differ by unit, and the first stage should be an identification of core competencies for these different units, which will then help in the design of a training program.

## Stronger Management

**Undertaking regular and robust performance evaluations is a clear recommendation that emerges from the survey results given its impact on staff motivation and performance.** In Liberia, the Civil Service Agency has rolled out a new Performance

Management System (PMS) that aims to stimulate regular monitoring and resolution of staff challenges, with the ultimate objective of shifting civil service culture toward a performance orientation for improved productivity. The performance appraisal tool evaluates staff on personal goals and objectives that are linked to organizational targets, as well as on desirable behaviors. The PMS is currently being implemented in several ministries, accompanied by a training of managers and staff. Given the important impact performance evaluations seem to have on staff motivation and performance, the FDA should participate in the Civil Service Agency's pilot program to benefit from this reform initiative and maximize potential synergies. To be maximally effective, the PMS (a central-level reform program) will need to be customized to the specific FDA context, in which a very large proportion of staff are based in remotely located field offices.

**Effective performance management will require regular implementation of the PMS, accompanied by a shift from evaluation to coaching and problem solving.** While the implementation of the PMS will be an important reform, academic research reveals that the effectiveness of performance appraisals is contingent upon the perceived fairness of the process, the quality of the relationship between the manager and employee, and employees' reaction to feedback (Center for Evidence-Based Management 2016, 19). A cross-country survey of 23,000 civil servants from four continents found that for clear impact, performance needs to be evaluated against objectives identified in advance, and performance results need to be perceived to matter for promotions, pay rises, or job stability (Meyer-Sahling, Schuster, and Mikkelsen 2018). However, the difficulty of objective measures of performance, and limited opportunities for promotions and pay increases, make effective implementation of performance appraisals in public administrations difficult. In response to this challenge, many OECD countries are shifting the performance conversation from one that evaluates staff to a two-way conversation in which employees get the direction and developmental opportunities to continually improve performance, while evaluators have the chance to provide timely feedback.

**Managers can use a variety of tools beyond performance evaluations and performance conversations to motivate staff.** Evidence from ethnographic studies points to effectiveness of access to training or learning opportunities, a friendly work environment, staff recognition and appreciation, and involvement of staff in decision making as key motivational devices that managers can use particularly

in resource-constrained environments (McDonnell 2017; World Bank 2019).

**Managers will need to be incentivized and mentored to improve management practices.** These incentives can include conditioning managers' own performance evaluations on the regularity and quality of the performance feedback that they provide staff, both through the PMS and, more importantly, through regular performance conversations. Increasingly, managers in OECD countries have a different performance appraisal system than the rest of the civil service, with an emphasis on their achievement of strategic organizational goals as well as their managerial and leadership skills (Kuperus and Rode 2016). To be effective coaches, managers will need targeted training in assessing employee skills, mastering difficult conversations, and giving constructive feedback. For example, in Ireland managers need to undergo 30 hours of training specifically on performance appraisal, and in Canada managers receive special training on performance management from the Canada School of Public Service. Equally important is mentorship, ideally by high-performing managers in the Liberian public administration (these individuals could be identified from the FDA and broader Liberia public administration surveys), who can provide hands-on coaching that can potentially have more impact given their embeddedness in the local context.

**Organizational management practices like targeting and monitoring also need to be strengthened to complement these personal management improvements.** The survey reveals that better organizational management practices have a strong correlation with improved staff motivation and staff productivity. At the same time, the quality of specific components of management practices, such as targeting, monitoring, and performance tracking, vary widely across the departments of the FDA. Encouraging the adoption of internal best practices can therefore be a cost-effective way of improving staff motivation and organizational productivity. The FDA's strategic plan has a concrete set of time-bound goals that can be the basis of organizational objectives and goals, which can then be cascaded down to unit-level targets that managers can focus on and be held accountable for achieving.

**Whistle-blower protection is an essential reform to address staff safety concerns regarding their ability to report on corrupt practices.** While reducing corruption is an institutionally complex reform that requires prevention and enforcement measures that go well beyond the jurisdiction of the FDA, managers can create a culture where staff feel safe to report wrongdoing. The OECD definition of whistle-blower

protection is "legal protection from discriminatory or disciplinary action for employees who disclose to the competent authorities in good faith and on reasonable grounds wrongdoing of whatever kind in the context of their workplace" (OECD 2016). A necessary requirement is whistle-blower protection legislation based on internationally accepted principles. In Liberia, a draft whistle-blower protection law has been under debate for several years, yet, according to the government's self-assessment report under the Open Government Partnership, the challenge in implementing the commitment is the lack of political will.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the FDA can implement a protection policy that informs employees about their rights and obligations, establishes a reporting channel (for example, a complaints portal) that maintains the anonymity of the whistle-blower, and specifies penalties for retaliation against whistle-blowers.

## More Equitable and Transparent Pay

**A simple pay and grading structure based on clear job profiles will help restore staff confidence and ensure more equitable pay for equal work.** The complexity of the FDA's Personnel Classification and Compensation Plan—with one position for every two employees in the organization—is not based on any clear job evaluation methodology, resulting in some surprising classifications. For instance, rangers, a core technical job, are classified lower than administrative and legal assistants, and among rangers, those in the Department of Community Forestry have a lower class and grade than those in the Commercial Forestry and Conservation Departments. Therefore, it is not surprising that the staff survey revealed such high levels of dissatisfaction with pay, specifically lack of pay equity and transparency. Restoring staff confidence will require a simplified classification and compensation plan that both reduces the number of job titles and assigns grades based on an established job evaluation methodology.

## More Cooperation and Coordination with Key Stakeholders

**A robust forest governance framework includes mechanisms for stakeholder participation in policy making and implementation.** According to the findings of the staff survey, FDA staff recognize the need to improve interactions between the FDA and local communities. The "9-Step" process, under the Community Rights Law, brings together the agency and forest communities to foster collaboration on forest

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/liberia/commitments/LR0019/>.

management. The use of trained facilitators, particularly sensitive to community interests, helps develop a relationship of trust between the two major stakeholders. Opportunities for quality interaction are also available through the Community Forest Working Group (CFWG), the Community Forestry Development Committee (CFDC), and the Regional Inter-Agency Task Forces (RIATs). Ensuring that these platforms are well resourced and managed is integral to their effectiveness.

**Improve public access to information.** The FDA has developed protocols and procedures on public access to information. It finalized protocols for public disclosure in 2016 (FDA 2016), patterning them after the National Freedom of Information Act of 2010. The protocols provide user-friendly, step-by-step descriptions of internal and external channels for obtaining information from the FDA. These protocols will improve the agency’s credibility and strengthen the level of transparency, accountability, and good governance for the sector. To operationalize public access to information, it is recommended that the FDA establish an adequately resourced unit dedicated to responding to public requests for information, promptly and with clarity. Given the sense of distrust of local communities in the FDA as reported by FDA staff, the establishment of an information desk in the *regional* FDA offices where members of the public may go to request information would be particularly beneficial to strengthen public access to information. Furthermore, the development and implementation of an information management system in consultation with other key stakeholders and according to a clearly agreed upon timetable would help reinforce public trust in the agency’s capacity to deliver on its mandate.

## Better Data, Key Performance Indicators, and Staff Engagement

**Better data, both administrative data and staff surveys, are necessary for informed human resource management practices and broader evidence-based policy making and implementation in the forest sector.** Better information systems including the necessary infrastructure and staff capacity are necessary to ensure an effective management of information in the sector. Better data generation, both of accuracy and frequency, backed by reliable information systems, is the backbone of effective monitoring and evaluation and, in turn, evidence-based decision making. Furthermore, the FDA staff survey provides a baseline against which the impact of human resource management and other reforms can be measured through follow-on surveys. Surveys should be complemented by administrative data, particularly payroll data, to measure inefficiencies in staffing and inequities and distortions in compensation, and to identify staffing needs and gaps. These data are a vital tool for management for improving internal decision making, for identifying high-performing and low-performing units, and to help the FDA develop momentum for reforms.

**These data will enable the FDA to compile and regularly track a set of indicators on public employment and management to assess progress toward institutional strengthening.** A proposed set of key performance indicators, measured by payroll data and surveys, is listed in Table 1.

**Short and regular surveys can also be an effective motivational tool for staff.** An SMS-based short survey, regularly conducted, can be an effective mechanism

**TABLE 1. PROPOSED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS ON PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

	INDICATORS FROM STAFF SURVEYS	INDICATORS FROM ADMIN. DATA
Attractiveness	% applicants/staff who think that recruitment is based on merit	Vacancy rate (by grade/type of position)  Number, qualification, and scores of applicants to public administration positions  Length of time individuals search for public sector jobs (relative to private sector jobs)

	INDICATORS FROM STAFF SURVEYS	INDICATORS FROM ADMIN. DATA
Retention	<p>% staff who think about leaving the FDA</p> <p>% of staff who think about leaving the public sector</p>	<p>Turnover rate (disaggregated by key staff categories and positions)</p> <p>Reason for turnover (voluntary versus forced)</p>
Skills	<p>% staff satisfied with the relevance, frequency, and targeting of training programs</p> <p>% staff who believe they have the right skills for the tasks (technical and nontechnical)</p>	<p>Number of staff trained</p> <p>Proportion of staff who have the minimum set of qualifications for their job</p>
Quality of management	<p>% staff who believe that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers conduct regular and robust performance evaluations</li> <li>Managers and supervisors try to use the right staff for the right job</li> <li>Their department has a clear set of targets derived from the agency's goals and objectives</li> <li>Staff perception of percentage of projects successfully executed</li> <li>Their organization has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals</li> </ul>	<p>Vacancy rate (by grade/type of position); average duration of vacancies</p> <p>Turnover/mobility rate within the public administration</p> <p>Frequency of reorganizations</p>
Motivation	<p>% staff who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joined FDA to serve Liberia and improve the ecosystem</li> <li>Are satisfied with their experience in public service</li> <li>Staff perceptions of alignment of FDA mission with their personal motivation</li> <li>Have motivation levels above that when they joined the FDA</li> </ul>	<p>Public-private wage differential (controlling for worker and job characteristics)</p> <p>Relative wages across FDA occupations (both vertically and horizontally)</p> <p>Relative wages across occupations between FDA and other ministries</p>



for engaging staff, eliciting their feedback, and having the type of regular performance dialogue that research reveals as having positive impacts staff motivation. A separate manager-level survey would be helpful to get direct information on the availability of skilled staff and their appropriate deployment, and the effectiveness of the PMS. The public sector in general has not adequately leveraged technology for performance management, but many global private sector companies are increasingly using mobile applications to elicit feedback on staff and manager performance (Ewenstein, Hancock, and Komm 2016). These applications are used to gather structured and unstructured real-time feedback from meetings, problem-solving sessions, completed projects, and so forth. The important point is that this technology-enabled communication should not be about monitoring staff performance, as that can create perverse incentives, but instead be about eliciting staff views on issues and involving them in solving organizational problems.

**The FDA staff survey provides granular-level data on existing organizational-level challenges affecting its performance and effectiveness.** Much of the findings highlight challenges relating to the broader human resource management framework and management practices across different units. In order to improve organizational capacity to deliver on its mandate, the FDA would benefit from investing in skills development through targeted training programs of its staff; building staff morale through regular performance evaluations and more equitable compensation schemes as well as more access to adequate resources required for staff to fulfill their tasks effectively; and stronger accountability frameworks through meaningful stakeholder interaction and stronger information management systems to feed into policy decision making and implementation.

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