

**Keynote Speech: The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, TEEB
Country Study Liberia**

TEEB International Workshop

Venue: Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun: Blvd. Kukulcan km 16.5, Zona Hotelera, 77500 Cancun, QROO, Mexico

Tima: 9 AM, Monday 5th of December

High level presence:

- Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director Natural Capital, European Commission
- *Walter García Cedeño*, Minister, Ministry of environment
- Alexander Mueller, TEEB Study Lead TEEBAgriFood

Dear Mr. García Cedeño, Minister at the Ministry of Environment in Ecuador

Dear Mr. Delgado Rosa, Director Natural Capital, and donor of this initiative

Dear UNEP representatives

Distinguished guests from the different countries implementing TEEB

1. I would like to welcome you all to the TEEB International Workshop. The objective of this workshop is to exchange experiences between the different countries that are part of this initiative aiming to mainstream ecosystem services and biodiversity in national policies. This is of high relevance for Liberia, as we are recognized as a global hotspot for biodiversity.
2. About 70% of the Liberian population depends on natural resources for the livelihood of the Liberian population. We host two of the largest remaining forest blocks in West Africa. Also mangrove ecosystems can be found along the coast of Liberia. There are eight major wetland sites in Liberia of which five have been designated as Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance, with three of them containing rich mangrove forests.
3. The values of mangroves are however often overlooked or poorly understood. Coastal communities rely directly on the services provided by mangroves, such as food security, clean water and

health, energy security and protection against natural disasters. **Mangroves are among the most productive and valuable ecosystems on earth, but also the most undervalued. As a consequence, Liberia lost approximately 65 percent of its mangroves since 1980. In Liberia we decided that the TEEB initiative would aim at reducing the pressures on mangroves and wetlands.** We are also looking how TEEB can inform Marine Protected Areas, which is of great importance for the food security of our country. Food security is a concern for over half of the Liberian population, with the fishery sector providing about 65 percent of the population's protein needs.

4. **Local community engagement and awareness-raising is critical for the EPA in this project.** In Liberia, access to the natural resources of mangroves is mostly based on traditional management practices. Therefore, community involvement will be needed to realize a successful policy change through TEEB results. The EPA, with support of TEEB, works with local communities in 4 pilot sites (including Lake Piso). The objective is to integrate local and traditional knowledge on managing natural resource and to generate awareness on the true values of mangroves and wetlands. **The EPA also welcomes the strong cooperation between Conservation International and TEEB in the biodiversity sphere in Liberia.** We hope this can be replicated to other countries in our region.
5. Finally, I would like to thank the European Commission once more for their continued support and wish you all an inspiring workshop.

Thank you.