

RUBBER PRODUCTION IN LIBERIA:

An Exploratory Assessment of Living and Working Conditions, with Special Attention to Forced Labor



Funding for this report was provided by the United States Department of Labor under grant number IL177760875K. Points of view or opinions in this report do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.



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Abbreviations

CBA	–	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CIOL	–	Congress of Industrial Organizations of Liberia
COAWU	–	Cocopa Agriculture Workers Union
CPA	–	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSR	–	Corporate Social Responsibility
EITI	–	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
GAAWUL	–	General Agriculture and Allied Workers Union
GDP	–	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	–	International Labor Organization
ILRF	–	International Labor Rights Fund
ITUC	–	International Trade Union Confederation
LAC	–	Liberian Agricultural Company
LAWU	–	Liberian Agriculture Workers Union
LCL	–	Labor Congress of Liberia
LEITI	–	Liberian Extractive Industries Initiative
LFF	–	Liberian Frontier Force
LISGIS	–	Liberian Institute for Statistics and Geo-services
LURD	–	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	–	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NESH	–	National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences & Humanities
NPFL	–	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NTGL	–	National Transitional Government of Liberia
TWP	–	True Whig Party
UNMIL	–	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USAID	–	United States Agency for International Development
USD	–	United States Dollars
WFP	–	World Food Program

Introduction

With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, Verité carried out research on labor conditions in the supply chains of ten goods in seven countries from 2009 through 2011. Research was carried out on the production of shrimp in Bangladesh; Brazil-nuts, cattle, corn, and peanuts in Bolivia; sugar in the Dominican Republic; coffee in Guatemala; fish in Indonesia; rubber in Liberia; and tuna in the Philippines. The following report is based on research on living and working conditions in the rubber sector of Liberia, with special attention to indicators of forced labor.

Since the establishment of the Firestone plantation in 1926, rubber has been the cornerstone of the Liberian economy; even in post-conflict Liberia, this commodity remains the country's most important cash crop.¹ Rubber trees are cultivated on large company-owned plantations, where workers collect rubber year-round for a fixed salary; and also on small-scale farms that belong to households and individuals. This report focuses on rubber cultivated on large-scale commercial plantations that are not part of the Bridgestone/Firestone complex.

Rubber has a long and controversial history in Liberia. Observers largely agree that the sector has served as a much-needed generator of state revenues and a creator of formal, salaried employment in a country with a largely subsistence agricultural economy. However, there has been persistent concern and tension around the terms of the contracts signed between the Liberian state and rubber companies, on the one hand, and the living and working conditions on Liberian plantations, on the other.

It was determined that Verité's research in Liberia should be an exploratory study with flexible research objectives, which evolved into a study of current-day living and working conditions, with special attention to indicators of forced labor, on two Liberian rubber plantations: (1) the Liberian Agricultural Company's (LAC) plantation in Grand Bassa County; and (2) the Cocopa Rubber Company's plantation in Nimba County. The ILO's core labor conventions and Liberian labor law served as the framework for the study.

The LAC plantation is one of the largest in Liberia with a labor force of approximately 3,000 workers (regular and seasonal) and a total population of 25,000. This makes it second only to the Firestone plantation in population and workforce size. The LAC plantation is located close to Liberia's capital, Monrovia. In contrast, the Cocopa plantation is much smaller in size, with approximately 1,200 workers and a population of 6,000. This plantation belongs to a family-run company, LIBCO, and is located close to the borders with Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire.



Locations of the LAC & Cocopa Plantations

Verité’s analytical methodology used a dual-lens approach, examining data from the standpoint of discrete indicators of labor conditions, and additionally from the perspective of how the “five P’s” – product, people, place, policies, and programs – contribute to or ameliorate situations of labor abuse.

Below this report offers:

- background information on the economy, politics, and history of Liberia; the rubber sector, its supply chain and workforce; and a summary of past human and labor rights concerns in the rubber industry;
- the methodology and limitations of this research; and
- a presentation of research findings.

This section provides an overview of the rubber sector in Liberia, breaking down the analysis into the history and context of five key areas of inquiry of this study: the place, product, people, politics, and programs (the 5P’s); followed by a brief summary of previous allegations of human and labor rights violations on Liberian rubber plantations.

The Five Ps of Rubber Production in Liberia: Place, Product, People, Policies, and Programs

Place

Politics. Liberia’s early history and legacy of war are important factors to consider when evaluating the history and development of the rubber sector in the country, and the impact of severe poverty and social and economic instability on the labor force and employment patterns.

The civil war and subsequent political developments have created a complex and highly politicized socio-economic environment in Liberia today. On top of the tensions related to security, ethnic divisions, and fears of a return to conflict, the major political issues of the day around foreign investment concessions; roles of unions and other institutions in politics; and economic and development policy guarantee that inquiry into a major business sector like rubber is complicated and highly dynamic. Our research took into account not how previous and contemporary conflict is viewed by workers, but rather how the presence of these complicating factors in daily life in Liberia is “in the air” and therefore affects all elements of research there. Appendix 1 offers a thorough accounting of this history and backdrop, for interested readers. The most recent events are described below. The ways in which the research approach was adapted to meet the challenge of this operating environment are discussed in the Methodology & Limitations section of this report.

In August 2003, Liberia emerged from the devastating 14 year civil war with almost every institution and piece of infrastructure destroyed. President Charles Taylor went into exile and the country was ruled by a transition government that eventually oversaw elections in the autumn of 2005 that brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power.

A direct consequence of this environment of long-term and severe instability is that, while state institutions in Liberia have been reconstructed, they are far from functioning optimally. Liberian courts remain short of judges, particularly outside Monrovia. Police reform has been implemented, but while the uniforms may be new, many Liberians fail to see what has changed, with petty corruption still prevalent. Enforcement of labor law is weak. Education and other social services such as hospitals and health clinics are in the process of being rebuilt, but such services come at a cost (both formal and informal) and the quality is often low. Many parents, particularly in rural areas, think twice about sending their children to school because of the poor infrastructure, chronic under-resourcing and lack of teacher training that often results in educators themselves being unable to read or write.²

Economy . Measured in GDP per capita, economic growth in Liberia looks impressive at 4.6 percent in 2010. However, Liberia is still rebuilding infrastructure and establishing a democracy following the long civil war. There is currently a UN Peace Keeping Force of 15,000 in the country, whose mandate was extended to September 2012.³ Due to years of war, Liberia has high unemployment, low literacy, poor health, corruption, and a lack of infrastructure such as roads, water, sewage, and electrical services.⁴ Table 1 below provides key economic and social development figures for the country.

Table 1. Liberia: Key economic and social development figures, 2009-2010⁵

Economic growth	4.6 %
GDP per capita	400 USD (estimated)
Population	4 million
Population growth	4.3 %
Life expectancy at birth	58.3 years
Infant mortality	79 per 1000 live births
Unemployment/underemployment	85 %
Literacy rate (females), 15-24 years	79.5 % ⁶

Liberia has a primarily agrarian economy, with the majority of the population dependent on some form of subsistence agricultural production for their livelihood. It is estimated that almost 70 percent of the labor force in Liberia is engaged in agriculture, just above 20 percent in services and less than 10 percent in industry.⁷ Chief exports in 2010 were rubber, timber, iron, diamonds, cocoa, and coffee. Of Liberia's USD 207 million in export earnings in 2010, 61 percent came from rubber. Liberia's largest export partners in that year were South Africa (27%), the United States (18%), Spain (8%) and Denmark (6%).⁸

In addition to rubber exports, the country's main revenues come from its maritime registry program. Liberia's US-owned and operated shipping and corporate registry

(LISCR) is the world's second-largest, with more than 3,500 ships and 10 percent of the world's total oceangoing fleet.⁹

Today, many of the companies that fled during the civil war in Liberia are restarting operations, such as Firestone and DENCO Shipping Lines. New companies heavily investing in Liberia include Sime Darby (palm oil), Golden Veroleum (palm oil), ArcelorMittal (iron ore), Elenito, a unit of Israel's Enginvest Group (iron ore), Equatorial Biofuels, Lonestar Cell, and Global Bank Liberia.¹⁰ AMLIB United Mineral, BHP Billiton, Affero, and China Union are all developing new mining projects in the country.¹¹ Firestone and Buchanan Renewables, partially owned by Swedish electricity giant Vattenfall, have begun biomass producing operations using rubber wood (hevea) chips.¹²

Rubber is currently Liberia's most important export commodity, and the five largest companies in Liberia operate in this sector. It is estimated that more than 20,000 people are employed by commercial rubber farms and up to 60,000 smallholder households are involved in the growing of rubber trees. Since 2008, the world market price for rubber and the quantity of Liberia's rubber exports has declined substantially. While rubber has other uses besides automobile tires, rubber demand is strongly linked to the health of the global automobile industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis.¹³

Companies in the rubber sector in Liberia have reportedly been affected by the 60 percent decline in prices and have cancelled contracts with suppliers, leading to cutbacks in the employment of contract workers. Estimates at one Liberian plantation indicate that up to 2,000 full-time and contractual workers have been laid off. The majority of those laid off were contractual workers.¹⁴

Industrial Relations and Labor Market Actors. Labor unions in Liberia reflect the country's history. They were established late, experienced several problems, and for a good part of their history lacked the autonomy needed to play the role of independent unions. Currently there are approximately 30 functioning unions in the country with a total of 60,000 members. Most of these members are unemployed, meaning that the unions have little power and influence because they cannot meaningfully call for any form of credible collective action.

All seven of the large company-owned rubber plantations in Liberia are unionized. At both rubber facilities studied for this report, LAC and Cocopa, there are local chapters of the General Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (GAAWUL), respectively the Liberian Agriculture Workers Union (LAWU) and the Cocopa Agriculture Workers Union (COAWU). We will discuss the role of these unions and the relationship between them, workers and management in more detail below.

Workers at the Firestone Plantation are represented by new leadership of the Firestone Agricultural Workers' Union of Liberia (FAWUL) that came to power in historic union

elections in 2007. The union negotiated landmark collective bargaining agreements in 2008 and 2010. These are discussed in more detail below.

Product

Conscripted Labor and the Birth of the Rubber Industry in Liberia. Ever since its foundation, the central government of Liberia has influenced local communities in rural Liberia. This was particularly the case after a resource-extraction economy developed in the 20th century. This economy, in which rubber played an important role, was predominantly in the hands of international companies and their collaborators in the local elite. But it also could not work without large-scale labor mobilization.¹⁵ An understanding of how this history unfolded in the country is important when evaluating modern-day labor conditions.

Hut Tax System. The starting point for the process of large-scale labor mobilization was the implementation of the annual hut tax in 1916. This tax was supposed to be paid by all adult men and, as such, forced rural people into a monetary economy. In order to pay the tax, people began to offer their labor for hire, initially to traders but eventually to international companies that had won concessions¹⁶ to establish, among other things, rubber plantations. The tax was collected by local chiefs who had been informed by state agents working with soldiers from the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) about how many huts they had to account taxes for. The chiefs who were responsible for this were allowed to keep a commission from the taxes, thereby not only initiating a system of “indirect rule,” but also creating a new class of powerful male elders from ruling lineages.

Significantly for this research, the hut tax system was developed in tandem with a system of forced conscription of labor. Manpower was needed for public works – for example, the construction of bridges, roads, barracks and other government houses – but also for work with government officials. It was the chiefs who were responsible for supplying able-bodied men to work on these so-called “government” projects.

This system increased in importance when the agreement with Firestone was first signed in 1926. The establishment and operation of a large rubber plantation required a national labor market, but since this market did not yet exist, the Liberian government ordered the chiefs to draft laborers for the plantation. Thus, it was the Liberian government that initially assumed the main responsibility for the recruitment of the workforce for the Firestone plantation.¹⁷

This system – established in the 1920s – continued to exist at least until the 1960s. In 1954, approximately 16,000 workers on the Firestone plantation (equivalent to almost 80% of the work force) had been forcibly recruited, having been sent there by their local chiefs.¹⁸

The labor system established to implement and maintain the rubber plantations was therefore built on state-imposed coercion. Forcibly recruited workers received the same

salary, fringe benefits and working conditions as free workers.¹⁹ The key difference was that the latter had chosen to come to Firestone (and later LAC, Cocopa and the other plantations that were established), while the former did not have this freedom. They had been ordered to leave their families and homes.²⁰

International Criticism. This system of forced conscription of labor made possible the rapid establishment of rubber plantations in Liberia and was an essential boost to the Liberian economy. However, it also quickly garnered international criticism, with the League of Nations issuing a report in 1929 that accused Liberia of using an institution more-or-less equivalent to slavery. In 1930, a Commission of Enquiry established by the League of Nations produced a series of findings and recommendations on plantation labor in the country. It found that the system of forced recruitment in Liberia was sanctioned by the Vice President through a clear chain of command. This chain of command passed from the Vice President's order, through the district commissioners to the paramount chiefs and then to village chiefs.²¹

Growth of the Rubber Industry and Emergence of a National Labor Market. There is some difference of opinion as to when the system of forced conscription of labor in the rubber industry ended. Some argue that it declined in significance following the implementation of President Tubman's Open Door policy after the end of World War II,²² while others argue that it was still flourishing well into the 1960s.²³ What is undisputed, however, is the fact that Firestone's economic success, in combination with Tubman's Open Door policy, led to the emergence of more foreign rubber concessions with Americo-Liberian investment that in turn led to the creation of a national labor market: The existing system of forced conscription of labor was expensive to manage and output was inefficient. Given the number of new rubber plantations being established in the country, it was determined that moving to a national labor market would be less expensive and more cost efficient.

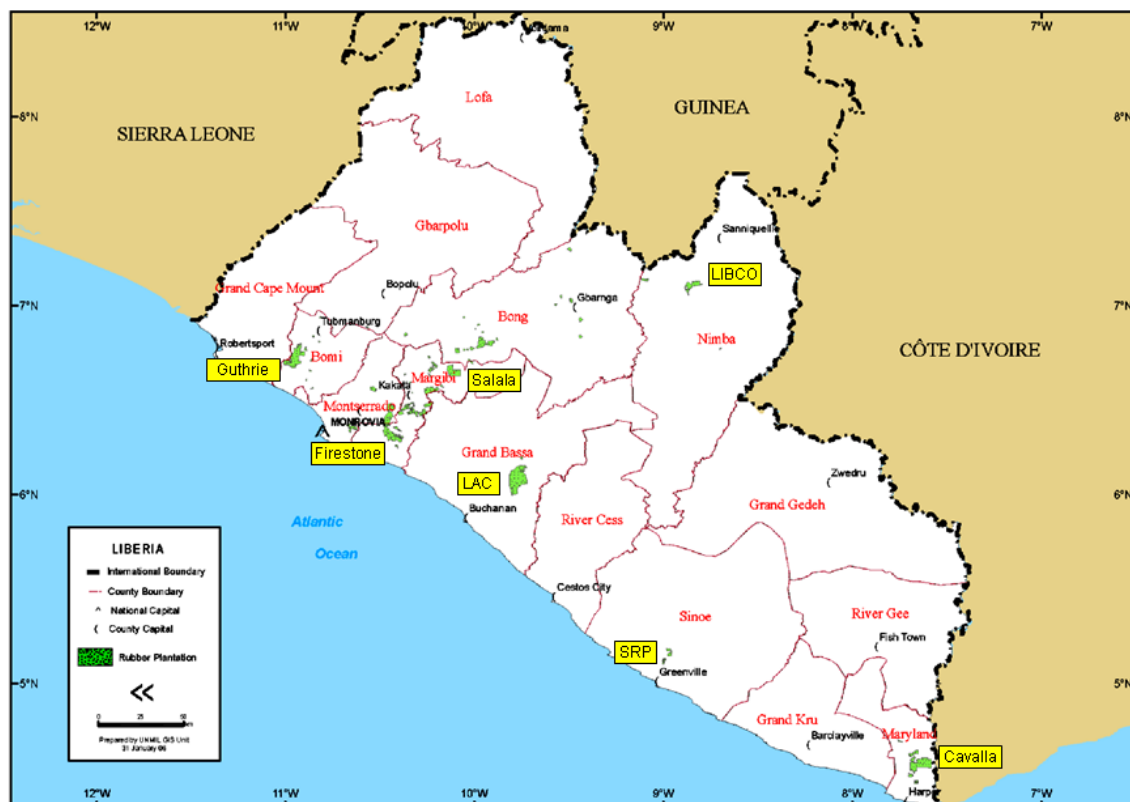
Since the arrival of Firestone in 1926 rubber plantations have been the single largest source of employment in Liberia. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war more than 30 percent of the total national workforce was employed on rubber plantations, with the overall majority of these both illiterate and unskilled.²⁴ However, even if Firestone was the pace-setter and lead implementer, what happened later in this sector cannot be understood if we do not consider the role that successive Liberian governments and elites have played. Initially they welcomed Firestone and created the system of forcibly recruited labor that was needed to staff the plantation; later the same governments and elites manipulated wage levels. The main reason for this was that Liberian-owned farms were less productive than their internationally-owned counterparts. This gave the national elite a clear excuse to keep wages as low as possible. Thus, even if a national labor market did emerge after the end of the Second World War, this was a labor market in which the national salary level in the sector was manipulated to serve the interests of the Liberian elite.²⁵

A Profile of Major Plantations in the Sector. The production and processing of rubber is an agricultural activity. Rubber plantations exist in a rural landscape, but at the same time are separate, as they have little in common with ordinary rural life in the country. Plantations are almost like small states with their own urban centers.

The boundary of the plantation is well-demarcated (particularly in the case of LAC and Firestone). There is an internal infrastructure, several communities, water supply, and schools and health centers that were built by plantation owners for the plantation population. Most people living and working on the plantations leave the grounds periodically, with some leaving daily and others less often. In theory, one could live their whole life on a plantation without ever leaving it.

Large-scale rubber plantations operating in Liberia include:

- Firestone – near Harbel, Margibi County
- Liberia Agricultural Company (LAC) – near Buchanan, Grand Bassa County
- Guthrie (also known as Goodrich plantation) near Baha, Bomi County
- Liberia Company (LIBCO) – near Cocopa, Nimba County
- Salala Rubber Corporation – near Nienka, Margibi County
- Cavalla (initially part of the Firestone concession) – near Harper, Maryland County
- Sinoe Rubber Corporation (SRC) – near Greenville, Sinoe County



Rubber plantations in Liberia.²⁶

During the civil war, some of these plantations were abandoned or taken over by rebel forces. Poorly managed during that time, many plantations emerged from the civil war needing significant investment to restore operations. Firestone and LAC were relatively unscathed and have continued to be the two largest producers in the country, producing 3000-4000 and 2000 tons of rubber per month, respectively, in July 2007. In comparison, two smaller plantations - Guthrie and Cavalla –produced 4,000 tons each for the entire year of 2006.²⁷

Hundreds of smallholder farms sell raw rubber to these company-owned plantations. In fact, many household farmers in Liberia note that rubber is currently their most important cash crop.²⁸

The Production Chain of Rubber. The production of rubber revolves around the life cycle of the tree from which the rubber (or latex) originates. This means that the production process for rubber requires the trees; people who can plant, maintain and harvest them; and the equipment needed for this work. As a production process, this is extremely labor intensive, and requires a well-qualified workforce.

In general terms, the production of rubber involves three major stages: planting, production (or tapping) and processing. In each stage, several specific tasks are involved, and each relates to the life-cycle of the tree. The rubber tree is fragile, particularly in the period immediately after planting and up to when it reaches maturity at seven or eight years of age. The tree can be tapped carefully from the age of two or three, but its prime years of production, if well-maintained, are from seven to 25 years.²⁹

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
New trees ¹	■																								
Weeding and pruning	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Tapping							■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Processing							■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

¹ Nursery, clear land, dig holes, plant

Table 2. Rubber production process in the lifecycle of a tree

The lifecycle of a rubber field is therefore defined by three distinct phases. First, as seedlings, the trees are in a nursery, while a field is being prepared for them. When the seedlings are ready, these young trees are transplanted to the prepared field. Second, for seven to eight years, apart from periodic gentle tapping, the main activity on the field is pruning and weeding. Third, after this seven to eight year period, the trees are ready for full production. At this stage, they will be tapped all year round. However, the peak periods of the season last from the heavy rains of May to September and the lighter rains of October to January. Production is considerably lower in the dry period lasting from February to April.

Tapping rubber trees. The clearing of land, breeding in the nursery, and the weeding and pruning of fields and young trees are integral elements to the production process. The most labor-intensive stage, however, is the tapping of trees. This involves each tree being “tapped” with a cup that is attached to it just below the cut made in the tree’s bark to collect the latex. In a normal working day, tappers will collect “cup-lumps” from the previous day – that is, the latex that has poured into the cup overnight – then clean the cup and return to collect the new latex later that same day. At the end of the day (or alternately after a whole field has been cleared), the tapper will carry both the fresh latex and cup-lumps to the nearest field station for weighing. At the field station, acid is added to the latex as the first step in producing rubber. At this stage, there are safety concerns for workers during the collection and production process, with injuries in the field including eye and skin damage from spilling latex; snakebites; back pain and muscle cramps from carrying heavy loads to the field stations; and exposure to the acid that is added to the latex at the field station. The particular health and safety concerns of note on LAC and Cocopa will be discussed below.

From the field stations, rubber is collected and sent on for further processing. On a large plantation such as LAC, this work is done on-site at a processing facility that cleans the rubber over several stages. This is followed by heat treatment and packing the newly-produced raw material into blocks ready for export. Smaller plantations like Cocopa or individual small-holders will sell their semi-processed rubber to larger plantations (Firestone or LAC) for this second phase of production. This means that factory-based processing in Liberia only takes place at Firestone and LAC. The majority of the labor force in the Liberian rubber sector therefore works in the fields, with the majority of these working as tappers.

Rubber Markets. Nearly half of all natural rubber output is used for tire production; and about 60 percent ends up in the automotive market as a whole, which includes belts, hoses and seals. Natural rubber is also used for gloves, mats, condoms, hot water bottles, and protective clothing.³⁰

Approximately 90 percent of rubber production takes place in Asia, with Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, China and Vietnam accounting for 88 percent of global production. Liberia accounts for approximately 64 percent of quantity and 72 percent of value for American rubber imports, with Vietnam and Thailand also being significant sources.³¹

Today natural rubber accounts for just 44 percent of world consumption; synthetic rubber accounts for the rest. However, natural rubber's environment-friendly nature, biodegradability, and lack of dependence on oil pricing have led to an increase in natural versus synthetic rubber in recent years.³²

Liberia is an exporter of raw rubber (a relatively low value commodity), and has no secondary or tertiary rubber processing activities. While tire manufacturing in Liberia has been discussed for decades, rubber is not the primary ingredient in tires. Tire composition varies by manufacturer, so production of this kind in the country is

unlikely.³³ In 2006, total natural rubber exports from Liberia reached 100,000 tons, of which two-thirds was block rubber and one-third liquid latex. Firestone was responsible for over 60 percent of total rubber exports.³⁴

People

Staff on rubber plantations have a salary income and are normally given a formal letter of employment in which they are categorized as either junior or senior. Employee, in contrast, is the term used to describe unskilled laborers who have the potential to become staff. They do not receive a formal letter of employment, but go through an interview and medical examination. Successful candidates fill out relevant paperwork at the company's Personnel and Legal Affairs Office and are issued an ID card. Contractors follow a similar pattern but are "hired" on a contractual basis (at LAC, for three months; shorter at Cocopa).

Employees work on the plantation on a permanent contract. *Employee tappers* have a daily wage that is higher than that of *contractor tappers*. These employees work in small teams under a headman. In such teams there may also be *contractors*. Contractors work mainly on a daily salary, but some are also employed over a longer period of time, such as a week or a month. Thus, contractors fulfill the need for an additional pool of labor when it is needed. Their engagement is often seasonal: In periods when there are lots of tasks to be fulfilled, contractors will receive work. However, in periods when tasks can be covered by employees, contractors will be unemployed.

To add to this complexity, not all contractors are hired under the same conditions. Some contractors are hired directly by staff. These are called *management contractors*, and receive salaries directly from the plantation. Another category of contractors is *sub-contractors*, or individuals hired by other contractors that do not work formally for the plantation. Rather, they work for the contractor, even though their day-to-day worksite is the plantation. To provide an example, under these circumstances, a management contractor may take on a specific task, for example tapping a certain field or number of trees or clearing an area for replanting. He or she would agree with management on a certain fee for the task. The management contractor would then hire a group of workers (sub-contractors) to conduct this work. Those contracted in this way work for the management contractor and not for the plantation. This means that the management contractor is an independent "entrepreneur" who provides certain services to the plantation when needed.

Research indicated that management contractors tend to be wealthier or better-connected. Sub-contractors come from neighboring rural communities and are primarily young men needing or wanting cash income for a specific period of time. These sub-contractors are generally paid the least for their work, with wages lower than the daily rate set by management for contract workers.

Policies




Government Policies. Liberia has laws that regulate the rubber sector, including a minimum working age, statutory minimum wages, occupational safety and health standards, and laws against child labor and child trafficking. However, there are important gaps and exemptions for rubber workers in the legislative framework, including the right of plantation managers to summary dismissal and the absence of a maximum limit on hours of work.³⁵

The Liberian government has ratified a number of UN human rights treaties that set out the framework for engagement between the government and the Liberian private sector. These include the:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol; and
- ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

The following table shows Liberia's ratification of ILO labor standards and other international labor and human rights protocols.

Table 3: Liberia Labor Laws³⁶

	C138, Minimum Age	No
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	16
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	12
	Free Public Education	Yes

Liberian labor laws are poorly enforced, due in large part to insufficient resources: In 2009, an ILO study found that Liberia had less than 50 labor inspectors to promote compliance with the country's labor laws.³⁷

A submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council in April 2010 by the UK-based Institute for Human Rights and Business asserted that while Liberia's gradual legal reform follows a decade of civil war, the country's private sector continues to suffer from a number of shortfalls that affect Liberia's human rights obligations under international law. With regard to the rubber sector, the submission highlighted the following three points:

- Inadequate monitoring of safety standards, including protection of workers from hazardous materials;
- Use of child labor; and
- Reliance on an informal and casually-employed workforce, resulting in less favorable working and living conditions compared to those formally employed by plantation companies.³⁸

Corporate Social Responsibility in Liberia. Large multinational corporations are increasingly rolling out corporate responsibility (CSR) programs in Liberia.

Firestone, the country's largest employer with over 6,100 employees,³⁹ reports having invested USD 107 million in CSR initiatives in the country since 2006. Firestone provides employees with free housing, medical care and education for workers' children. It has built 2,500 homes, operates 26 schools that teach 16,000 children, and runs nine health care facilities that treat employees and their families as well as members of the community. The company has also distributed more than 2.21 million free rubber tree saplings to Liberian farmers.⁴⁰ The company describes these expenditures in some circumstances as CSR, while others would describe them as part of their legal, concession, union contract, or other regulatory obligations.

Other multinationals active in Liberia also have CSR programs. ArcelorMittal, as part of its mining development agreement with the Liberian government, contributes annually to a County Social Development Fund that is managed and disbursed by the communities affected by its operations. Projects include the rehabilitation of roads, schools, and hospitals.⁴¹ ArcelorMittal is also collaborating with the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) to establish a CSR forum in Liberia.⁴²

Government companies also conduct CSR activities. The Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, a public entity, has a CSR program providing grants to organizations in education, health, agriculture, and community development.⁴³

In the past three years, four major companies have promised a total of USD 2.6 billion in palm oil investment, with the largest pledge from Golden Veroleum, which announced an investment of USD 1.6 billion in 2010. The Malaysia-based palm oil company Sime Darby pledged USD 800 million for a 63-year concession. All of the palm oil companies are members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), an

international certification program headquartered in Malaysia that unites producers, processors, manufacturers, retailers, banks and NGOs to develop and implement global standards for sustainable palm oil.⁴⁴

The Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI) began in 2005. Liberia was the first country to extend the scope of the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) beyond mining to include forestry operations. Each year, the LEITI publishes payments and receipts from the oil and gas, mining, forestry and agriculture industries to promote transparency and reduce the risk of misappropriation of funds. The 3rd LEITI Reconciliation, published in May 2011, shows a total of USD 55.8 million in tax receipts from 121 companies, with nearly half of this amount provided by the mining industry.⁴⁵

Programs

In 2010, USAID developed the "Rubber Industry Master Plan 2010 - 2040: A National Agenda for Rubber Sector Development" in collaboration with the Liberian Ministry of Agriculture. The master plan sets up the Rubber Development Fund Incorporated (RDFI), a joint public-private organization that will implement all master plan strategies. The program will rehabilitate, replant and expand Liberian smallholdings with new rubber clones. The plan calls for plant certification and the introduction of best practices. The plan's goal for Liberia is to convert at least 10 percent of its raw rubber and 30 percent of its rubber wood to value added products over the next 15 years.⁴⁶ Since 2006, the donor community has provided significant humanitarian assistance to rebuild Liberian society. Traditional bilateral donors such as the United States, the European Commission and Germany disbursed, respectively, USD 103 million, USD 88 million and USD 45 million in 2010; for capacity and infrastructure development and technical assistance.⁴⁷

Since the end of Liberia's civil war in 2003, the United States has contributed over USD 1 billion in bilateral assistance and more than USD 1 billion in assessed contributions to UNMIL. The US Agency for International Development's (USAID) rebuilding strategy focuses on reintegration and rehabilitation. Efforts include national and community infrastructure projects, training and education, promoting business development, health care, and anti-corruption.⁴⁸

A table in Appendix shows donor assistance by year for all major donors from 2004-2007.

Working Conditions in the Rubber Supply Chain in Liberia

For years, controversy has plagued the rubber sector, with the majority of the attention on the Firestone plantation. In 2005, the International Labor Rights Fund filed a case against Bridgestone in the US District Court of California alleging "forced labor, the modern equivalent of slavery" on the Firestone plantation in Harbel, Liberia.⁴⁹

In 2005, the Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU) published a report asserting that workers at the Firestone plantation regularly worked 12 hours a day, with very low wages and frequent demands to double output with no increase in pay (“double tapping days”). Workers were expected to tap 750-800 trees each, and had to carry two latex buckets weighing 70 pounds each to assigned storage tanks roughly 1.6 kilometers away. The quotas were too high for many workers to meet by themselves, and so workers were bringing their children along, or hiring subcontractors, in order to meet the quota and earn their daily minimum wage. Schools were reportedly of poor quality, and did not extend into high school. Living conditions were squalid, with poor sanitation and no electricity. SAMFU issued a follow-up report in 2008 in which the organization asserted that Firestone had made some changes, but that problems persisted, including inadequate schools and housing and sanitation, high quotas and very low wages, long hours, health and safety violations, and the continued reliance on manual transportation for tapped latex.

In 2006, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) released the results of a study by its Human Rights and Protection Section (HRPS) of the human rights situation on five of the seven major rubber plantations in Liberia.⁵⁰ Entitled “Human Rights in Liberia’s Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future”, the findings of this study included that workers were subject to hazardous working conditions without proper training or safety equipment; child labor was common – due to increasing workloads/quotas placed on tappers in light of diminishing productivity of rubber trees, inadequate or inaccessible educational facilities, and the fact that children of subcontractors cannot go to plantation schools; and that “many workers are not represented by trade unions, they do not receive fair wages or equal remuneration, and do not have the right to strike”. Extremely poor living conditions and sanitation, and inadequate or restricted-access medical facilities, were also noted with concern.

In 2009, the ILRF published “Firestone and Violations of Core Labor Rights in Liberia,” alleging that Firestone had violated all of the ILO’s fundamental labor rights on its rubber plantation in the country.⁵¹

In 2008 and 2010, landmark collective agreements were signed between the new leadership of the Firestone Agricultural Workers’ Union (FAWUL) and Firestone Rubber Plantation. The 2008 collective bargaining agreement reduced quotas by 25 percent and banned child labor on the plantation.⁵² In the 2010 agreement, FAWUL negotiated a commitment with Firestone to “change the current mode of transportation” that consisted of rubber tappers carrying two metal buckets, weighing up to 150 pounds, suspended from a stick across their shoulders. Beginning in 2010, a new system was instituted in which rubber is collected in plastic buckets which are picked up by a tractor trailer and hauled to weigh stations.⁵³ In the agreement, FAWUL also negotiated with Firestone to provide children living on the plantation with better schools.⁵⁴

Methodology & Limitations

Background

The research for this report was carried out in 2010 and 2011. Verité contracted with Norway-based Fafo, an independent and multidisciplinary research foundation focusing on social welfare and trade policy, labor and living conditions, public health, migration and integration and transnational security and development issues. The lead Fafo researchers for this study have extensive labor rights and related research and development experience in Liberia and elsewhere in Central and West Africa.

Fafo implemented the research collaboratively with the University of Liberia, represented by the Institute for Population Studies, with assistance from the Liberian Institute for Statistics and Geo-Services (LISGIS). This partnership enabled the research to benefit from the insights and experiences of a range of experts with local, national, and international experience and perspective on rubber, Liberia, and labor research more generally. This was particularly important in light of the security, political, and other sensitivities in Liberia.

Fafo designed and developed the research methodology, and implemented the field research. Verification and analysis of field results, and the writing up of the findings, were similarly performed by Fafo. Verité reviewed and edited the final research report in accordance with Verité's framework for evaluating indicators and vulnerabilities to labor exploitation.

The research was an exploratory study based on participatory qualitative methods, including individual semi-structured interviews, life-history approaches, and focus group discussions with stakeholders that included workers, their household members, management and owners. These methods are discussed in further detail below. The critical importance of the rubber sector to the Liberian economy, and the still-nascent effort to restore the sector to a healthy and productive state following Liberia's 14-year civil war, meant that any research into social conditions on rubber plantations would be highly sensitive. Preliminary research and expert consultations suggested that, to be successful, the study should be small in scale, in order to leave a light footprint and not raise undue concern or resistance to the research; and should employ semi-structured interview techniques using open-ended questions and a flexible set of research objectives.

The ILO's core labor conventions and Liberian labor law served as the framework for the study. Verité's analytical methodology examined data from the standpoint of discrete indicators of labor conditions, and additionally from the perspective of how the "five P's" – product, people, place, policies, and programs – contribute to or ameliorate situations of labor abuse.

This research did not focus on the Firestone plantation, in order to identify other, less-explored cases that might bring to light circumstances in the sector that were created or

exacerbated by the Liberia's 14-year civil war, and to provide more information on conditions in parts of the country that have less media and research attention.

The two plantations originally selected for research were Guthrie and Sinoe, both of which experienced significant rebel activity during and after the end of the civil war. However, following an initial trip by researchers to Liberia in March 2010, it became clear that these plantations were undergoing significant restructuring that would make it impossible to conduct the kind of research envisioned by the project.⁵⁵ After thorough discussions with research partners, it was decided to refocus the project on the Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) plantation 20 miles north of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County and the Cocopa Rubber Company plantation in Nimba County. Cocopa is located about five hour's drive from Monrovia, fifteen miles from the Guinean border and thirty miles from the Ivorian border.

Selection of these two plantations provided the opportunity to research conditions on one of the two biggest producers of rubber in the country – LAC – as well as one of the smaller company-owned producers (Cocopa). LAC has a labor force of about 3000 workers (regular and seasonal) and a total population of 25,000, making it second only in population and size of workforce to the Firestone plantation. Cocopa is an example of a smaller, but still company-operated plantation. It has a population of 6000, with roughly 1200 workers in total.

Selection of these two plantations also offered examples of different patterns of ownership: The LAC plantation has been in almost constant operation since it was established in 1957 by the Italian company Uniroyal. This plantation is currently under the management of the Belgian company SOCFIN. In contrast, the Cocopa plantation was taken over by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) as late as January 2007, with management handed over to LIBCO, a Liberian company, three months later. After years of neglect and mismanagement during the war and immediate post-war period, LIBCO is currently replanting trees, hiring new rubber tappers and initiating parallel cooperative projects with local farmers. The main objectives of these initiatives are to increase output and minimize theft of rubber in support of both workers and local farmers.

Finally, these two plantations offered a geographically diverse sample, with one plantation located near the capital, Monrovia; and the other in a rural and distant location, close to Liberia's borders with Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea.

Prior to conducting the fieldwork that went into this report, it was necessary to obtain permission from the Liberian Ministry of Labor. This is a requirement specified by law, although primarily a formality. The research team also informed local stakeholders about the study and when it would be implemented. Management and union leaders at both plantations were contacted before research visits. Research began with a management meeting prior to site visits around the plantation.

Research Timing

The preparatory research phase, which included literature review and expert consultation, development of draft research design and instruments, and identification of research sites, was conducted from late 2009 to early 2010. An initial scoping visit to the field, followed by two rounds of field research, were implemented from March through November 2010. Data analysis and report writing were then completed by December 2011.

Workers were interviewed about their employment over the previous year.

Research Methodology and Field Work

The field research undertaken for this report builds on extensive existing knowledge of Liberia, the country's history and the role of rubber in that history. A literature review was conducted that supported the fieldwork and strengthened the final report following data collection and analysis. As noted above, the principal authors of the report have worked extensively on Liberia over the last decade and conducted numerous in-country research projects in recent years.

This report is based on participatory qualitative methods. These take the form of individual semi-structured interviews,⁵⁶ life-history approaches, and focus group discussions with stakeholders that included workers, their household members, management and owners. Semi-structured interviews sought to understand the socio-cultural environment in which workers live on the plantation, exploring their individual stories, peoples' livelihoods and the impact of labor and working conditions on workers and their families. Appendix 2 offers the set of guiding research questions that informed these qualitative, exploratory research methods.

The majority of Liberians are not fluent in English as it is spoken internationally. They speak local languages (of which there are at least sixteen in the country) and most speak some Liberian English. For this report, interviews were conducted in Liberian English, or field assistants served as translators when respondents spoke only local languages.

Results were verified by sharing findings within the research team and cross-analyzing input from different workers and from different sources (e.g., interviews versus focus groups or observation) to check for coherence and consistency of findings.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The informants that were interviewed were not randomly selected. Rather, they were chosen on the basis of who and what they represented, with the aim of achieving diversity in representation. The research team sought informants that were male and female, young and old, and representatives of different social, economic and political groups within worker communities. Initial communications and interviews with workers

increased the team's understanding of the composition of the community and functioned to guide the process of selecting informants.

The aim of semi-structured interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the living and working conditions on the plantation and the factors influencing those conditions. To conduct the interviews in a systematic manner, researchers were trained on interview methodologies by the lead researcher.

Semi-structured interviews were flexible so that interviewers could explore topics that were brought up during open-ended questioning. Interviewers were instructed to encourage interviewees to tell their own story about living and working conditions with as few interruptions as possible. In order to help interviewee advance their stories, interviewers were instructed to use simple follow-up questions such as:⁵⁷

- Why?
- What happened?
- What did you do about it?
- What did you think about it?
- Did anyone help you?
- Why did you/did you not turn to that particular person or institution for assistance?
- Could you have done anything differently?
- What would have made it easier for you?
- How did this affect you or your family and community?
- How do you think this could have been different?

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were also utilized to explore workers' own perspectives of the social and economic conditions on plantations and the impact these have on their livelihood opportunities. An ethnographic life-history approach was used to conduct these interviews.⁵⁸ Guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, the point of departure was the informant's location at the time of discussion, e.g., the physical location or the site of the interview. From there, the interviewer and informant traced backwards through the informant's life and experience. The aim of the in-depth interview was to establish the chain of events leading the informant(s) to the particular place where the session was occurring.⁵⁹

Focus-Group Discussions

We approached the focus group discussions by organizing informants into small groups to discuss topics presented to them by a facilitator. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain a more nuanced view of the topic at hand, gaining a full appreciation of its various dimensions. We used this method in order to obtain additional comments and insights from informants on information that might not have been articulated or obtained using other methods. We also expected the focus groups to serve as another way to confirm information received from other approaches. We found these groups valuable

as a way to obtain information about people's values or the reasoning they use pertaining to certain issues. At another level, the focus group can be an effective way of minimizing "individualistic bias." While interviewing individuals reveals a person's particular views and character, a focus group identifies social and cultural perspectives that are articulated through the interaction and discussion of a larger group.

We chose to design our focus group discussions using relatively small numbers, between five and 12 people. This was based on the goal of finding the optimal size that would ensure continuous discussion and a generation of ideas, but without everyone talking at once. Our focus group sessions lasted for one or two hours, but we avoided using firm time limits and sought to be sensitive to the level of interest and availability of participants. Throughout this research project, we utilized both carefully planned focus groups, as well as others organized in a more open-ended way.

Informant Profiles

For this report, researchers conducted 98 formal interviews and 20 focus group sessions.⁶⁰ Twelve of the focus group sessions were conducted at LAC and eight at Cocopa. These sessions had no fewer than five and no more than 12 participants, with eight having only male members, two only female and the remaining 10 having a mix of both. Three managers and one union representative were interviewed at LAC, while two managers and one union representative were interviewed at Cocopa. Many more individuals participated in smaller, informal conversations that occurred throughout plantation visits. Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the persons interviewed.

Table 4. Persons interviewed⁶¹

Profile	LAC	Cocopa	Total
Male	36	22	58
Female	32	8	40
Age 18-35	43	23	66
Age 36-60	16	6	22
Age 60+	9	1	10
Number of years at the plantation 1-10	37	23	60
Number of years at the plantation 20+	31	7	38
Employees (tappers)	59	28	87
Sub-contractors (tappers)	9	2	11
Total	68	30	98

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to underscore that the field research for this report was conducted according to the ethical guidelines articulated by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH). Names and identifying details have been changed or removed when using information gained from interviews or observations in the field, except where interviewees granted permission for attribution. Informed consent was secured before each interview, and all interviews

were terminated if or when this was requested by the interviewee. Furthermore, a concern for gender – including consideration of gender relations and differential impacts on men and women – was integrated into all project components. This included taking gender into account in both the data collection and analysis phases so that informants from different genders were sought and gendered approaches were employed. The authors would also like to extend their appreciation to the Liberian partner institutions involved in this project and to the workers and management of the LAC and Cocopa plantations. These institutions not only facilitated the fieldwork; they participated in the research in a professional and timely manner, ensuring that the project could be implemented smoothly and efficiently.

Limitations

In addition to field research, this report draws extensively on literature about Liberia in general and rubber in Liberia in particular. What is presented here is an effort to construct a clear narrative using diverse methods that blend field observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and a literature review.

It should be noted, however, that this study was limited in both time and scope due to the resources available.

The sample universe for this study was drawn from two of Liberia's seven large-scale rubber plantations. As discussed above, the Firestone plantation was not included in the study. While the two plantations selected for this research have many characteristics representative of large rubber plantations in Liberia, this study was not designed to be nationally representative, and no claims are made in this regard.

A key limitation of the study was the absence of smallholder farms in the sample. A variety of factors made the study of smallholder farms infeasible for the research, including (among others) time and resource constraints, challenges to access and the establishment of a proper sample universe, and the logistical difficulty of travel amongst these farms.

Non-random sampling methods were used in the selection of both interviewees and research sites, and sample sizes were basically arbitrary. That said, clear patterns did emerge from the data collected.

Finally, it is important to note again that Liberia has a long history of mismanagement, authoritarian rule, and corruption that has been followed more recently by a devastating 14 year civil war. The vast majority of Liberians are poor and live under challenging economic and social circumstances. Living and working conditions on rubber plantations should be seen through this contemporary and historical lens.

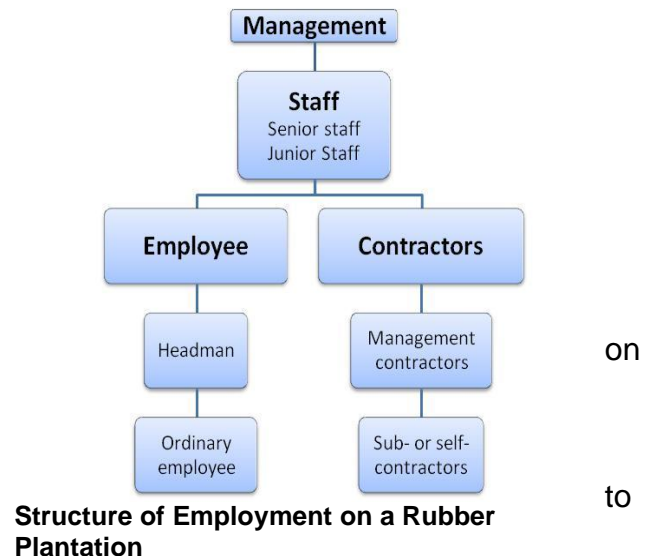
Research Findings

Introduction

With a respective population of 25,000 and 6,000, LAC and Cocopa are major population centers in Liberia.⁶² According to managers at LAC and Cocopa, new workers arrive at the plantations every month seeking employment.

Research indicated that the majority of workers at both LAC and Cocopa live within the grounds of the plantation. Workers are categorized as *staff*, *employees* and *contractors*, in addition to the *management team*.

Staff perform administrative tasks. Most staff members have been recruited externally for their current position (e.g., from Monrovia or from Firestone), based on their skills and qualifications. Informants reported that, in some cases, employees had begun working on the plantation as contractors or employees, and worked up to the position of staff.⁶³



Labor Relations and Unions

As mentioned earlier, on both plantations studied, there were active local chapters of GAAWUL. The relationship between the union and the presence or absence of forced labor conditions on the plantations was not a focus of the Verité study. A brief summary of the nature of relations between the union and the workers is offered here, as background and contextual information. No observations on the effectiveness of union protection are offered, as this was not a research objective.

Research indicated that all regular employees are members of their respective local chapters, even if union membership is not officially compulsory. Both the respective union leaders and management presented their relations to researchers as good and cordial, but there were indications of underlying issues of tension and dissent between management and union leaders, and – in the case of LAC – between the union rank and file and their local leaders. On the latter, informants talked of current disagreement on a number of issues, including housing, education and medical services.

Cocopa Union. At Cocopa, tensions between management and the union were described as mainly connected to disappointment and unmet expectations in the current leadership. The current manager of the plantation, and owner of the LIBCO Company, belongs to the Tripp family that originally established Cocopa. Naturally hopes were

high when a Tripp, whose great grand uncle was the original Tripp that once established the plantation, returned from the United States to reclaim his ancestor's plantation.⁶⁴ The current management team arrived in June 2010, after Supreme Court decisions in 2007 gave the Cocopa concession back to the original owners, after the plantation had been in the hands of government ministers during the Taylor years and ex-combatants after the end of the civil war in August 2003.

According to a union representative, there is open dialogue with management: "We talk every day, but there is too much talk and too little is happening, making the union look bad in front of the members." Management reported to researchers that they took over a decaying plantation and progress has thus been slow.

According to a management representative, Cocopa suffered from mismanagement and financial corruption. Management acknowledged the need to build new schools and clinics as well as rehabilitate workers' dwellings, but stated that there was only so much that could be done before the plantation started to yield a real and sustained profit over time. At the time of the interviews, current management had not been in the position for very long .

Other respondents observed that new management had fed early expectations by setting unrealistic timelines for promised improvements without making clear the challenges of rehabilitating core operations in order to earn revenue to pay for social investments. The result has been a sentiment voiced by many that the new management is hiding things, covering up, and unwilling to stand by its social commitments and their respective financial costs. This has given rise to some tension, but not yet any open confrontations between workers and management.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement at LAC. Tensions were higher at the LAC plantation, stemming from a new three-year Collective Bargaining Agreement that came into effect on July 1, 2010 between the Liberian Agriculture Workers Union (LAWU) and LAC. A focus group was organized to explore this issue in more depth. The findings from that focus group are presented here.

The collective agreement had stipulated that the "premium (e.g., the top pay that goes into effect if workers exceed their daily quota) would be based on a three year plan according to the reproductive life of the rubber tree." Local workers were very disappointed with their first "take-home-pay" under the new CBA when they received their July salary on 9 August 2010. Focus group discussants reported feeling that LAC management, and also their union leaders, had "stolen" from them on the basis of what they felt was an "unfair distribution of the premium." The result was a wildcat strike that lasted from the 10th to 17th of August 2010. The strike became chaotic. Some structures and plantation equipment were burned and most of the management team fled the plantation after they had called for the assistance of the nearest UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) troops stationed in the area.⁶⁵ Focus group participants made it clear that they had never intended to harm anybody physically.

After seven days of unrest, the workers agreed to return to work after the LAC, the LAWU and the Ministry of Labor promised to look into their grievances. As far as researchers were able to establish from interviews, both with tappers and their union representatives, no force or threats of force or dismissal were used to stop the strike. In the end, a settlement was negotiated in which parties agreed to push the issues into future talks based on collective investigations by LAC, LAWU and the Ministry of Labor.

Following the above description of the workforce and union-worker-management relations at LAC and Cocopa, research findings on working conditions at the two plantations are presented below.

Findings

As discussed in Methodology & Limitations, this study was small-scale, exploratory and impressionistic. Research probed for indicators of exploitative working conditions at LAC and Cocopa, including indicators of forced labor. By virtue of the semi-structured, open-ended interview techniques employed, research also captured other issues of working and living conditions of concern to informants themselves.

Research detected several potential indicators of forced labor at LAC and Cocopa – including forced overtime, financial penalties, and debt connected to an obligation to work. Although the presence of these indicators signals an increased risk for forced labor, each case must be assessed individually to determine the interplay of indicators and the context to determine whether or not it rises to the level of forced labor.

These and other working and living conditions explored by the study are described below.

Quotas, Cash Benefits and Financial Penalties

Tappers are paid on the basis of what they produce, but there are also quotas that they must reach. If they do not reach them, not only are they paid less, but they may also be subject to financial penalties.

At Cocopa, the quota is now based on the number of trees tapped per day. Each tapper is supposed to tap 300 trees per day, and most interviewed workers reported being satisfied with this quota. The union at Cocopa likewise reported being satisfied with the current quota. Prior to August 2010, the quota was 500 trees per day.



Payment according to productivity

There is a “minimum wage” of USD 3.25 per day,⁶⁶ but at Cocopa the term is somewhat misleading: The minimum wage only comes into play when a tapper is on leave; for example, following a work-related accident or during a maternity leave entitlement of three months. Leave of absence due to ordinary forms of illness that are not work-related is covered by 60 percent of the minimum wage, plus half a bag of rice. For those that work, there is no minimum wage; it depends entirely on what workers produce. Workers are paid 125 x USD 0.085 per pound of latex collected (based on the agreement negotiated between management and the union), which, according to the union, gives an average monthly income of USD 125. This payment scheme was introduced by the union. Researchers did not detect that penalties were levied by management against contractors or sub-contractors that did not meet their quotas.

At LAC, each tapper is required to tap between 400 and 500 trees per day, depending on the terrain and other conditions; but here there is a minimum wage for all those employed by the plantation. The daily minimum wage is USD 3.60 (from July 2011, USD 6.40). According to interviews, if the tapper exceeds his or her daily quota of trees, a positive premium comes into effect. Alternatively, if a tapper is unable to fulfill his or her quota, a negative premium may come into effect. An example of this would be if there were no “good” reasons for not fulfilling the quota. Although other factors come into play, the negative premium is calculated at a daily rate of: USD 3.60/total number of trees x untapped trees of quota = negative premium. Older workers reported to researchers that the quotas were set too high to achieve in the time allotted. At LAC, there is also a daily rate for the contract workers of USD 2.50 per day.⁶⁷ It remains unclear from the research how the new Liberian Labor Law will affect contract workers, as they are non-unionized and therefore not part of any collective bargaining framework.

Research indicated that the premium at LAC is quite important as it makes it easier to pay back loans taken up in the past (see Debt below). This was mainly an issue at LAC; as the Cocopa plantation, at the time of research, was not giving loans to staff and employees.

Management and workers reported frequent disagreement over what constitutes a fair quota, and on what basis it should be estimated. There are several methods for this estimation, and changes have recently been implemented at both LAC and Cocopa. Table 5 below provides a breakdown of employee views concerning the fairness of quota levels at LAC and Cocopa.

Table 5. Views about quotas among those interviewed at LAC & Cocopa

	Too high	About right	No answer	Total
LAC	23	40	5	68
18-35 years of age	3	36	4	43
36-60 years of age	11	4	1	16
60+ years of age	9	0	0	9
Cocopa	5	21	4	30
18-35 years of age	1	20	2	23
36-60 years of age	3	1	2	6
60+ years of age	1	0	0	1
Total	28	61	9	98

Research indicated that the quota system at LAC is transparent in-so-far as it is well understood by the tapper. However, the system is also quite complex given that it may change from one field of trees to another, depending on whether the terrain is hilly or flat and the age of the trees. Younger trees are shorter and more easily accessible, but one also needs to be much more careful when tapping them. Workers on younger trees must work harder to achieve their premium, as these trees yield less. This means that quotas and the opportunity to tap beyond the daily target to achieve the premium can change from one day to another, depending on the type of trees being tapped. Some workers, in informal conversations, reported that certain headmen and their teams were favored by junior management by being assigned flat fields with high-producing trees more often than other teams. However, research did not detect evidence of systematic bias in favor of particular groups of workers, or that senior management was involved in such bias.

In sum, research found that there is frequent disagreement over setting the quotas, and that some favoritism may be involved in tree assignments that, in turn, affect the ability to meet the quota. That said, the majority of workers interviewed reported to field researchers that the existing quota on their plantation was “about right”. Verité recommends that the relationship between quotas and hours of work, and the use of quotas as an incentive or coercive mechanism, be the subject of further investigative study. This topic would benefit from in-depth research that examines the ways in which quotas are applied similarly or differently at various plantations, and among different categories of workers; how factors such as tree assignments, weighing and payment mechanisms and the overall level of the quota affect take-home pay and hours of work.

Working Hours and Forced Overtime

According to interviews, all workers are supposed to work eight hours per day, but 12 hour shifts are not uncommon. Almost half of the 98 respondents reported working longer than eight hours per day. Extended hours beyond the number allowed by law can be linked to the daily quotas established by the plantation: If a tapper does not fulfill the daily quota, s/he is paid less and may be subject to financial penalties. On the other hand, once the quota is fulfilled the worker is free to leave earlier.⁶⁸

Income depends importantly on hours worked, since, all else being equal, workers will earn more money if they work more hours. Some workers reported the desire to make as much money as possible as a driving force. At Cocopa, the union leader mentioned a tapper that had earned USD 407 one month. This is exceptional, with the average monthly income at Cocopa estimated at around USD 125, according to the same union leader.

Debt

At LAC, research found that loans were made available by plantation management to all employees who participate in the voluntary savings scheme.⁶⁹ According to respondents, the maximum cash credit that one can receive is USD 200. This carries 10

percent interest for any amount borrowed and is provided against future wages. In theory, loans are supposed to be paid back within six months, but this is reportedly not always the case, as sometimes expenses are higher than earned income.

The loans that the plantation offers were reportedly used for a wide range of purposes, including investments in business opportunities or to finance marriages or funerals. People may also take out loans in order to provide for themselves during longer absences from work (for example, due to illness), or simply in order to buy things that they otherwise could not afford.

An issue discussed at length with informants was whether indebtedness would bind a person to the plantation. All interviewees said that this was not the case. Most knew somebody who had run away even if indebted, and this had not had any major implications for those persons (apart from the fact that they could not return to the plantation anymore, but would have to search for employment and livelihood opportunities elsewhere).

The stores operated by the plantation that sell commodities onsite also give credit, but these stores do not deduct directly from the monthly paycheck. According to respondents, these stores price their commodities at fair market value.

Debt among workers on the plantations is an issue of concern; but research did not detect that this pattern of borrowing leads to clear or systematic cases of bonded labor at either LAC or Cocopa. Research indicated that workers remain on the plantation not because of circumstances related to debt or debt bondage, but because the plantation is their only viable provider of waged employment.

Salary and Remuneration

Employees at LAC are paid on the basis of a daily minimum salary and according to their productivity. Management contractors also receive a daily salary; however, this is lower than that paid to employees. Management contractors are also paid according to their productivity. For sub-contractors, payment is dependent on the arrangement they have made with the person who has contracted them. At Cocopa, employees are paid on the basis of productivity alone.

The variation in employment status not only relates to payment schedule; it also relates to the access workers have to goods and services such as school, health, housing, and subsidized food. This is shown in Table 6 below.

LAC							
Employment categories	Fixed wage	Production dependent wage	Subsidised rice, must buy	Free health care	Free school	Access to credit	Housing
Staff	Yes	No	2 bags/mth.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Employees	Yes	Yes	1 bag/mth.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contractors	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Cocopa							
Employment categories	Fixed wage	Production dependent wage	Subsidised rice, must buy ¹	Free health care ²	Free school	Access to credit ³	Housing
Staff	Yes	No	One bag 14 USD	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Employees	No	Yes	One bag 14 USD	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Contractors	No	Yes	One bag 14 USD	No	Yes	-	No

¹ Everybody must buy one bag of rice, in addition people can buy an additional bag for 30 USD if they want.

² For worker and up to five dependents less than 18 years of age. Other must pay.

³ No information available

Table 6: Employment categories & benefits at LAC & Cocopa

LAC and Cocopa provide certain benefits for staff and employees. They do not provide benefits to contractors. Contractors receive a daily wage, but must obtain everything they use on the job themselves. There are no health and educational benefits for contractors, although in theory they receive free medical treatment in the case of accidents on the job. Contractors also receive less pay for the same type of work as employees. At LAC, for example, an employee tapper before the introduction of the new Labor Law received a daily wage of USD 3.66, whereas a contract tapper earned only USD 2.55. The sub-contracted tapper, on the other hand, does not earn a fixed daily wage at all, but is paid on the basis of the amount of rubber tapped, a figure negotiated between the contractor and management. Workers in the latter two categories are not unionized, and any employee that is promoted to staff is removed from the union. A contractor who becomes an employee automatically becomes a union member.

Wage Deductions

Research indicated that there can be significant differences in how much money each tapper makes every month due to wage deductions. Deductions are typically made for things like a compulsory bag of rice, school fees, and a voluntary savings program. The nature of these deductions is discussed below, following some examples of workers' paychecks.

As the first example, we cite the paycheck of employee tapper Mary J., who works at LAC. Mary is a regular employee whose daily rate was USD 3.66 when this interview was conducted in December 2010. As Mary had worked for 24 days in November and fulfilled her quota, but not exceeded it, her gross income was USD 87.84. However, her total earnings were much lower because several deductions were made from her income.⁷⁰ These were:

<i>Union Fee (monthly)</i>	USD 2
<i>Rice Bag</i>	USD 11
<i>Half-Bag Rice (extra)</i>	USD 13.25
<i>General Insurance</i>	USD 1.75 (voluntary)
<i>Savings⁷¹</i>	USD 10 (voluntary employee contribution)
<i>Income Tax</i>	USD 0.48
<i>School Fee</i>	USD 2 (Deducted for a child at school above the number for free)
<i>School Uniform</i>	USD 8.58
Net Income	USD 38.78

Another example concerns the remuneration for the same month for a man named Kinen K., who is a management contractor at LAC who works only for himself and does not hire sub-contractors. Kinen is paid an annual rate of USD 2.50 per day if he fulfills his quota. This particular month, however, he has made more money than Mary despite her status as a regular employee because he also worked two Sundays and exceeded his target. Kinen's gross income for November was USD 103.09, based on 26 days of tapping at a daily rate of USD 2.50. He had to make the following deductions, but he also gained a premium.

<i>Base Salary</i>	USD 65
<i>Sunday Bonus x 2</i>	USD 21
<i>Premium</i>	USD 28.09
<i>Gross Income</i>	USD 103.09
<i>Income Tax</i>	USD 1.23
<i>Bag of Rice</i>	USD 17.50 (not full bag)
<i>Hospital Fee</i>	USD 2.21 (Not entitled to free medical services)
Net Income	USD 82.15

School. "Free school" on the LAC plantation is limited to a maximum of four children plus an additional two if they have been born on the plantation. Yet, even if education is free for these children, their parents must still pay for their school uniforms. The price for this is currently USD 16 per uniform per year. The children of contractors can also attend plantation schools, but they are required to pay for the service as this is a private school.

Private schools on the LAC plantation are owned and operated by the plantation. The LAC schools are generally recognized as among the best in Liberia (competing with the Firestone schools and other private schools for providing the best results in the country). At LAC, the current rate of tuition is USD 44 per child per year, for children over and above those for whom tuition is free.

It is important to note that, outside plantations, Liberian parents are required to buy school uniforms for their children that attend school.

On Cocopa, there are five schools: two upper primaries and three lower primaries. On Cocopa, up to five dependents under the age of 18 are entitled to free school.

Health Care. Basic health care is free, including giving birth and work-related accidents; for other services, fees apply. On Cocopa, dependents that qualify for free education also qualify for free medical treatment. For medical treatment of older family members, deductions are made from the worker's salary. However, if such expenses are very high, deductions are reportedly made over several months. Generally outside the plantations, Liberians pay for health services, which are known to be of relatively low quality.

Subsidized Rice. The subsidized price of the bag of rice at LAC is USD 11 for the first bag (50kg), which is compulsory to purchase; and USD 23 for the second bag, which is voluntary. Contractors buy rice at the price of USD 23 USD. On Cocopa, the price for the first bag is USD 14; while additional bags can be purchased for USD 30, which was the market rate at the time of research.⁷² Information on prices and the subsidy system were confirmed by both managers and tappers at both plantations.

Threat of Dismissal

At both plantations, stories were shared of workers being subject to “quick dismissal” or dismissal without benefits, or workers being paid unequal amounts for the same type of work. These stories surfaced in approximately 50 percent of focus group sessions. Substantiation of these stories was difficult, as most were described by third-parties.

Child Labor

The issue of child labor ranks with quotas as a highly controversial matter on these plantations. As discussed above, at the Firestone plantation, reports established that quotas were so high that tappers were forced to involve household members and children in their production in order to fulfill them.⁷³

With regard to LAC and Cocopa, researchers observed some children working on the plantation with their parents. Research did not detect signs of the trafficking or forced labor of children. Researchers encountered a total number of ten older boys helping their fathers with their work (four at Cocopa and six at LAC), but this was after school hours, and only one boy seemed to be working full days.⁷⁴

The issue of child labor was not generally viewed as an issue of concern by respondents in this study. Because school quality is generally viewed as poor, and in some cases comes with associated fees, many parents feel that the best way to provide for their children is in fact to teach them skills in agriculture.

Dwellings, Sanitation, Education and Health

Sanitation. At the Cocopa plantation, the main issue of concern to workers interviewed appeared to be the quality of worker dwellings, schools, the health center, water and sanitation. The latter in particular, is in dire need of investment and improvement. Latrines are in such poor condition that many workers refuse to use them and make their toilet in the bush surrounding the workers' quarters instead. This is clearly unsustainable, and will eventually lead to the spread of disease.⁷⁵

Housing and Health Centers. Housing at both plantations is free, built for workers as single-family homes and generally larger than what is available to Liberians off the plantations. However, the quality differs considerably between the two plantations. Based on the experience of the researchers, it can be said that housing conditions at LAC are fair and on the higher end of the spectrum relative to what most people in Liberia experience. Houses have iron roofs, are made of brick and have multiple rooms; most also have separate corners with iron roofs for cooking. When used, these facilities have the potential to significantly reduce the risk of fires from cooking; however, most families seem to prefer to prepare their food outside their dwellings.

At Cocopa, the living quarters are overcrowded and in urgent need of repair, especially the roofs. The water quality is poor, particularly during the rainy season. At the time of research, management had only recently assumed control of the plantation, after years of mismanagement and neglect. Research indicated that Cocopa will require massive investment in rubber trees, and also in housing, latrines, clean water, and in its health center in order to be fully and sustainably operational. With regard to the health center, the building is new, but as indicated by the union representative, "buildings are one thing, what's in them another matter." According to the doctor working in the health center, it is currently both understaffed and lacks medicine.

Education and Schools. Schools on the plantations operate as private schools within the educational system of Liberia and follow its ordinary primary and secondary education schedule. They are owned by the plantations and established to meet the needs of the children of plantation employees. As noted above, the children of contract workers can also attend the schools if their parents pay the school fee.

At LAC there are elementary, junior high and senior high schools. According to the superintendent of the LAC schools, a total 4,556 children are enrolled in the LAC school system. This suggests, based on the total population of 25,000 people, that there must be children on the plantation who are not enrolled in school. This issue warrants further investigation, as researchers were unable to obtain a population register of the plantation showing a breakdown of the population by age and gender.

Based on information provided during interviews, the quality of LAC schools is generally considered to be good, and according to the school superintendent, attendance rates are very high. No attendance statistics were available however. When researchers visited the schools at LAC, they looked busy but not overcrowded. As previously mentioned, LAC competes with the Firestone and other private schools in producing the

best results in the country.⁷⁶ The school system also provides four annual scholarships to the University of Liberia for LAC graduates. A concern raised both by the union representative and in several of the focus groups was the lack of a technical high school targeting the needs of the rubber sector.

In contrast to LAC, the Cocopa schools have suffered from the same amount of neglect as the rest of the plantation. One school building is quite new and looks fine from the outside, but it is overcrowded and lacks teaching materials. There were also several concerns expressed about the quality of some teachers. It was not possible to find out how many children were enrolled or regularly attended school at Cocopa. In theory there should be one stipend per year for a Cocopa graduate to attend the University of Liberia, but according to the union representative, it has not been handed out for several years. This suggests that the practice stopped sometime during the civil war or Taylor years.

Table 7: Perceptions of housing, education and the health center

	LAC (Number of respondents)	Cocopa (Number of respondents)
<i>Housing (decent)</i>	36	4
<i>Housing (bad)</i>	32	26
<i>Sanitation and water (decent)</i>	40	-
<i>Sanitation and water (bad)</i>	28	30
<i>Education (decent)</i>	43	5
<i>Education (bad)</i>	25	25
<i>Health center (decent)</i>	41	3
<i>Health center (bad)</i>	27	27

In sum, the perspectives of the LAC workers interviewed is that their dwellings, education and health facilities are generally poor; and they are concerned about the relationship between the quotas and cash benefits they receive. Workers at Cocopa are primarily concerned with the low quality of their housing, educational and health facilities, but seem somewhat more satisfied with their quota system.

Security

At both plantations, but more so at Cocopa, a number of workers expressed concern about insecurity and the risk of armed robbers seeking to steal rubber. These concerns were expressed despite the presence of a small security force at both plantations. This is a significant issue, with armed robbers arriving at night. It is also a complex issue, as there is some difference of opinion about whether this is a matter for private plantation security to manage or for the government to control as part of its general public safety and security responsibilities. (Liberia already has considerable private security forces, which is perceived by many as problematic for various reasons.) The issue is further complicated by concern that a strong private security force on the plantation could be used against workers during strikes or other worker-management conflicts.

Health and Safety

The major occupational health issues on both plantations, according to data collected, are back pain and muscle cramps. This is not a surprise given that working as a tapper is hard physical labor, involving the need to carry loads weighing up to 150 pounds. Cases of back pain reported to the hospital at LAC were more common among older workers.

Skin infections are another common concern. Work-related accidents mainly result from cuts received while cutting the bush with a machete, and from wounds and infections caused by hot rubber that has melted on the skin. Workers also risk eye damage while working, with an average of five cases reported to the hospital each month.

Table 8. Safety and security: exposure to work-related danger & accidents last year

	LAC (Number of respondents)	Cocopa (Number of respondents)
<i>Robbery/theft</i>	4	15
<i>Snakebites</i>	3	8
<i>Eye damage from latex</i>	2	6
<i>Skin damage from latex</i>	8	23 ⁷⁷
<i>Back pains</i>	68	30
<i>Muscle cramps</i>	68	30
<i>Skin damage from acid</i>	5	19

Management at both plantations reported that all workers are routinely supplied with adequate protective gear such as boots; brown dresses/gowns/aprons to be worn over their clothes; and gloves for their hands and goggles to protect their eyes from the acid of latex.

At LAC most employees reported that they are supplied with this gear, and most of them reported using the rubber boots. Contractors and sub-contractors also reported using rubber boots, as these protect not only against damage from the latex and the acid used, but also from snake bites. Protective clothing appeared to be less commonly used among employees, contractors and sub-contractors alike. According to interviews, there are several reasons for this: Rubber boots may be lost, stolen or sold if they are not worn, while some of the other equipment is seen by some as impractical for fieldwork when workers wish to work as swiftly and effectively as possible.



Most workers at LAC use rubber boots

At Cocopa, access to protective gear, including rubber boots, is more haphazard as a lot of such equipment was lost during the chaotic years at the plantation and not all of what was lost has been replaced.

Some respondents suggested that a way to combat frequent skin and eye damage would be to consult with workers on the functionality of the protective gear and make adjustments if necessary, so that the gear would be viewed as more practical. Research did not detect that there are current efforts by management to enforce or incentivize the wearing of such personal protective equipment.

At LAC, the quality of the health center is quite good, but the doctor working there reported several problems that relate to working and living conditions. One important problem is malnutrition of small children. This is partly related to the fact that mothers only receive two months of paid leave after giving birth. This means that they return to work after two months and, in order to make a decent wage, they leave their small children behind in the villages on the plantations. This keeps them from breastfeeding infants at an early age. This leads to many children becoming malnourished and contracting diarrhea, and contributes to under-five mortality. Contractors also tend to leave their sickbed too early as they only receive payment when they work. In contrast, the doctor also reported that employees often preferred to stay as long as possible in the hospital, at least in part because they receive sick pay.

With regard to common types of illnesses, interviews with the doctor, her staff and a review of hospital records suggested that the main cause of sickness and death at LAC, as elsewhere in Liberia, is malaria and diarrhea. LAC does not distribute mosquito nets to employees, and the hospital receives only a limited supply from the county government.⁷⁸

Social Security and Pensions

Plantations are part of rural Liberia, but different from it. They constitute sites of agricultural activity, but offer a sense of urban life. They lie somewhere in between, being rural and urban at the same time. They represent a working life, but also a family life, until you reach the age of retirement or you can no longer work.⁷⁹

Research indicated that if a retired worker has family members that continue to work on the plantation and agree to take care of that person, then the retired worker may stay; if not, retired workers are supposed to leave the plantation and return to their home of origin. After having received all final benefits a retiree is entitled to, the retiree will have 15 days to leave the plantation.

LAC is part of the Liberian Social Security system, meaning that the pension from LAC is supposed to be paid through this government body. This is not the case for Cocopa which pays its pensioners directly every month. The extent to which the Social Security system actually works, and whether Cocopa is able to reach its pensioners every month, is another issue. Due to constraints of time and resources it was not possible for

the team of researchers to investigate this in systematic detail, but in conversations with the workers, this issue was rarely raised as a major concern.⁸⁰

Conclusion

This report has presented background information on Liberia and the rubber sector, the exploratory methodology that was developed to study working conditions – with special attention to forced labor indicators – on two company-owned rubber plantations in Liberia, and the findings yielded by the study. The findings presented herein are not statistically representative of Liberia or the rubber sector, and this report does not claim to determine the existence of forced labor or the scale of exploitative working conditions in Liberia. However, the report does provide an overview of working and living conditions of concern uncovered amongst rubber plantation workers on two rubber plantations in Liberia.

The relationship between quotas and cash under which a minimum fixed daily wage is tied to the completion of a pre-established quota is clearly an issue at both LAC and Cocopa. Workers who do not fulfill the quota may experience a financial penalty. But, as noted in the report, at the time of research, the majority of interviewed workers reported being satisfied with the level of the quota; with a greater proportion of older workers expressing dissatisfaction. Workers regularly work 12 hour days on both plantations.

Research found evidence of loan taking on LAC but not Cocopa. This debt did not appear to bind workers to the workplace.

The primary concerns of workers interviewed at Cocopa included housing, education and sanitation. Sanitation, in particular, has reached a crisis point at Cocopa. Based on research findings, there is also a need at both LAC and Cocopa for improved monitoring of safety and health standards and better mechanisms for protecting workers from work hazards: snakebites, skin burns and eye injuries are relatively frequent. Child labor is present on both plantations: researchers observed some children (ten in all) working with their parents, after school hours. Concern about the risk of the armed robbery of rubber by bandits was present at both plantations.

Contract workers interviewed for this study, and in particular sub-contractors, reported much less favorable conditions.

Lessons Learned

A key lesson learned in this exploratory research is that investigating working conditions in the rubber sector of Liberia, a sector that provides critical employment for an impoverished country, must be done with due consideration toward protecting the workers on the plantations and preserving livelihood opportunities. This is particularly the case in light of ongoing economic and social changes, such as the potential transition of some plantations to palm oil production.

This study indicates that more research into working conditions is necessary and warranted. Further research should combine qualitative and quantitative methods, encompass all large-scale company-owned rubber plantations if possible, and include livelihood studies of communities living and working outside the plantations. A similar study of smallholder production of rubber should also be undertaken. This would enable greater understanding of the differences between life on plantations and general living conditions in rural Liberia. It is hoped that the current report will act as a foundation for further research and to inspire discussion that can lead to a more nuanced understanding of conditions on rubber plantations in the country.

The issue of quotas should be addressed in this larger-scale research. Inclusion of all company-owned plantations in a research sample would be essential to understanding the impact of quotas on the ability of Liberia's rubber workers to earn a fair wage, under fair and legal working conditions. The issue of debt-taking should also be explored in a larger scale study, among both plantation workers and smallholders.

Plantations in Liberia rely on an informal and casually-employed workforce to supplement formal employment. This results in less-favorable employment conditions for these workers compared to those available to formal employees on the plantation. This raises the question of whether the workforce could be expanded; and independent analysis of this should be conducted.

It remains a distinct possibility that an increasing number of rubber plantations will transfer to palm oil production, a process that is significantly less labor intensive and, therefore, would result in lay-offs across the sector. Research is warranted into the labor rights and livelihood consequences of this transition.

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Appendix 1: Early History and Legacy of War in Liberia

During the period from 1980 to 2003, Liberia became synonymous with war, chaos and destruction, yet the underlying causes of conflict are deeply entrenched in Liberian history. Liberia consists of 16 major ethnic and cultural groups, each with its own traditions, customs, religion, languages and dialects. Furthermore, in order to understand the history of state formation in the country, one must also consider the group of freed slaves who went to Liberia from the United States between 1822 and 1861. These freed slaves established the Republic of Liberia and became known as the Americo-Liberians. Their intention was to create a safe haven for freed slaves. Given the land to govern, however, they built a system of rule on the only political and administrative system they were familiar with: the system of plantations in the southern US. The main difference in this case was that they were now considered “masters” and the indigenous people were treated as “servants.” Trapped in this model, they embarked on a political strategy of division between themselves – perceived as a civilized and educated class – and the others – perceived as a savage, native underclass. This worldview strongly influenced living and working conditions on the rubber plantations that were established in the Liberia during the 1920s.

When the Republic of Liberia was established in 1847, a constitution based on the US model was adopted. According to this constitution, all men are born free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and inalienable rights. However, “all men,” in this case, did not mean everyone inhabiting the area over which the constitution governed; this founding document made a strong distinction between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population. Members of the so-called “native tribes” were not eligible for election or voting. A firm division between the two groups was institutionalized, laying a foundation for entrenched alienation between different ethnic groups in Liberia, and between these groups and a new upper class constituted by the Americo-Liberians. In 1870, the True Whig Party (TWP) was established, and for the next 110 years Liberia was a *de facto* one-party state.

By the early 1920s, the Americo-Liberians had secured their rule through a combination of force and arrangements based on clientelism. A complex system of hierarchical patron-client relationships (with Americo-Liberians at the top) maintained what can be characterized as “settler rule.” This system remained more-or-less in place until riots broke out in April 1979 against then President William Tolbert and his regime. In response, Tolbert declared a state of emergency and suppressed the riots with full force. Most leaders of the small and fragmented opposition were arrested. However, only two days before their cases were due to be heard in court, a group of 17 enlisted men killed Tolbert, overthrew the government and executed several ministers at the beach in Monrovia. Much of the population supported the coup, hoping that it would usher in a new era in Liberia where people would indeed be treated equally.

However, it soon became obvious that the soldiers, under the leadership of Samuel Doe, were not able or willing to reform the Liberian state. On the contrary, they became captives themselves of the predatory logic of the state established by the Americo-

Liberians. Doe's almost ten years in power are a story of petty corruption, theft of state resources, murder, rape, torture and other human rights abuses. As social tensions increased, the country was ripe for civil war. This conflict began on Christmas Eve 1989 when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), a small rebel army led by Charles Taylor, crossed over the border from Côte d'Ivoire.

No one knows how many people died in the first part of the Liberian civil war, which lasted from 1990 to 1997. Some say 60,000 while others claim deaths as high as 250,000. The first estimate is probably more realistic; however, what is clear is that the level of human suffering created by the war was enormous, and that the war spilled over into other West African countries. The consequences of this civil conflict – including refugee flows, political and economic destabilization, and the creation of new military alliances – could be identified in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Between 1994 and 1996, several attempts to implement a peace agreement in Liberia failed, mainly because of the unwillingness of Nigeria to accept a deal that included Charles Taylor. However, in 1996, Taylor and then Nigerian ruler Sani Abacha reached an agreement, and elections were held in July of that year. In relatively free and fair elections that were supervised by international election observers, Taylor won approximately 75% of the vote. The main reason for this is that Taylor's movement was the best organized and most ethnically diverse of the armed factions, and that civilian opposition was too fragmented and disorganized to put up a real challenge to him.

From 1997 to 2000, the situation in most parts of Liberia was relatively calm. However, in the northern territory of Lofa County, instability and low-level conflict continued and by 1999 the second phase of the civil war began. Three years later Taylor's enemies in the rebel factions – Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) – brought the war back to Monrovia. As West African peace talks failed to yield any tangible result, the summer of 2003 turned into a disaster for the inhabitants and internally displaced peoples of the capital. This continued until Taylor surrendered and accepted a Nigerian offer of exile on 11 August 2003.

When President Charles Taylor went into exile, power was first transferred to his Vice-President, Moses Blah, before the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was established under the leadership of Gyude Bryant, which set out to steer Liberia through a two-year transition phase agreed upon in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Together with UNMIL, the NTGL managed to conduct relatively free and fair elections in the autumn of 2005 which brought to power Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. This transition period, however, created new problems and challenges that continue to haunt Liberia today.

The main problem was the composition of the NTGL. In many respects, it was not much different from previous power-sharing arrangements. Like other Liberian governments, the NTGL was highly competitive and patrimonial, with various elites locked in struggles

over state resources. A small number of representatives from the private sector and civil society were included in the NTGL, but by-and-large the transitional government reflected the prevailing balance of power between the three rival military factions: Taylor's government army, LURD and MODEL. This meant that real power in the NTGL sat with members of the former warring factions.

LURD and MODEL had won the war, but these groups could not win the peace. LURD was a Mandingo-dominated group, which could not win a national election. Similarly, the Krahn were a small ethnic group that remained marked by what many Liberians believed were favored group status under Samuel Doe's dictatorship. Their interest in the NTGL was therefore not in transition as such; but as an opportunity for enrichment before multi-party elections would consign them to minority political status. Acutely aware of this, faction leaders openly traded in NTGL positions, selling them to the highest bidder. This is the legacy that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's government continues to struggle with as Liberia prepares for a second period of her presidency.

Appendix 2: Guiding Questions for Field Research

The following questions shall serve as a guide for semi-structured interviews, life-history approaches, and focus group discussions:

- Production chain at rubber plantation: what are the different tasks involved in rubber production? Who is conducting the different tasks? What input is needed at every stage in the production chain?
- What is the organizational structure of the rubber plantation? How many levels of management? Who (roles/positions, not names of individuals) are responsible for supervision at the different levels? Who are responsible for security?
- What are the working conditions for the workers involved in different parts of the rubber production?
 - How many hours per day, days per week do they work? Do they have a quota they need to fill within a certain time period? What is the quota? What happens if they don't reach their quota?
 - What wages do they earn? How are their wages determined? Are wages fixed or according to amount of rubber tapped? Does it happen that their wages are withheld/not being paid? How often and for what reason? How often are they paid? Are wages sometimes delayed? Are new workers paid from when they start or is there a period of training with reduced or no pay? If yes, for how long and on which conditions?
 - Do the workers receive additional benefits to paid wages, such as housing, food, schooling (themselves or their children), health assistance, or other?
 - Are the workers exposed to health hazards, such as working with pesticides, cuts from machetes, etc.? Do they use any protective gear, such as masks, gloves, rubber boots, etc.? What happens if they are injured? Do they get health treatment (free or for charge), do they receive payment/compensation if they cannot work due to work injury?
 - What kind of training do the workers receive?
- Are there occurrences where workers have experienced threats (of withhold payment, loss of employment, physical violence towards themselves or their families, sexual abuse, loss of deposit, withdrawal of necessities such as food or housing, of having to work longer hours, do more dangerous work, reduced wages, higher quotas, etc.) or the actual occurrence of any of the above?
- Do the workers hold debt to anyone involved in their recruitment to the work or involved in organizing their work? If yes, what is the nature of their debt, how much, to whom do they owe money/work, what are the conditions of down payment, what happens if they are not able/willing to pay? Is it a personal debt or have they inherited it from other family members?

- Who are the workers involved in the different tasks at the plantation (gender, age, ethnic belonging, migrants/non-migrants, etc.)
- How are the workers recruited? Where are they recruited, by whom? Do they pay middlemen in any process of the recruitment? Are there occurrences where workers end up doing other tasks than the ones they were promised? Are there occurrences where workers get different conditions than they were promised (longer hours, lower wages, more dangerous work tasks, other contract conditions, etc.)
- Are the workers able to leave at any time if prospect for another job comes up? If no, why not? (Quotas to fill, contract obligations, debt for recruitment, housing, food provision, other?)
- Are the workers organized through a labor union? Do they have contracts for their employment? If yes, what are the terms of their contracts?
- How are conflicts, for instance between workers and management, solved? Who are involved in resolving disputes?
- Are the workers and their conditions affected by external events such as fluctuations in the price of rubber, changed ownership of plantation, conflict vs. post-conflict situation, or other factors?
- How are the living conditions for the workers at the plantations? What are their housing conditions (space, water, sanitation, electricity, etc.), do they own or rent their houses, how much do they pay in rent? Do they have access to health facilities? Do they have access to school for their children?
- How do the workers experience that their situation has changed over time and what do they believe to be the causes of these changes?

Field researchers should also be participant observers and use their skills as independent researchers to detect conditions of concern that are not mentioned directly in interviews. Such observations can include:

- Workers showing signs of physical maltreatment, for instance bruises
- Workers being anxious to talk about their conditions
- Supervisors demonstrating violent behavior
- Workers not being allowed to leave the workplace
- Barbed wire, armed guards around the workplace
- Workers receiving threats or abuse
- Workers not receiving their wages

Appendix 3: Donor Assistance to Liberia, 2004-2007⁸¹

NO.	DONOR	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL
1	ADB	500,000		145,000	3,600,000	4,245,000
2	CANADA		737,552	0	0	739,552
3	DANEMERK	2,100,000	1,800,000	1,000,000	1,500,000	7,000,000
4	ECHO	15,941,497	23,595,908	21,180,000	0	60,717,405
5	Germany	4,480,000	12,960,000	7,790,000	4,900,000	30,130,000
6	GFTAM	5,061,000	9,160,511	8,970,000	0	23,192,099
7	Irish AID	2,257,587	3,674,977	5,623,988	0	11,550,522
8	Japan	11,940,000	8,850,000	0	0	20,790,000
9	OSI	0	0	1,000,000	0	1,000,000
10	OTI	10,500,000	1,500,000	4,500,000	7,000,000	23,500,000
11	Spain	0	145,955	0	0	145,985
12	Sweden	12,703,804	14,500,000	14,000,000	0	41,203,804
13	Switzerland	2,950,000	2,850,000	5,500,000	5,500,000	16,800,000
14	U.S.A	236,118,000	130,761,000	199,213,000	89,945,000	656,036,500
15	UNDP	6,602,463	3,224,124	7,700,000	0	14,526,587
16	UNEP	200,000	200,000	300,000	300,000	11,000,000
17	UNESCO	0	1,050,000	0	0	1,050,000
18	UNFAO	307,900	0	801,000	0	1,108,000
19	UNHCR	11,474,204	16,610,800	11,854,962	0	39,939,956
20	WFP	36,000,00	45,400,000	50,000,000	33,000,000	163,400,000
21	WHO	4,500,000	3,271,000	2,715,000	2,715,000	13,201,488
22	WORLD BANK	1,900,000	15,500,000	67,800,000	0	85,200,000
	TOTAL	363,530,455	295,744,345	407,692,998	148,460,000	1,216,417,798

Not captured in the table above are non-African and African emerging partners active in Liberia. China, the largest non-African partner, provides an estimated USD 20 million annually to Liberia to build infrastructure and improve healthcare and education. Nigeria and Libya are also present in Liberia, and plan investments in mobile phone banking, hotel, and rubber production.⁸²

The World Food Program (WFP), the second largest donor in Liberia, focuses on school meals and helping smallholder farmers to rehabilitate agricultural assets with a focus on rice production. The WFP also provides food assistance to mothers and children at risk of malnutrition, TB patients and people living with HIV.⁸³ The World Bank, another major donor in Liberia, has twenty-four active projects in the country focused on electricity, financial management reform, roads, sanitation, education, infrastructure, agriculture and capacity building.⁸⁴

Endnotes

¹ This may change in the future as mines around the city of Yekepa become fully operational and if oil exploration in Liberia's territorial waters is successful.

² On education, see: M. Bøås and A. Hatløy (2006) *After the Storm – Economic Activities Among Returning Youths: the Case of Voinjama*, Oslo: Fafo (Fafo-report 523).

³ CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

⁴ US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Notes: Liberia*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm#econ>

⁵ See: World Bank (2010) *Liberia – Basic Indicators*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank; UNMIL (2010) *Liberia – at a Glance*, Monrovia: UNMIL.

⁶ The accuracy of this figure could not be substantiated.

⁷ See: World Bank (2010) *Liberia – Basic Indicators*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank; UNMIL (2010) *Liberia – at a Glance*, Monrovia: UNMIL.

⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/li.html>

⁹ US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Notes: Liberia*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm#econ>

¹⁰ Liberia Information, *Business Investment in Liberia*, <http://www.liberiainformation.com/content/business-investment-liberia>

¹¹ *The Gulf Today*, "Liberia's economy expanding," February 13, 2012, <http://gulftoday.ae/portal/273a24d3-ddbb-4745-88ec-56dad620ab7e.aspx>

¹² Rubberwood "Hevea" Chips From Liberia by Buchanan Renewables ("BR"), 2010, <http://www.buchananrenewables.com/assets/pdf/Updated%20Data%20Sheet%20Oct%2009.pdf>

¹³ ILO, A Rapid Impact Assessment Of The Global Economic Crisis On Liberia , 2009, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/---cepol/documents/publication/wcms_116721.pdf

¹⁴ ILO, A Rapid Impact Assessment Of The Global Economic Crisis On Liberia , 2009, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/---cepol/documents/publication/wcms_116721.pdf

¹⁵ See: J. Munive (2011) 'A political economic history of the Liberian state, forced labor and armed mobilization', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 357-376.

¹⁶ A concession can be described as a permit granted by the Liberian State to operate in a specific territory for a specific period of time.

¹⁷ This was also reflected in Article II of the Act Establishing the Firestone Plantation: 'encourage, support and assist the efforts of Firestone to secure and maintain an adequate labor supply'. See also: R.W. Clower, G. Dalton, M. Harwitz and A.A. Walters (1966) *Growth without Development: an Economic Survey of Liberia*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

¹⁸ While desertion was relatively common, it was considered a serious offence to disobey a chief's orders, and not returning home was a problem because traditional practices and modern state law made residing outside one's tribal area difficult and punishable as a legal offence. Thus the young and the poor were particularly likely to remain on the plantation. Many people who currently work at the rubber plantations are descendents of people forcibly recruited in this early period. This, of course, does not mean that they cannot leave the plantation, although it does mean that, since childhood, their lives have been shaped by being plantation workers.

¹⁹ See: R.W. Clower, G. Dalton, M. Harwitz and A.A. Walters (1966) *Growth without Development: an Economic Survey of Liberia*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

²⁰ While this system of forced recruitment was based on a combination of coercion, indirect rule and patrimonialism, it also led to the creation of a wage-earning labor force of some magnitude.

²¹ See: H. Akingbade (1997) 'The Liberian problem of forced labor, 1926-1940', *Africa – Revista Trimestrale di Studi e Documentazione*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 261-273; J. Lewitt (2005) *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia: from Paternalism to State Collapse*, Durham, NC: Carolina University Press; A. Sawyer (1992) *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia: Tragedy and Challenge*, San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.

- ²² See: S. Ellis (1999) *The Mask of Anarchy – the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, London: Hurst.
- ²³ See: Clower et al (1966).
- ²⁴ See: J. Munive (2011) 'A political economic history of the Liberian state, forced labour and armed mobilization', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 357-376.
- ²⁵ See J. Munive (2011) 'A political economic history of the Liberian state, forced labour and armed mobilization', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 357-376. Rubber is important for Liberia; and there has always been a close relationship between the political and economic interests in the country. Further research should be conducted on the political economy of rubber in the country, in particularly how it rests within elite patrimonial networks.
- ²⁶ Milbrandt, A. (April 2009). Assessment of Biomass Resources in Liberia, Technical Report NREL/TP-6A2-44808, Prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Liberia Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) <http://www.nrel.gov/analysis/pdfs/44808.pdf>.
- ²⁷ Milbrandt, A. (April 2009). Assessment of Biomass Resources in Liberia, Technical Report NREL/TP-6A2-44808, Prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Liberia Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) <http://www.nrel.gov/analysis/pdfs/44808.pdf>.
- ²⁸ Milbrandt, A. (April 2009). Assessment of Biomass Resources in Liberia, Technical Report NREL/TP-6A2-44808, Prepared for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Liberia Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) <http://www.nrel.gov/analysis/pdfs/44808.pdf>.
- ²⁹ It is interesting to note that at LAC only female tappers work on young trees; for management, they are considered to be more careful than their male counterparts.
- ³⁰ United Nations, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Commodity Atlas: Natural Rubber*, http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditccom20041ch17_en.pdf
- ³¹ Verité, *Commodities Atlas: Rubber*, <http://www.verite.org/Commodities/Rubber>
- ³² CIRAD Agricultural Research and Development, *Rubber Context and Issues*, <http://www.cirad.fr/en/research-operations/supply-chains/rubber/context-and-issues>
- ³³ Too Edwin Freeman, "Liberia's Natural Rubber Industry: A Second Look," *The Perspective*, Atlanta, Georgia, July 28, 2011, <http://www.theperspective.org/2011/0728201104.html>
- ³⁴ United Nations, United Nations Development Program, Annex 4: Summary of DTIS (June 2008) concerning Commodity Development, http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/stream/asset/?jsessionid=asK_d_R7bbze?asset_id=2208712
- ³⁵ See the Labor Practices Law of the Republic of Liberia. (Title 18 and 18A of 1956), as amended by An Act to Amend the Labour Practices Law with Respect to Employment in General, 1966; and an Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons within the Republic of Liberia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs : Monrovia, July 5, 2005. For an excellent critique of the coverage of Liberian labor laws for rubber workers, see UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Human Rights in Liberia's Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future. April 2006. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/473dade10.html>.
- ³⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, *2010 Findings on Worst Forms of Child Labor*, September 2011. http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=usdol%20findings%20on%20the%20worst%20forms%20of%20child%20labor&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCwQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dol.gov%2Ffilab%2Fprograms%2Focft%2FPDF%2F2010TDA.pdf&ei=McF0T6z_Mub10gGO8liAAw&usq=AFQjCNGFUHOcS9t5JCjKUe-WHrRta2Wkqw&cad=rja.
- ³⁷ See: ILO (2009) A Rapid Impact Assessment of the Global Economic Crisis on Liberia, Geneva, ILO.
- ³⁸ See: Institute for Human Rights and Business, *Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review Session 9: Liberia*, April 2010, http://www.ihrb.org/pdf/Liberia_UPR_April2010-IHRB-FINAL.pdf
- ³⁹ Bridgestone-Firestone, *Saving Liberia's rubber industry*, http://www.bridgestone-firestone.com/about_bg_index.asp?id=about/fslbg
- ⁴⁰ Firestone, *Liberia Statistics*, <http://www.firestonenaturalrubber.com/documents/StatSheetNarrative.pdf>
- ⁴¹ CSR Europe, *ArcelorMittal approves development projects in Liberia*, http://www.csreurope.org/news.php?type=&action=show_news&news_id=2441

- ⁴² Steel Guru, *ArcelorMittal launches CSR forum in Liberia*, 2009 http://www.steelguru.com/international_news/ArcelorMittal_launches_CSR_forum_in_Liberia/112465.html
- ⁴³ Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, *Background*, <http://www.lprclib.com/content1.php?subid=33>
- ⁴⁴ *Africa Monitor*, "West Africa Rising: Liberia leads charge to lure palm oil investors," May 18, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/0518/West-Africa-Rising-Liberia-leads-charge-to-lure-palm-oil-investors>. See also: Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), *What is RSPO?*, <http://www.rspo.org/page/9>.
- ⁴⁵ US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Notes: Liberia*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>
- ⁴⁶ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), *Rubber Industry Master Plan 2010 - 2040: A National Agenda for Rubber Sector Development* http://www.rpalib.org/page_info.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=MTU0
- ⁴⁷ African Economic Outlook, *Liberia*, <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia>
- ⁴⁸ US Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Notes: Liberia*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm#econ>
- ⁴⁹ ILRF, *Firestone Rubber & Latex Company: Prospering from Child Labor and Enslavement in Liberia*, <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/stop-firestone/news/11244>
- ⁵⁰ UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), *Human Rights in Liberia's Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future*, April 2006, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/473dade10.html> [accessed 17 February 2012]
- ⁵¹ ILRF, *Firestone and Violations of Core Labor Rights in Liberia*, 2009, <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/stop-firestone/resources/12060>
- ⁵² International Labor Rights Forum, *Labor Rights Advocates Congratulate Bridgestone/Firestone Workers in Liberia on Award from U.S. Dept. of Labor*, <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-forced-labor/stop-firestone/news/12461>
- ⁵³ United Steel Workers, *Heavy Loads Lifted from Tappers' Backs*, July 2010, http://www.usw.org/media_center/news_articles?id=0594
- ⁵⁴ United Nations, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Country Profiles Liberia*, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4e8c39831f.pdf>; <http://stopchildlabor.org/?p=2378>.
- ⁵⁵ From 1 January 2010, management of the Guthrie plantation was taken over by Sime Darby, a Malaysian company. Sime Darby has shifted plantation production from rubber to palm oil, making the plantation unsuitable for the project. This points to an emerging trend in Liberia: plantations and land previously used for rubber production are being cleared for use as palm oil plantations. With regard to Sinoe, its primary production remains rubber, but the Chinese company that operates the plantation intends to reorganize the production process; at the time of research there was no activity on this plantation.
- ⁵⁶ Individual, semi-structured interviews were based on the research questions found in Appendix 1.
- ⁵⁷ See Appendix 1, which contains the terms of reference for the research assignment.
- ⁵⁸ This approach is also called "livelihood pathway analysis" or the study of "livelihood trajectories". See: L. de Haan and A. Zoomers (2005), 'Exploring the frontier of livelihoods research', *Development and Change* Vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 27-47; S. Lautze (2008a) 'Livelihood systems of enlisted Ugandan army soldiers: honour and reform of the UPDF', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 635-53; S. Lautze (2008b) 'Social dynamics in militarized livelihood systems: evidence from a study of Ugandan army soldiers', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 415-38; S. Ian and W. William (2002) 'Pathways of change: crop-livestock integration in Africa', in I. Scoones and W. Wolmer (eds), *Pathways of Change in Africa: Crops, Livestock and Livelihoods in Mali, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe*, Oxford: James Currey, pp. 1 - 32.
- ⁵⁹ M. Bøås and A. Hatløy (2005b) *Alcohol and Drug Consumption in Post War Sierra Leone – an Exploration*, Oslo: Fafo/FORUT (Fafo-report 469); M. Bøås, K.M. Jennings and T.M. Shaw (2006) 'Dealing with conflicts and emergency situations', in V. Desai and R.B. Potter (eds) *Doing Development Research*, London: Sage, pp. 70-78.
- ⁶⁰ Some interviewed workers also took part in focus group discussions.
- ⁶¹ With regard to the personal data presented in this Table, not all respondents are certain of their exact age or how long they have been on the plantation. In the figures provided, researchers observed fewer

female workers at Cocopa, which accounts for the smaller number of female workers interviewed during field visits to the plantation. It should further be noted that researchers found few sub-contractors at the plantations during their field visits.

⁶² Population estimates were provided by management representatives of LAC and Cocopa. A breakdown by job category was not provided.

⁶³ One such person was interviewed directly at LAC; he claimed that, in the past, there had been others. At Cocopa there were no such cases currently, but it was claimed that there had been in the past.

⁶⁴ This is a fascinating story in its own right. The original Tripp who established Cocopa initially came to Liberia as part of the Roosevelt team that on its way to the Jalta Conference (4-11th February 1945) made a brief touchdown in Liberia. Here he met, among others, Liberian president Tubman and later became involved in various business operations in Liberia after the Second World War, banking (the JB Bank, Liberia), but also commercial farming (Cocopa).

⁶⁵ UNMIL had come to LAC previously, in the autumn of 2003, to clear the plantation of MODEL (Movement for Democracy in Liberia) combatants roaming the area after the end of the civil war. In order to protect the plantation from ex-combatants there are still UNMIL troops stationed within the area of the plantation. Now these UN troops were asked to protect the plantation and its property from angry workers protesting against the new CBA and thereby against both management and their union. Fortunately, this appears not to have had long-term negative consequences, but questions remain about how and why UN troops were deployed in this manner.

⁶⁶ Raised to USD 6.40 by the Liberian Senate on the 19th of July 2011 by endorsing The New Labour Law of Liberia. This law replaced an old labor law from the 1980s that operated with a minimum wage for rural agricultural workers of USD 2 per day. This means that the new minimum wage now in theory applies to all private sector agricultural workers. It still remains to be seen how this will be implemented in practice locally and what effect it will have on the industry. The latter depends on international demand and whether it will continue to be high or the financial crisis will reduce it. See: Tom Nyenur (2011) 'New Labour Law Approved', *Front Page Africa*, www.frontpageafricaonline.com, 20 July 2011.

⁶⁷ No similar daily rate for contractors was reported at Cocopa.

⁶⁸ According to the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, the obligation to do work outside normal daily working hours under the threat of a penalty, for example the payment of wages below the minimum legal level, ceases to be merely a matter of "poor conditions of employment" and instead may be considered to constitute forced or compulsory labor, if that work is above the overtime limits permitted by national law or collective agreement. See: ILO, *Eradication of forced labor: General survey concerning the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957 (No. 105)*, 2007. p. 72.

⁶⁹ At Cocopa, a similar system had been in place, but was not operating at the time of research.

⁷⁰ These figures are taken from photos of Mary and Kinen's pay checks, which were taken with permission.

⁷¹ This savings scheme is voluntary and available to all permanent employees.

⁷² It should be noted that, in addition to the "company store" at which workers can purchase their rice, there are alternatives off-site that are available to those who wish to take advantage of them.

⁷³ See, for example: Nicholas Jahr (2010) 'Workers organize at Firestone, Liberia's state within a state', *International Labour Rights Forum* (July 19, 2010).

⁷⁴ This boy was 15 years old and, according to his caretaker, working because his mother was dead and father's location was unknown; and thus his mother's relative had sent him to his current caretaker, who had agreed to take him in. The boy's caretaker needed his help to cover the extra costs of having an additional household member. This is not an uncommon situation in rural Liberia. Almost all children who grow up here help their parents with agricultural activities. It is also common to be sent away to someone else if your mother and father die. It is possible that this boy's life chances are better at LAC than in his home village with relatives who cannot care for him or drifting on his own into one of the larger cities. When researchers asked others about encountering the 15 year old boy, a man in a group of tappers asked, "how can you think that you can understand our life?"

⁷⁵ The workers interviewed are aware of this, but as one household head asked rhetorically while showing researchers the latrines, "would you poo-poo in this place?" In his view, it was better for him and his household members to use the bush than the latrine, even if he was aware of the danger of spreading disease since most people making their toilet after dark did not want to go very far from the dwellings.

⁷⁶ This information is based on interviews with representatives of the University of Liberia.

⁷⁷ One possible explanation for the higher rate of skin damage injuries at Cocopa is that researchers observed less protective gear here than at the LAC plantation.

⁷⁸ This is a case where the workers at LAC fall between the gaps of two different types of administration (company and government) that both claim these health needs are not their responsibility to cover: As a concessional area, the LAC plantation does not represent its own legal jurisdiction as such, but the local and national governments and administration reportedly generally expect those that have obtained the concession to cultivate the area to also provide for its inhabitants.

⁷⁹ The official retirement age in Liberia is 70 years. On plantations, this figure is 60 years, however the issue is complicated by the fact that many workers do not know their specific age. Many more are also not keen to reveal their true age because retirement means leaving the plantation and exchanging a life of general predictability with one of uncertainty.

⁸⁰ Only a handful (four) of our 98 respondents mentioned pension payment as something they were concerned about, and it did not come up in any of the focus group sessions. There may be two reasons for this: 1) the system works; or probably more likely, 2) receiving a pension – that is payment – after you have stopped working is considered unrealistic, so much so that this is not an issue people think about. As one respondent replied rather fatalistically “what happens when I leave Cocopa is up to God.” This should be a major issue for the rubber companies, but they too are constrained by a government system that functions ineffectively, and the challenge of transferring payments to retirees who move far enough away that direct payment is not logistically possible.

⁸¹ African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, *A Critical Assessment Of Aid Management And Donor Harmonization In Liberia: A Case Study*,

http://www.afrodad.org/downloads/publications/Aid%20Mgmt_Liberia_Final.pdf

⁸² African Economic Outlook, *Liberia*, <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/countries/west-africa/liberia/>

⁸³ World Food Program, *Liberia: WFP Activities*, <http://www.wfp.org/countries/Liberia/Operations>

⁸⁴ For a list of all active WBG projects in Liberia, see the World Bank’s list at:
<http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=223716&piPK=95917&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=225435&pagenumber=1&pagesize=100&sortby=BOARDSORTDATE&sortorder=DESC&category=advsearch&query=liberia&status=A®ioncode=1&countrycode=LR§or=ALL&majorsector=ALL§orboard=ALL&majorthemeid=ALL&themeid=ALL&network=ALL&prodline=ALL&prodlinetype=ALL&lendinstrtype=ALL&lendinstr=ALL&goalid=ALL&metathemeid=ALL&startyr=ALL&endyr=ALL&env=ALL&match=>