

collection. In rural areas, land resource management provides similar scope to demonstrate social worth. In fact, several RUF groups, retaining their band structure from the bush war, have moved into cooperative agricultural development. One such group has rehabilitated swampland destroyed by alluvial diamond mining. Perhaps ex-combatants could undertake a range of other land resource recovery, maintenance and protection tasks, including forest protection? The challenge is to rethink environmental protection in terms of work that will help stigmatised ex-combatants prove their social worth. In both symbolic and practical terms this would be a proper antidote to the poison of forest war in West Africa.

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CONFLICT TIMBER AND LIBERIA'S WAR

By Arthur G. Blundell

In 2002, forestry accounted for an estimated 22 percent of Liberia's GDP and half of its exports. Forests are important to the 85 percent of Liberians who are unemployed and many of who rely on shifting cultivation. However, forests have also been a source of instability. Over the past two decades, timber has funded conflict and the security forces of logging companies have engaged in widespread human rights abuses, including massacres. To eliminate this 'conflict timber', the United Nations Security Council (UN) banned the export of forest products from Liberia in 2003. The sanctions remain and the UN has demanded reform of the forest sector to prevent revenue from funding the resumption of violence. This paper summarizes the history of the conflict, the role of timber, and the use of targeted sanctions.

In 1820, rather than receiving their liberty in the USA, 86 ex-slaves were sent to West Africa to found a new country: Liberia. Their descendants, less than 3 percent of present-day Liberians, ruled until 1980, when a semi-literate sergeant seized power. Samuel Doe's kleptocracy lasted a decade until the cold war ended and with it, Liberia's strategic importance. With failing support from the USA, Liberia descended into a brutal civil war, lead by the Libyan-trained insurgent Charles Taylor. Exploiting ethnic animosity, Taylor soon captured most of the country, which gave him control over Liberia's lucrative natural resources.

In 1997, under a UN-backed peace accord, Taylor agreed to general elections. Liberians understood, however, that if he did not win, he would not relinquish power. Under the campaign slogan ‘*You killed my ma, you killed my pa, but I’ll vote for you*’, Taylor won in a landslide. But the international community offered little support, especially when Taylor backed the RUF rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Liberia’s civil war spread when Guinea backed another faction, the LURD.

Given ongoing conflict and the limited international engagement, the Liberian economy collapsed. As one of the few functioning sectors, timber was critical. Forestry attracted investment, notably about \$60 million by the Indonesian Oriental Timber Company (OTC). By 2002, timber was worth more than \$80 million a year and \$19 million in taxes, although the government could account for less than 15 percent. Between 1999 and 2001, OTC paid at least \$1.5 million to known arms dealers in lieu of taxes. In other cases, Taylor allegedly traded timber directly for arms. The notorious Ukrainian mafia boss, Leonid Minin, was awarded a logging concession, the Exotic Tropical Timber Enterprise.

Perhaps most devastating for Liberians, the timber companies employed private security forces –mostly militias associated with Taylor— to protect logging interests but also to gain access to new forests through the intimidation of local people. For example, in 1999, Taylor’s brother, the Managing Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), required the Maryland Wood Processing Industries to pay the local commander, Sumo, \$4000 per month for security. Sumo and his soldiers

are accused of *inter alia*, entering Côte d’Ivoire to loot and to recruit new fighters, and attacking civilians who denied access to his militia. Eyewitnesses claim that Sumo directed the massacre of civilians at Youghbor in May 2003; in 2004, the UN uncovered more than 300 bodies at the site.

In an effort to end the conflict, in 2001 the UN banned the travel of the major combatants and their supporters, the import of arms and the export of diamonds from Liberia. The UN tried to be selective, using targeted sanctions with the largest impact on the conflict while minimizing humanitarian impact¹.

Despite the sanctions, regional security deteriorated considerably. The UN became frustrated with the lack of progress and came under intense NGO lobbying, by Global Witness in particular². In May 2003, the UN banned timber exports. In fact, the civil war had become so widespread that most timber companies had already withdrawn from the forest, fearing looting or worse.

By August 2003, the rebel groups were near Monrovia, and under mounting international pressure, including an indictment by the UN Special Court for crimes against humanity, Taylor went into exile in Nigeria. The world’s largest peacekeeping operation, UNMIL, deployed 15 000 troops. Under a peace accord, a national transitional government (NTGL) was installed, divided among the warring factions. The NTGL gave control over the FDA to one of the rebel groups, MODEL.

Despite Taylor’s departure, the UN remains concerned that forestry could lead to conflict once again. That threat is empirical, not hypothetical: the World Bank found that fully

half of countries recovering from war return to violence within a decade because of the misappropriation of funds from natural resources –exactly what has happened in Liberia. To avoid this, the UN insisted on three criteria before timber sanctions can be lifted: 1) security is established throughout Liberia; 2) money does not fund conflict; and 3) the NTGL and FDA must manage the forest to ensure legitimate use. UN monitors found that all three remain unmet³. The UN reviewed the sanctions 21 December 2004 and extended them for another year.

Although the FDA and NTGL have been slow to reform, the timber sanctions have been remarkably effective. At first the lack of logging was due to the war, but since UNMIL has been in Liberia, most of the logging companies have respected the sanctions.

The sanctions were targeted to stop conflict, but they have had other impacts. Some believe they hinder relief; under Taylor, UN humanitarian workers received death threats because of the sanctions. Sanctions also affect employment: about 8000 seasonal jobs, which paid \$100/month. However, most of the skilled labourers were expatriates (e.g., OTC brought more than 600 workers from Asia). Sanctions also reduce maintenance of logging roads that provided access to local people, but also to the military (e.g., Taylor paid OTC to build roads outside their logging areas). Some timber companies also operated clinics and renovated schools. However, data from the Liberia Forestry Reassessment⁴ indicate that communities in logging concessions were, on average, no better served than those outside.

Despite the sanctions and the importance

of forests to Liberians, international response has been slow. At the February 2004 UN conference, donors pledged \$500 million to rebuild Liberia but forestry was not even on the initial agenda. The World Bank assessment team before the conference did not have a forestry expert. Since then, however, the US government has dedicated more than \$4 million to reform, and the World Bank, EC, FAO and IMF are collaborating. Rather than promote logging, environmental NGOs, such as Conservation International and Fauna and Flora International, have plans to increase 'peace' parks in Liberia.

History shows that countries recovering from war are as likely as not to return to conflict when revenue from natural resources is misappropriated. Once sanctions are lifted, buyers of Liberia's wood should insist that wood is tracked through the chain of custody from stump to export to ensure that only legitimate timber enters trade. Otherwise, international buyers may be fuelling the next war. Until the necessary reforms are implemented, Liberia, the massive investment in its recovery, and the world's largest peacekeeping operation remain at grave risk.

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PILOTING COMMUNAL FORESTS IN LIBERIA IN THE POST-CONFLICT PERIOD

By Jamison Suter

After the recent period of conflict in Liberia, aspects of which are discussed in other papers in this issue (Richards, page 29, Blundell, page 32 and Melnyk et al, page 17), with President Taylor's departure to Nigeria and the arrival of largely Nigerian peacekeepers in August 2003, the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history started in October 2003. Soon thereafter a National Transitional Government took power, the Constitution was suspended for two years and positions in Government were divided among LURD, MODEL, Taylor's supporters and 'Liberian civil society'.

Many development and diplomatic agencies sent in representatives and conducted assessments on the country's reconstruction needs. All of these acknowledged the role of the forest sector in fueling national and regional instability, as well as the sector's potential in providing jobs and funding reconstruction, directly and indirectly (for example infrastructural improvements funded by timber companies improving the national transportation network and port operations).

While the commercial aspects of Liberia's forest sector were frequently highlighted, the community- and conservation-related aspects received much less attention. However, reform of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) was regularly cited as key to meeting the UN Security Council (UNSC) criteria for lifting timber sanctions, even though officially these are limited to the Government regaining control of the timber-producing regions and ensuring that all revenues from the sector are properly managed and used as intended by Liberian law and regulations, and for the benefit of the Liberian public. In response, the FDA prepared a Road Map to Lifting UNSC Sanction[s] on Log and Timber Trade in Liberia: Basic Reforms in the Forestry Industry, which outlined that in addition to reviewing past and all existing concessions and reforming financial management, the country must balance the FDA Managing Director's "three Cs" of forest management: Commercial, Community and Conservation objectives. This has formed the basis for Fauna and Flora International's (FFI's) interventions in Liberia since 2004.

Two of the three Cs have legal and empirical precedents in Liberia, but management of forests by Communities has not yet been pursued by Government. Looking to the future, FFI and the FDA will pilot establishing communal forests (CFs), specifically in the forests and with the villages surrounding Sapo National Park.

The Act for the Creation of a Protected Forest Area Network (October 2003) defines a communal forest as an "Area set aside temporarily by regulation or legally [deeded to communities] for sustainable use of forest products by local communities on a non-commercial basis. No prospecting,