

[REDACTED]

THE MARK OF MODERN SLAVERY

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Acknowledgements

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1. ORGANIZATION PROFILE

SAVE MY FUTURE (SAMFU) FOUNDATION

The Save My Future (SAMFU) Foundation is a non-governmental organization established in 1987 by a renowned Catholic priest and two conservationists. SAMFU was founded out of the cherished love for the natural heritage of Liberia and is fully registered, incorporated and accredited under the laws of the Republic of Liberia.

SAMFU's mission is to facilitate and promote participatory community-based sustainable natural and human resource management and development in Liberia. This is pursued through an educational and empowering process in which the people in partnership with each other and those able to assist them identify their priorities, mobilize resources and assume the responsibility to manage and control the resources they depend on. The organization's activities are directed towards the protection for the environment, facilitation of nature conservation and embrace the promotion of social justice, equality and respect for human rights.

SAMFU envisages a new Liberia in which natural resources are managed sustainable to ensure a healthy environment and decentralized development under the rule of law in the next ten years.

SAMFU uses Participatory Rapid Appraisal techniques to help especially rural people to identify their problems/needs and other techniques to conduct research. The information gathered is focused on the environment, social justice, human rights and sustainable development. The information is disseminated for the purpose of creating awareness and influencing policy change.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is the result of an inquiry into the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 69yrs of operation. It is published in fulfillment of SAMFU's mission to protect the environment, facilitate nature conservation that embraces the promotion of social justice, equality and respect for human rights.

This report mirrors the activities of one of the oldest companies in Liberia, Firestone, which was established in 1926. The report raises three issues human rights abuses, unfair labour practices and environmental pollution.

This report reveals that [REDACTED] between 2000 and 2003 exported about 167, 165 tons of dry rubber from the country. The market value as well as the company's income is not known since the Company does not publish her tax returns and revenue intake. This report also reveals that [REDACTED] facilities have not been upgraded, and bulk of its labour force live in dilapidated buildings and do not have access to safe drinking water. They also live in quarters with poor sanitary conditions, lack of a high school and electricity even though the Company operates a dam and other equipments that provide these facilities for senior staff members and their families.

The objectives of this report are:

- To create public awareness aimed at drawing the attention of decision-makers to what is obtaining at the company; and
- To solicit the public's support for a just and immediate reform at [REDACTED]

We, at SAMFU, hope that the recommendations contained herein will be given serious attention by the Government of Liberia, the Management of the [REDACTED], both local and international Labour and human rights Organizations, consumers of [REDACTED] rubber, and civil society organizations, especially human rights and environmental groups.

3. INTRODUCTION

██████████ is a rubber plantation located in Margibi County, Liberia, West Africa. The plantation was established in 1926 and is amongst the world's largest rubber plantation. The terrain is a coastal low-land, interspersed with marshes, creeks and streams that flow into the Farmington, Junk and the Du rivers before final destination into the Atlantic Ocean. This is the Marshall Watershed Network, one of three major watersheds in Liberia with high marine biodiversity.

In 1926, ██████████ signed a concession agreement with the Government of Liberia for a period of 99 years subjected to renewals. The agreement covers one million acres of coastal land. In recent times, ██████████ has been joined by ██████████ as a partner in its operations. Since the inception of this company, it has produced billions of tons of dry rubber and latex but has not been able to establish any factory to be able to manufacture some of its products into finished products. It has and continues to ship all of its rubber to the United States of America and other countries for sale. This inquiry is focused on three aspects of the company's operations including: Economic, Social and Environmental impacts.

The Company has a combined labour force of about 14,000; 8,000 fully employed and 6,000 persons serving as contractors or casual labourers. The terms of references¹ of these labourers has increased over the years. Consequently family members, especially under-aged children, must now render their parents assistance to complete their daily work. The average monthly wages are less than one hundred United States Dollars.

Most of the children of the labourers at the plantation are not attending school because of its absence at most of the Company's camps, and the

¹ Including tapping 750 trees and transporting the gathered latex to the assigned storage tanks at least 1.6km away daily

quest of most parents to allow their children assist them to complete their daily task. Children, who are successful to have primary school in their camps, are learning under poor conditions, as the schools are substandard with poor facilities. There are forty-five (45) divisions in the company's concession with four (4) junior high schools; there is no high school attached to the Company's school system. Most of the present junior high schools were formally elementary schools of two classrooms that have been attached with additional classroom, made of local materials, by parents to host their children. In most of the Company's camps, labourers live in single-room mud huts, with no electricity, access to safe drinking water, latrine and bathrooms.

There appears to be no environmental standards for the company operations as evidenced by the lack of a solid waste management or disposal system. Large volumes of chemical rubbers are dumped in the open. Chemical waste from the factory goes through a sewage line and eventually empties into the Farmington River. The Farmington River is used by inhabitants of adjoining communities, for bathing, washing and other household chores.

The areas now covered by the [REDACTED] was originally owned and inhabited by the Mamba Bassa tribes. They were reportedly evicted from the area by the [REDACTED] and the Government of Liberia during the signing of concession agreement without benefits to these local inhabitants.

4. ECONOMIC IMPACT

4.1 Employment

██████████ has a workforce of about 14,000. Approximately 70% are labourers (tappers) who are mostly illiterate and unskilled Liberians. The lack of employment for unskilled labourers in Liberia, and the inability of the Liberian government, past and present, to monitor the activities of the Company have given rise to the abuse of labourers and the poor working and living conditions they have to endure. The primary concern of ██████████ management is to see latex delivered to the factory for processing, but ignores the safety and well-being of labourers who performed this task. Since the tappers are virtually illiterate peasant contractors they stand the risk of arbitrary dismissals and replacement at the will of their bosses. According to some of the labourers interviewed, those who attempt to seek justice in these instances often drop their cases because of prolonged court proceedings and their inability to pay for legal representation.



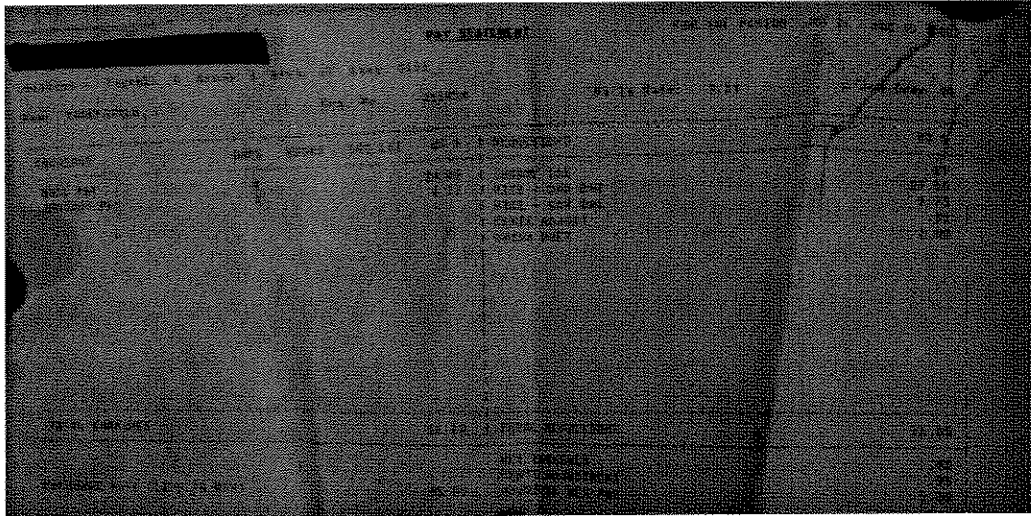
A child who cannot attend school due to the lack of money to pay fees at a private school assists her brother to complete his day's work.

Labourers workload has increased over the years. Their daily responsibilities now include cleaning rubber cups, tapping, collecting latex, applying stimulants and fungicide. They also transport the latex they collect, maintain equipment and perform seasonal tasks such as grass cutting and weeding around the rubber trees. *Each* tapper must tap up to 750 - 850 trees about 15 feet apart from each other and all of the additional work for a daily wage of US\$3.01.

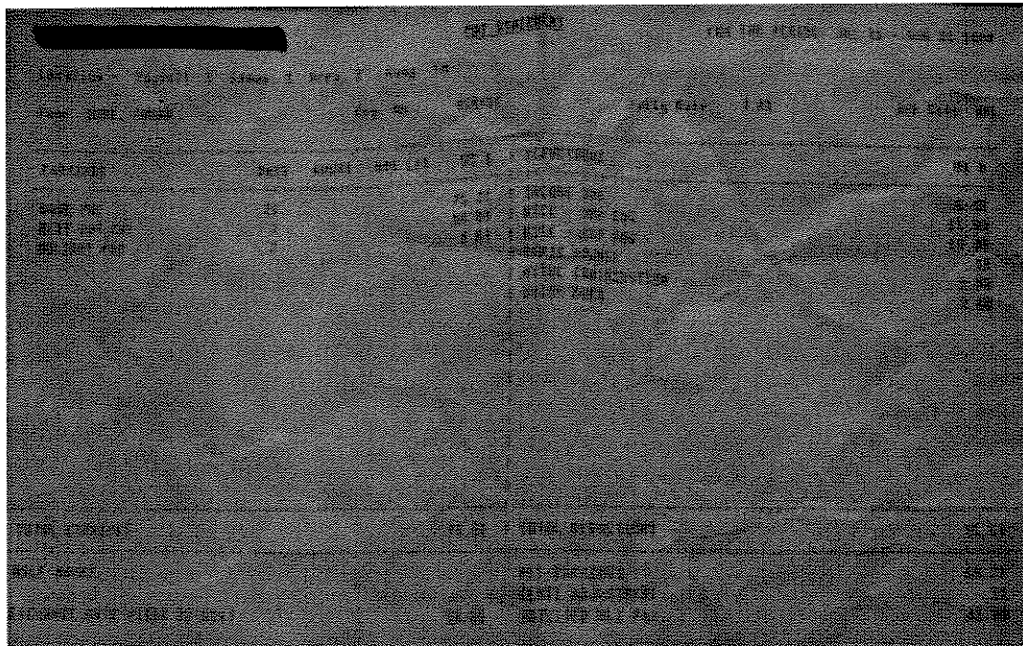
To increase production, [REDACTED] designed and introduced a production cash prize bonus scheme for its staff, especially superintendents, who register the highest production monthly. This situation has led to each superintendent designing their own strategies to ensure that labourers under their supervision work hard to increase their individual production. In their quest to win the cash prize, a **Double Collection** of latex scheme is introduced; meaning that at the end of normal daily tapping, collection and transporting of latex to the storage tanks usually about 2 - 3 km away on their bared shoulders, a second round of latex collection is done and transported for weighing. Under this scheme a tapper's normal working day starts 04:00 GMT and end at 16:00 GMT. All of the tappers interviewed during this inquiry complained that the workload is unbearable. The average tapper produces about 100lbs of latex plus at least 50lbs of coagulated cup lump on a daily basis. This means that a single tapper who works 30 days a month is capable of producing at least 3,000lbs lbs of latex and 1500 lbs of cup lump. At the time of this investigation, the [REDACTED] market value price of rubber was between U\$400 - U\$500.

The average tapper generates U\$900 minimum monthly for the company, this adds to approximately U\$9m in production for the tapper workforce on a monthly basis.

This amount doubles in most cases when tappers are asked to perform double collection, double tapping or use stimulating chemicals to force the trees to produce more latex.

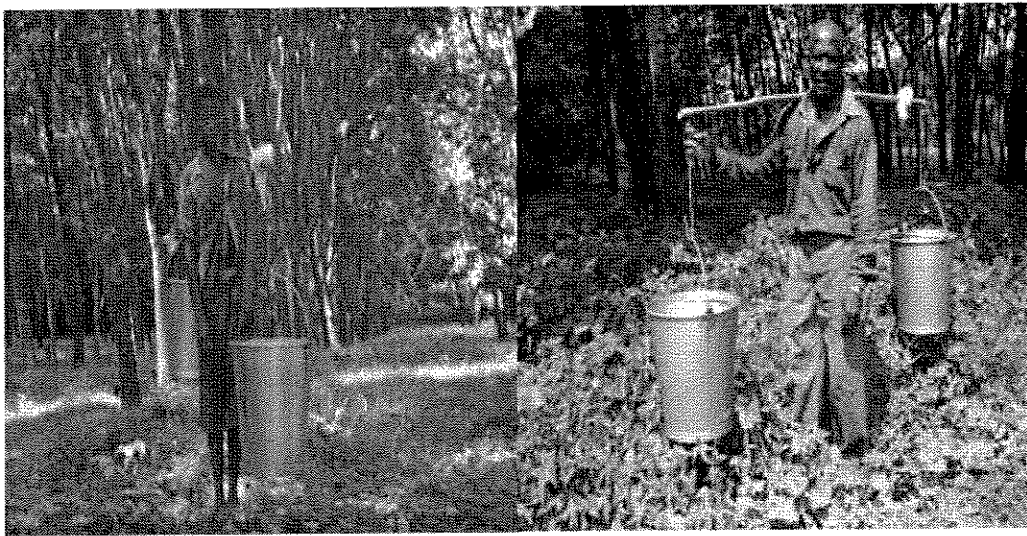


Take home salary slip of 1 USD value for Lorpukollie Yarkpawolo who was retired and is now blind after 8 days of work.



A monthly take home salary of 41 USD after 25 days of work and deductions.

During the visit to the concession, tappers complained of the lack of transportation system for latex from the areas of collection to the storage tanks. Each bucket of latex a tapper carries weighs 70lbs and they have to carry two buckets at a time. The **RECOVERY TAPPING**, commonly known as **"DOUBLE TAPPING"** doubles a tappers daily workload. For example, a tapper is forced to tap 1500 trees in two different areas instead of the usual 750 trees of his normal work.



The means of transporting latex - a child assisting his father and an adult labourer returning from the field with a bucket weighing 70lbs each which is carried on their shoulders as they appear.

This is another strategy employed by the management of [REDACTED] and is enforced by the Superintendents, headmen and overseers to double production. This enables the Superintendents, headmen and overseers to win the monthly bonuses at the expense of labourers. This strategy also enables the Company to make up for lost days by labourers during the month.

Tappers are not issued safety materials (rain boots, rain coats, acid protective gloves, goggles, etc.) by the Company. This exposes them to

serious injury such as damage to eyes due to chemical coated tree barks that are tapped overhead, wounds from tapping knives and slashing cutlasses etc. Unfortunately, tappers who do not complete their daily workload are marked half their daily wages by their bosses.

As a result of tappers increased workload, other family members including their wives and children join to assist in completing the day's work. As a common Firestone working phenomenon, tappers who do not have many children themselves sub-contract other children from the neighborhood or nearby IDP camps to assist them in completing their workload. These subcontractors are paid around US\$10 and 10 cups of rice (approximately 5kgs) out of labourers monthly wages. Without subcontracting or asking family members to assist, it is impossible for the tappers to complete their daily task.



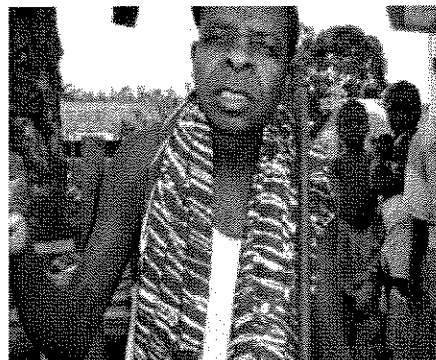
Displaced Family- Children helping their displaced father, who is a sub-contractor

The average monthly wage of tappers is less than US\$100 and is calculated on a basis of daily wages of US\$3.01 subject to tax deductions, rice supply and credit union deductions.

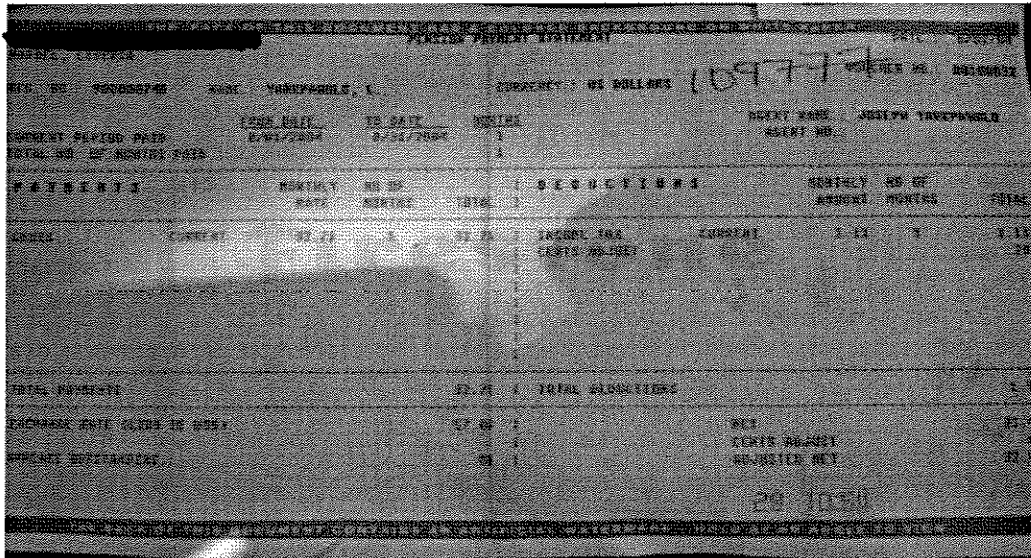
The bosses of the tappers decide the completion of the tapper daily task on the basis of quantity and density of latex reported at storage sites, the completions of tapping of 750, the reporting of coagulated latex from the rubber cups "Cup Lum p" etc. Most tappers that are ill treated by their bosses remain silent for fear of losing their job coupled with the lack of an independent labour union to advocate for their rights.

4.2 Retirement

Retirement in the concessions is done after twenty-five to thirty years of hard labour with monthly retirement benefit between 10 - 50 dollars depending on the service time with the company. Most of them are retired upon physical disability with their retirement packages as their benefit. Most retirees complained of delays in receiving their monthly retirement benefits. When we visited the plantation, many retirees were quoted as saying, "the people don't want to give us our money and we are suffering everyday, when you get sick nothing is done for you, since they took their working ID cards from us."



Two frustrated retirees of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] explaining their ordeals - one of them lost his left eye from chemical coated tree bark while the other got completely blind. The both of them confirmed not receiving any form of benefit from the Company as well as the National Social Security and Welfare cooperation to which they have paid their social security fees.



The monthly retirement pays slip of [REDACTED] of 32USD after more than 25 years of service with the Company and subsequently turning blind.

After several years of labour, most employees who are retired are not capable of performing other tasks; they are mostly physically disabled or nursing permanent injuries. Upon retirement, most retirees are unable to leave the plantation because they could not afford to construct a home for themselves while they were working. Retirement benefits vary and it is difficult to determine the basis on which it is calculated because of limited information.

4.3 Tax

[REDACTED] may probably be the highest taxpayer in Liberia. Presently the company occupies about one million acres of land. Its concession agreement with the Liberian Government was for a period of 99 years and subject to renewals. The land rental tax embedded in that document is \$0.06 per acre annually, which amount to U\$60,000 for the entire 1,000,000 acres. The total tax accumulated from the production, or total revenue received by government is unknown since neither [REDACTED] nor the Liberian Government publishes what they pay or receive as tax returns.

The below information was provided by a staff of the Company who prefers to remain anonymous.

Export Figures of Dry Rubber (Latex)

PERIODS	WEIGHT (lbs)	TON (2000lbs)
2000	100,000,000	50,000
2001	84,562,000	42,281
2002	78,768,000	39,384
2003	71,000,000	35,500
Total	334,330,000lbs	167,165 tons

The company's production figures have been very attractive over the past few years, regardless of the civil crisis. In the year 2000, the record shows the highest exportation figure, while 2003 is the least in four years with a decline of 29%, which is due to the increased insecurity in the country.

5. SOCIO IMPACT

5.1 Housing Conditions

Housing in the [REDACTED] concession for labourers is the worst in multinational operations history in Liberia. Most labourers and their families are forced to live in single room units. Some tappers annex additional rooms to their single rooms at their own expense. They have no access to electricity and pipe borne water.

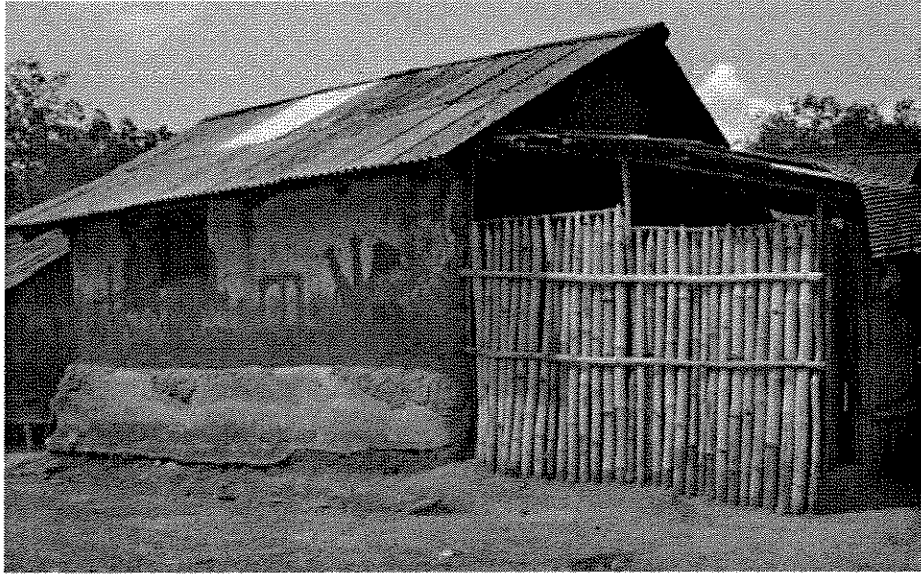
Even though these dilapidated homes exist for labourers who produce the rubber, Junior and senior staff live in luxurious homes with regular electricity pipe borne water and earn fabulous salaries.



The typical housing units for labourers of [REDACTED]

Because most senior staff enjoyed these facilities they often ignore the plight of the men who work under their supervision. They continuously design new strategies to improve production and maintain these facilities and their jobs.

The Company produces about **1.5 million KWH** of electricity per month from their hydro-plant and passes electricity lines through various labourers' camps to supply the homes of senior staff while the labourers are left in darkness.



Another example typical housing units for labourers of [REDACTED]



The home of senior staff of [REDACTED]

5.2 Education

The [REDACTED] concession is divided into 45 divisions with less than ten primary schools and four junior high schools. Most of the children walk 3-4 miles daily to attend school, especially when there is no school built in their camp. There is no high school in the company school system. These existing primary and junior high schools are not up to standard. They lack materials such as (furniture, chalks, blackboards etc.) and most have small capacity; classes are often combined. Most of the existing junior high schools were formerly two classroom elementary schools that have been annexed with reeds or sun dried bricks by parents to host their children. For example, the Division # 6 Elementary with two rooms was annexed with class rooms made of reeds by parents as a replacement for the Du-side Junior High School.

Even though the company has been operating during the crisis it has not been able to reconstruct the Du-side Junior High School, which hosted junior high student from more than ten divisions that was destroyed by the civil crisis. Like other camps around the plantation these schools lack electricity, standard latrines, recreation and other facilities feasible for school going kids.

There is also a discriminatory system in the school system. The children of the senior staff have a separate well furnished school with all facilities. Before the civil crisis they were even transported by bus to school. Most children who manage to complete junior high education do not go through high school, as there is no company high school in the plantation.

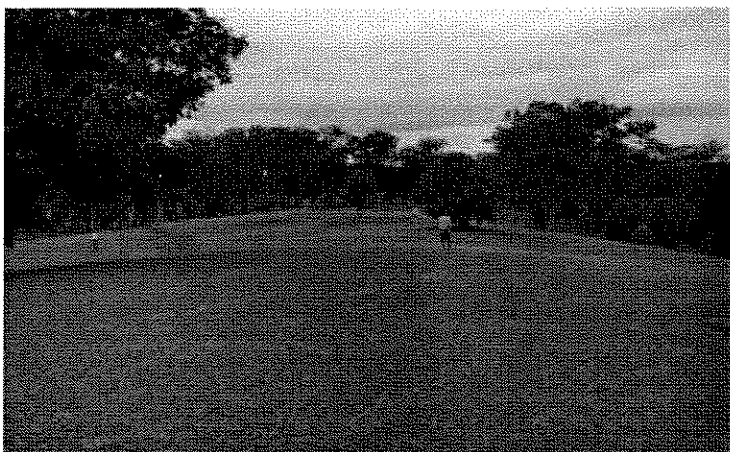
About 90% of the children who graduate from the plantation schools are entrapped in this dragnet once they stayed on the plantation without further education.



One of the four Junior High Schools formally Division#6 Elementary School that was annexed with reeds by the Parents Teachers Association to host Junior high student.

5.3 Recreation

In all of the camps visited labourers and their children are provided no recreational facility except for self made football fields and privately owned video clubs. Contrast this situation with this well maintained golf course approximately 25 acres, a multi-purpose volleyball and lawn tennis court, which regardless of their sizes are well maintained.



A Luxurious golf playing field with club attached for the few elites and friends at the [REDACTED]

6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

6.1 Air Pollution

From a long distance, [REDACTED] welcomes you with its strong odor of chemically mixed air pollutants from its nearby rubber processing factory and caked rubber field. Here all purchased rubbers are stockpiled before being transferred to the main factory for processing. Besides the factory, the company dumped a huge pile of low grade rubber fenced in on more than 1 acre of land about 200 meters from the [REDACTED] headquarters (Harbel) that is host to more than 10 thousand people.



Air and ground water pollution -Chemically mixed rubber dumped on more than 1 acre of land by the [REDACTED] more than 1 year ago

In the process of baking rubber for export, the Company releases huge amount of chemical pollutants that is mixed with the carbon dioxide that is inhaled by inhabitants of the city. The smoke released from the factory rises to be seen in many parts of Harbel as a sign of very serious air pollution.

6.2 Water and Chemical pollution

All attempts by SAMFU to test the waters of [REDACTED] failed due to the lack of water testing kits and expertise to conduct the test. What is glaring is that the company uses huge volume of ammonia and acid daily to keep the rubber liquidized or coagulated. At the end of the day, workers are asked to keep their working equipment clean by washing them into creeks and rivers. The quantity of chemical that is washed from buckets, storage tanks, latex transportation trucks, and other equipments from the factory into creeks daily is high and poses a serious health hazard when accumulated over a long period.



The [REDACTED] processing factory from where wastes are emptied into the Farmington River.

Considering that about 70% of the 14,000 workers are tappers, this amounts to 8,400 active tappers. Also considering that each tapper working tools contain at least a gram or drop of ammonium which is far less than reality,

8,400 grams² of ammonium is washed into the Farmington River daily. Using these estimates we calculate that approximately 66gallons of ammonium is emptied into the Farmington River on a monthly basis; this totals approximately 792gallons or 14 drums of ammonia that is emptied into the river quietly by tappers alone annually. This figure does not include the chemicals from the factory and accidental sources.



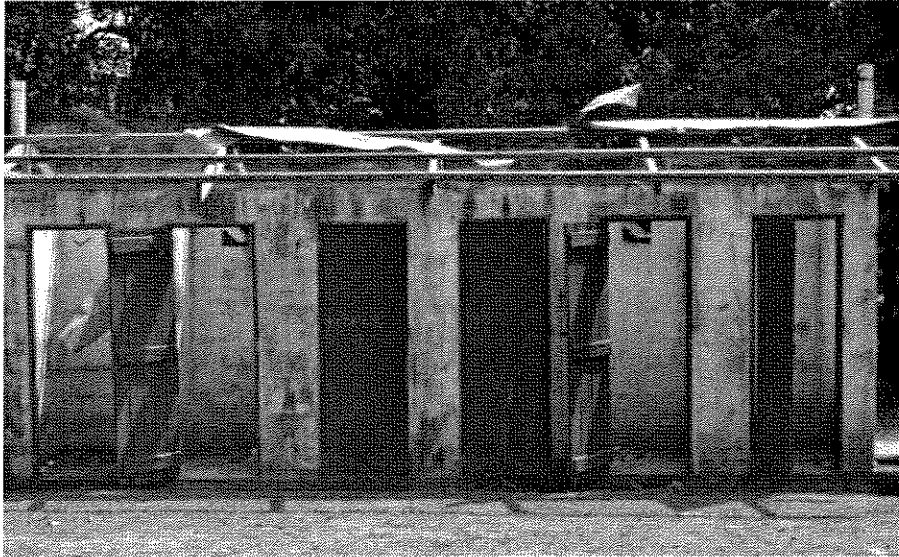
One of the several sign boards planted by smaller creeks in the plantation

6.3 Sanitation

The labourers live in over-crowded camps. Some camps have about up to 50 (fifty), hosting fifty families, but with ten bathrooms and latrines. Because these latrines and bathrooms are jointly used, cleaning is difficult. When overfill there is no waste disposal facility. Because of this reason most of the labourers and their families prefer to use the nearby bushes and creeks for latrine purposes while some construct their family bathrooms and latrine

² This is equivalent to approximately 8.4 liters or 2.2 gallons of ammonia

facilities made of local materials. Others use mini buckets for latrine purposes and are subsequently dumped the next morning.



A typical latrine in the plantation

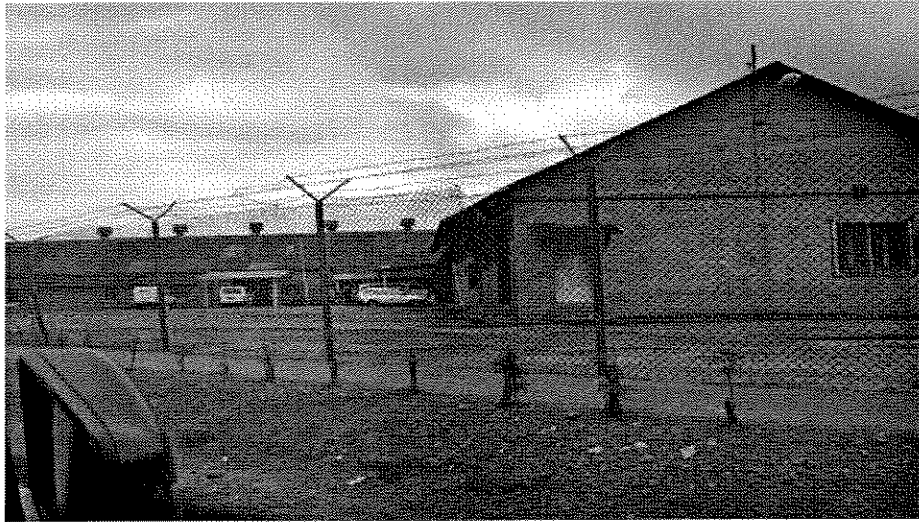
6.4 Drinking Water

In Most of the camps visited, there is no pipe borne water³. There was one hand pump in each of the camps visited but inhabitants complained that they are not chlorinated regularly. Also, when the water table goes low during the dry season they are forced to drink from nearby creeks and streams already polluted with human waste, chemicals, and other pollutants.

6.5 Health

Presently, there is only one hospital in Harbel, the company's headquarters, a few dispensaries and an ambulance to transfer patients during emergencies. This facility seldom benefits labourers as their camps do not have radio communications system and the superintendents, who have these facilities on their vehicles, we were told, are frequently absent.

³ SAMFU investigation in Divisions 6, 9 and 42, December 2004



The [REDACTED] in Harbel

Employees complained of poor health care delivery system saying that they are not properly attended to, which often lead to permanent disabilities. For example, [REDACTED] presently suffers medical complications from a surgery she underwent at the [REDACTED] in 1998. During the operation her urinary bladder was punctured, and presently, she uses an external urinary bladder. She explained that even with this condition the company still requires her to work. She has been threatened with eviction if she stops working and she has received no compensation.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Following six months of investigation, SAMFU arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The [REDACTED] tappers are suffering from some of the worst forms of rights abuses and are working under inhumane and hazardous conditions;
2. Child abuse and labour is commonplace;
3. Retirees face difficulties and endure weeks of delays to receive their merger benefits;
4. The company is causing massive air and water pollution and polluted water sources are being used by nearby local communities;
5. The company is not doing enough to improve the working and living conditions of its employees;
6. Tappers salaries do not commensurate with the labour they provide for the company;
7. The absence of up-to-date educational facilities in the plantation is negatively impacting the growth and development of children born on the plantation;
8. Because of the alleged difficult possibilities for receiving justice in the courts, aggrieved workers are reluctant to pursue legal actions against the company when abused; and
9. The credit scheme imposed on the labourers of [REDACTED] is exploitative and not in the best interest of them.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this inquiry on the operations of the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], we wish to recommend the followings:

- That [REDACTED] take immediate steps to improve the living and working conditions of the tappers by providing them safety equipments and body wears;
- That the Company immediately reduce and set limits to the daily workload of a tapper as well a take steps to outlaw the use of child labour on the plantation;
- That the Company cleans up the solid waste that has accumulated in its plantation over the years as well as the polluted creeks and the Farmington river;
- That the Company increase the daily wages of its labourers by 100% ;
- That the Company improve the medical facilities, including the hospital, for use by its employees;
- That the Company publish its yearly production and tax payment records at the end of each fiscal year;
- That the Company improve the education facilities for tappers' children and construct a high school to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities with children of other categories of employees;
- That the Company identify and use alternative means of transportation for their latex to the storage tanks;
- That the Company allow other labour organizations to freely operate in the concession to protect labourers rights and interest;
- That the Company relocate its rubber processing facility in an isolated area following a full scale environmental impact assessment;
- That the Company immediately close down the credit scheme on the plantation;
- That the Company immediately improve the living standards of its labourers by constructing new housing units with electricity, save

drinking water and latrines as they are enjoyed by other employees of the company; and

- Regularize retirees' benefits in such a way that delays faced before receiving their benefits are avoided.

That international human rights organizations and consumers of [REDACTED] rubber should:

- Pressure [REDACTED] to take steps to address the issues highlighted in this report including child labour⁴ and environmental pollution or stop buying their product on the international market until reforms are put into place.

That the government of Liberia should:

- Instruct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct an immediate environmental impact assessment in the concessions;
- Instruct [REDACTED] to improve the working and living conditions of its employees;
- Compel [REDACTED] to comply with international labour standards and principles; and
- Request [REDACTED] to begin manufacturing finished products for domestic consumption and export.

SAVE MY FUTURE FOUNDATION

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⁴ The basic elements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child