

landmine action

Feasibility Study into the Rehabilitation &
Reintegration of
Unregistered Ex-Combatants
Guthrie Rubber Plantation, Liberia
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¹ Cover Picture: Village women 'disarming' in Lofa County

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List of Acronyms

CBO	Community-based organization
DEN-L	Development Education Network – Liberia
CDC	Clan Development Committee
CHF	Cooperative Housing Foundation
DDC	District Development Committee
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LAC	Liberian Agriculture Company
LMA	Land Mine Action
LRC	Liberian Resources Corporation
LNGO	Local non-governmental organization
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NARDA	New African Research and development Agency
NGO	Non-governmental agency
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PBRC	Peace Building Resource Centre
PPD	Plantation Protection Details
RR	Rehabilitation and reintegration
TDC	Town Development Committee
ULIMO	United Liberian Movement for Democracy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNMIL	UN Mission in Liberia

Executive summary

The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants omitted from the disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programme (DDRR) requires an integrated strategy that addresses:

- (i) The immediate rehabilitation and reintegration requirements of the group
- (ii) The anomalies in the DDRR modality that led to their exclusion from the programme
- (iii) The broader contextual issues that, they feel, led to their participation in the war (drivers of conflict).

Rehabilitation and reintegration requirements

The ex-combatants on Guthrie that require rehabilitation and reintegration packages are a small component part of a national problem. Unemployment in Liberia is estimated at 85%¹, with youth unemployment estimated at 88%². The creation of jobs and small business opportunities is critically important to long term peace and stability in Liberia.

Job creation should be combined with high labour requirements and high revenue generating potential. The development of commercial, rather than subsistence, agriculture will have an important potential for the generation of national wealth as well as job creation in both agriculture and industry³. Liberia's rubber and agricultural sectors, both decimated by the conflict, offer the greatest opportunities to train and employ large numbers of unskilled individuals to the national benefit.

The feasibility study recommends that the rehabilitation and reintegration packages for the Guthrie ex-combatants be set within this context; specifically, the report recommends the rehabilitation of a Ministry of Agriculture training facility and institutional support to the Liberia Rubber Development Authority (to enable the provision of rubber training packages) and support for an accompanying comprehensive social reintegration programme.

Disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR)

The principal strategic aim of DDR is to target the core perpetrators of violence, to remove them from the sphere of conflict, and to reintegrate them in to civilian life, thereby giving them a stake in a peaceful and developing economy, rather than in a cycle of destructive conflict. The DDRR modality deployed in Liberia failed this aim in several key respects.

The central issue is the system's recognition, then dependence, on faction-appointed commanders to provide lists of combatants to enter the DDRR process, thereby enabling the commanders to control access to the process. Many took advantage of the situation; weapons were collected from combat soldiers and either redistributed amongst kin, client and ethnic group networks or sold to people willing to pay to access RR opportunities. A major consequence of this was the exclusion of an as yet unknown number of core

¹ United Nations Common Country Assessment

² Millennium Development Goals Report 2004, Government of Liberia 2004

³ Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP), Government of Liberia (with ILO), June 28, 2006, p14.

combatants from the DDRR programme. On Guthrie alone, research identified 394 ex-combatants omitted from DDRR.⁴

The report recommends a review of the DDRR modality deployed in Liberia; refinement of the screening methods employed by the Guthrie research team; implementation of suitable rehabilitation and reintegration packages for the excluded Guthrie ex-combatants; and the conduct of research to identify other excluded ex-combatant groups and design suitable rehabilitation and reintegration for them.

Drivers of conflict

Addressing the potential problems presented by ex-combatants excluded from the DDRR process through training packages and social reintegration support alone is too narrow a conception. There are broader issues to consider; the conflict systems in the Mano River Union are the product of historical and political processes that have excluded successive generations of citizens, rural youth in particular, from the benefits of the state⁵.

Today, there is a clear perception that vested political and commercial interests underlie the resumption of government control of Guthrie, and that the Americo-Liberian political and business elites which, in previous decades, centralised the country's wealth flows through the Executive Mansion, are resuming control of the political and commercial spheres in the post-war period.

As a case study, the Guthrie ex-combatants offer a clear indicator of the generational issue that must be addressed if the peace is to prove durable. Young people fought the war in Liberia, and youth now make up more than half the population of the country. To a large extent, the consolidation of peace depends on the (a) successful rehabilitation and reintegration of the former fighters, (b) the extent to which the young and marginalised are involved in the reconstruction process, and crucially (c) their perceptions of the remaking of the political and economic structures and processes that will determine their life opportunities.

These issues are not about personalities, they are about the political system; the problems are systemic, therefore it is the system that must be addressed. The fighters perceive the machinery of government as highly centralised, and responsive and accountable only to a very narrow constituency. There is a need to evolve the system away from this, and to engage grassroots constituencies in shaping a post-war political culture that avoids replicating the problems of the pre-war regimes.

The report recommends Government and donor support for the design and implementation of a set of initiatives to (a) capacitate community-level institutions to engage with local government, and (b) promote accountability and transparency in the rubber sector.

⁴ Research and sensitization efforts since 30 November have uncovered a further 24 DDRR excluded ex-combatants; it is likely that the 394 figure will rise prior to the start of any training package. A final total is expected to be in the region of 450.

⁵ Richards, Paul, Steven Archibald, Beverlee Bruce, Watta Modad, Edward Mulbah, Tornorlah Varpilah and James Vincent. 2005 "Community Cohesion in Liberia: A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment." *Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction Paper No. 21*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Methods

The research was conducted on the Guthrie Plantation, and in other locations in Liberia, between September and December 2006. The research team consisted of 6 national staff, initially trained and coordinated by an international consultant under the direction of the Landmine Action Liberia programme manager. The team included ex-combatants, Guthrie residents and professional researchers; two were female.

Research was designed and then conducted to:

- (i) Identify the modes of organisation and production employed during the illegal occupation of the plantation
- (ii) Identify the unregistered ex-combatants working on the plantation, and ascertain their status and function within the plantation economy
- (iii) Identify the main reasons why unregistered ex-combatants did not enter the DDRR process
- (iv) Develop clearer understandings of the factors that influenced combatant's decisions to join factions
- (v) Develop clearer understandings of ex-combatant perceptions of the process through which the Government of Liberia resumed control of the Guthrie plantation
- (vi) Develop clearer understandings of ex-combatant perceptions of the post-war reconstruction process
- (vii) Identify which type of skills training package would be most likely to provide a sustainable livelihood option for the majority of the group.

Given the nature of the target group, and the sensitivity of the information to be gathered, it was decided that a formal research approach, based on a pre-set questionnaire, would be less productive than a relatively informal, discourse-based approach. As each of the research team members was familiar with the plantation, and the mechanics of its occupation, each was comfortable with the prospect of working within a set of discussion guidelines intended to draw out the information listed above. The research team spent 3 days in Monrovia devising the guidelines, which were reviewed and adjusted on a weekly basis at the end of week debriefing and consolidation meeting.

Research was started with an initial scoping study of the plantation to assess how many of the 25 camps were functional, and whether ex-combatants were occupying each camp. A six-week research schedule was then devised, although this expanded into a 12 week task as the ex-combatant group became more mobile in the wake of the Government repossession of the plantation and the imposition of the Interim Management Team. Screening and registration processes were conducted in each of the 22 functional camps. Approximately 2000 people were screened, over 700 interviewed, and, by 30 November 2006, 394 had been registered as ex-combatants who had not entered the DDRR process. The 394 includes 35 women fighters and 35 who would have been child soldiers at war's end (3 still fall into the child soldier category). Each of the initial camp screening and interview processes took 2 days to organise and conduct, with research taking place on 5 days per week and collation and analysis of the data on the 6th day. Follow up research typically lasted a day in each camp.

As the research was conducted during the period of transition to Government control, the team found that, in each camp, they were inundated with illegal tappers presenting themselves as ex-combatants unregistered with DDDR. In some camps the process would begin with hundreds of would-be participants. The screening process centred on a series of questions aimed at ascertaining whether the individual in question was a genuine combatant. Key to this stage of the research was the detailed knowledge of the dynamics of the war possessed by each member of the research team. The key questions included:

- (i) Name of faction
- (ii) Date of recruitment
- (iii) Place of recruitment
- (iv) Name of battalion
- (v) Name of commander
- (vi) Changes in command structure, including names of individuals
- (vii) Structure of battalion, including names of battalion sub-units
- (viii) Rank on joining battalion
- (ix) Rank on leaving battalion
- (x) Description of duties within the battalion, including management of combat units (if applicable)
- (xi) Description of main battalion actions, including dates, locations and description of engagements
- (xii) Battle progress of battalion (i.e. from location to location, including dates)

Each of the 394 selected respondents was interviewed in depth, on at least three occasions and by different researchers, about their areas of origin, their social background, their circumstances at time of recruitment / abduction, how they came to be on the plantation, their present familial circumstances and their rehabilitation and reintegration priorities (re: skills training and employment). Repeat interviews during the 3 months built on the initial information to include ex-combatant perceptions of the causes of the war and the greatest threats to peace and stability; the salient points of which are presented in the main body of the report.

As the grip of the IMT has tightened, the ex-combatant population has become increasingly mobile. IMT recruitment and housing policies have placed them under increasing economic and social stress and they are becoming increasingly desperate as any saved money is run down and they lose their accommodation. The research process has continued although its focus has shifted. Considerable time and effort has been devoted to tracking the movement of the ex-combatants as they move and to developing a contact system. This has proved a time consuming and challenging task; there is no phone network on the plantation and as a result the research team has had to maintain a daily presence, moving around the camps, villages and adjacent farms in order to locate and track the ex-combatants and develop a contact system.

Linked to the tracking exercise, the research team has had to sensitize the ex-combatants on the need to remain calm, to avoid trouble and to be patient. Regularly updated radio messages on national, UN and local radio stations and distributed flyers contribute to this sensitization exercise. This effort will need to continue until the ex-combatants can be placed in a training facility. A failure to track and sensitize them risks an exodus from the plantation and their potential recruitment into a sub-regional fighting faction, criminal activity or their coalescing at another site of illegal natural resource exploitation.

1 Introduction

In September 2006 the Government of Liberia took control of Guthrie from the former LURD⁶ faction that had illegally occupied the plantation since June 2003, since which time it had organised the production and sale of rubber to the internal Liberian market.

An estimated 2500-4000 former combatants were involved in the illegal management of the plantation economy and the production of rubber. The majority of the ex-combatants working on the plantation had registered with the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), and entered the DDRR process, only to drop out and turn to the illegal Guthrie rubber economy to earn “quick money” way in excess of their RR benefits.

The occupation is now ended, and a government-appointed Interim Management Team (IMT) has assumed control of the plantation. The former LURD management structure has abandoned the plantation, leaving its rank and file footsoldiers behind. Legal employment practices are being instituted and former plantation employees are being hired. Only those ex-combatants with a previous family history on Guthrie are being offered employment; those who settled in the plantation after the war are being encouraged to report to an on-site DDRR facility to register for re-entry in to the process. Since September 2006, 288 ex-combatants have re-entered the programme and left the plantation⁷.

A sub-set of the ex-combatant group was not registered with the DDRR process⁸. Now required to leave the plantation and with no where to go, this group has no immediate training or employment options, leading to concerns that members of the group are vulnerable to militia re-recruitment in Ivory Coast or Guinea, or are likely to pose a persistent public order and criminal threat within Liberia⁹.

2 History of the Guthrie occupation

Guthrie plantation straddles Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties, which are bounded to the north by Gbarpolu County. By early 2002 LURD had gained control of Gbarpolu and was planning its advance on Monrovia. A key strategic target in the advance was the town of Tubmanburg in Bomi County. Tubmanburg is adjacent to the Guthrie plantation.

As LURD advanced on Tubmanburg it recruited a number of young men engaged in logging activities in Bopulo District. The majority of these young men were from the resident tapping communities on the Guthrie estate. Weary of the harassment they were suffering at the hands of Government of Liberia forces stationed in the area, the young men fled to the logging operations in Bopulo.

⁶ Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, a Guinean and Ivorian-supported warring faction that entered Liberia from Guinea and Sierra Leone

⁷ This figure includes dependents, UNMIL RRR 30 November 2006

⁸ The research team screened approximately 2000 ex-combatants and registered 394 ex-combatants not registered with the DDRR process

⁹ For much of 2006 Monrovia has been subject to an exponential increase in street crime, including armed robberies, much of which is attributed to the presence of large numbers of unemployed ex-combatants in the city (the actual extent of ex-combatant involvement in criminal activity is not known, although ex-combatants would appear to be the key players in armed violence, UNPOL Officer, 30 November 2006).

LURD trained these young men and used them to infiltrate Gbah Jekeh, a market town situated on the edge of the plantation along the main highway to Bo Waterside on the Liberia – Sierra Leone border.

In March 2003, during a busy market day in Gbah, the infiltrators ambushed two Government Forces vehicles and, in the ensuing confusion, abducted a large number of young men. The group underwent training in Bopulo and formed part of the force that finally took control of Tubmanburg in June 2003.

LURD soon extended its control of Bomi County along the Tubmanburg – Monrovia highway to the junction town of Klay, thereby taking control of the main roadways between Monrovia and Sierra Leone, and the entire area of the Guthrie plantation.

With access to the plantation secured, senior LURD ‘General’, Joseph Nyumah¹⁰, along with LURD Special Forces ‘General’ Mohammed Tarawally¹¹, deployed forces on to the plantation to collect the rubber that had been tapped and abandoned in the gathering cups as residents had fled the fighting.

Known as ‘Operation BLACK RUBBER’¹², this initial phase of LURD involvement on the plantation took place during August and October 2003. Throughout the occupation ex-combatants provided a significant amount of the labour that tapped the illegal rubber. For those excluded from the DDRR programme, the illegal Guthrie rubber economy was the only real employment option available.

If the exclusion of core combatants from DDRR programmes is to be minimised in future DD processes it is important that we understand the systemic flaws that contributed to the exclusion of the Guthrie group and probably to a far larger number of ex-combatants throughout Liberia.

3 Exclusion of core combatants from DDRR

The principal strategic aim of DDR is to target the core perpetrators of violence, to remove them from the cycle of conflict, and to reintegrate them in to civilian life, thereby giving them a stake in a peaceful and developing economy, rather than in a cycle of destructive conflict. The DDRR modality deployed in Liberia failed this aim in several key respects.

The DDRR modality deployed in Liberia attempted to organise D&D through existing command structures. This modality was developed for the demobilisation of formal military structures, such as those encountered in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, where military bureaucracy provided records of enrolled combatants which could be used to verify DDRR lists.

¹⁰ Nyumah has a lengthy history of engagement in African conflicts, having fought with the CDF / Kamajoisia militia in Sierra Leone, and with private militias allied to President Lansana Conteh in Guinea and Joseph Kabila in DRC.

¹¹ Tarawally, also known as “Sparrow” is a Sierra Leonean who commanded a battalion of 415 Sierra Leonean CDF / Kamajoisia fighters. LURD recruited the battalion in 2002 and deployed it as a ‘Special Forces Unit’ in securing Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties. After leading the successful assault on Tubmanburg, the Sierra Leonean Special Forces Unit was initially used to provide the security for LURD’s ‘Executive Mansion’ HQ in Tubmanburg, and was then deployed to Bo-Waterside on the Sierra Leonean border to provide a secure escape route from Tubmanburg if necessary.

¹² So called after the colour of the sun-dried rubber left in the cups.

Comparatively, the Liberian factions were highly informal, and kept few, if any, records of combatants. This proved problematic where the system depended on faction-appointed Commanders to provide lists of combatants to enter the DDRR process, thereby enabling them to control access to the process. Many Commanders were quick to take advantage of the situation; weapons were collected from combat soldiers and either redistributed amongst kin, client and ethnic group networks, sold to people willing to pay to access RR opportunities, or, as is also widely reported, distributed amongst non-combatant rural villagers who, having passed through the registration and cantonment process, would divide the received DD cash incentives with the Commander.

The manipulation of the DD process by the faction commanders contributed to the mass registration of non-combatants, and rendered the resources available for the RR components inadequate. Drawing on estimates conducted during 2002-2003¹³, it can be argued that the number of core combatants involved in the Liberian conflict was between 10,000 -15,000. The (already high) initial DDRR planning figure of 38,000 has now risen to an improbable registered number of 103,000, a figure almost impossible to reconcile with the earlier estimates.

The key issue for the feasibility study is the predicament of the core combatants who, having handed their weapons to their commanders, were then denied access to the DDRR process because their weapon had been reallocated elsewhere.

“For three years we fought all the way from Voinjama to Tubmanburg. We were the first battalion to enter Tubmanburg. When DDR came they [the commanders] collected all our weapons. Some they gave to their Mandingo brothers, and some, the big weapons, they sent to the bush. They said that they would give our names to DDR, but then they told us that we should tap rubber and not go to DDR. They told us that our picture would be taken and that we would be charged with war crimes. The Mandingo boys that fought don’t want to tap rubber, neither do those that got the weapons, so we have been here tapping rubber for the big people¹⁴, now they have gone and we are left here with nothing.”
LURD Combatant, Age 22, Guthrie Plantation, 5/10/06

Besides the purely financial, Commanders have other motivations for retaining control over a core group of combatants, including ready access to labour and experienced fighters for deployment elsewhere in the sub-region:

“I control all the work in this Estate, all of these children report to me, they are tapping my rubber. If I say disarm, they disarm, If I say we go to the Ivory Coast, they will go to the Ivory Coast.”
Senior LURD Commander, Guthrie Plantation, 14/9/06

¹³ Liberia: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD): James Brabazon, RIIA, London 02/2003. Liberia; Security Challenges, ICG, Brussels 11/2003.

¹⁴ Analysis of the data appears to bear this out. LURD is a Guinean-supported militia with a predominantly Mandingo, and therefore Muslim, leadership and fighting force. Given the level of LURD control of the illegal Guthrie economy, one might expect the majority of former LURD combatants tapping rubber on Guthrie would be from the Mandingo ethnic group, and the Muslim faith. Instead, the data reveals the largest ethnic group representations to be Kpelle (35%, mostly from Bong and Lofa) and Kissi (20%, mostly from Lofa), while the Mandingo ethnic group accounted for only 4% of the total. The group is overwhelmingly Christian (89%), with only a minority (10%) Muslim representation.

3.1 Consequences of exclusion

The changing circumstances on the plantation at the time of the research made it difficult to assess the number of ex-combatants present. Based on the initial research assessment of functional camps and approximate populations, a reasonable estimate would be in the region of 2500 – 4000 ex-combatants. The research process identified and registered 394 ex-combatants who had remained outside the DDRR process; after 3 months' intensive research presence inside the plantation, the figure has remained steady with only slight increase since the end of November; it is therefore unlikely that there are many other DDRR excluded ex-combatants inside the plantation

At the start of the research phase information and meetings with unregistered ex-combatants was certainly manipulated or denied by the Camp Masters in many of the camps, and the research process was in direct competition with the changing circumstances within the plantation which saw the ex-combatant tappers under growing pressure to produce and sell rubber as quickly as possible before the handover to the IMT, and were therefore often unwilling or unable to spend a work-day out of the field to attend a meeting.

Based on these estimates, the number of *identified* unregistered ex-combatants expressed as a percentage of the total estimated Guthrie ex-combatant population is 16%. While it is not possible to apply this equation across the entire DDRR process, there is a strong indication that the number of core combatants excluded from the DDRR process nationally is significant, and warrants further detailed research¹⁵.

4 Occupation management structure

Operation 'BLACK RUBBER' proved highly profitable. By October 2003 LURD High Command had deployed additional combatants to tap rubber alongside the slowly returning resident population.

By early 2004 a plantation management structure comprised of senior LURD battle commanders was installed to oversee the production and sale of rubber. The management group, initially known as the 'Top Brass Ruling Council', became known as the 'High Power Ruling Council', or HPRC.

4.1 High Power Ruling Council

The HPRC was originally led by the LURD Deputy Chief of Staff; he was replaced in mid-2004 by LURD front-line commander Sumo Dennis¹⁶ who remained as the Head of the HPRC throughout the occupation, maintaining overall responsibility for the running and exploitation of the plantation until the hand-over of control to the government in September 2006.

The other 12 members of the HPRC were appointed by the senior LURD strategists. With the exception of one, all were LURD battle commanders.

¹⁵ A Landmine Action visit to the gold and diamond mining area around Weasue (Lofa Bridge) revealed ex-combatants from the LURD faction, and Sierra Leonean ex-combatants from both RUF and Kamajor groups; each reported that most of the mining in the area was being done by ex-combatants that had stayed out of the DDRR process, some through choice, others under the instruction of their commanders.

¹⁶ Dennis served as part of Liberian 'Special Forces Unit' under Mohamed Tarawally's CDF / Kamajoisia militia group in Sierra Leone in 1996.

4.2 Occupation strategists & facilitators

While the HPRC provided the on-site management of the resource, the trade in the illegal rubber (between the plantation and the purchasing companies¹⁷) was arranged and managed by a core group of individuals, mainly senior LURD strategists, appointed to influential positions in the NTGL.

These individuals, in strategic government positions, ensured that the business relationships and linkages ran free from interference.

4.3 Sponsors and brokers

Operating the plantation and organising the sale of rubber had three main strategic requirements:

- (i) A regular supply of rice to feed the workforce¹⁸
- (ii) A regular supply of tools and chemicals
- (iii) A network of brokers to arrange the transport and sale of the rubber

These requirements were met by a network of 'Sponsors' in return for the first share of profit from sale of rubber.

4.4 Mode of production

Of the 300,000-acre concession area, approximately 54,341 acres were under production during the occupation¹⁹. The plantation is divided into 3 'Estates'²⁰ each of which is sub-divided into 'Camps'²¹. There are 25 camps on the plantation, of which 22 were functional during the occupation.

An HPRC-appointed command structure oversaw the production and harvest of rubber in each camp. An ex-combatant Camp Commander, assisted by two ex-combatant Deputy Commanders²² and a civilian Camp Master²³, oversaw activities in each camp²⁴.

Workers would deliver their rubber to the Camp Commander on a set day each month²⁵. The Camp Commander would then arrange the transportation of the rubber from the plantation to the buying depots of the purchasing companies²⁶.

¹⁷ The main purchasers of illegal Guthrie rubber were the Firestone Company, WEALA, the Liberian Agriculture Company and the Liberia Resources Corporation

¹⁸ Rice supply requirements were running at approximately 3000 bags (50kg) per month in mid-2006. At the current rate of \$35 / bag, this required rice inputs in the region of \$105,000 per month

¹⁹ Estimated at April 2006, source: Rubber Plantations Task Force Report, 23 May 2006 (p3). The IMT is now clearing the lanes and rehabilitating the unused acreage. The resident former employees, and a smaller number of former resident ex-combatants mainly provide the labour.

²⁰ Lofa, Bomi and Cape Mount

²¹ Each camp centres around a worker's accommodation block, and is sub-divided into numbers of 'tasks'. A 'task' is a group of trees for which a number of employees have primary responsibility for maintaining and tapping. A Guthrie task is typically 450 trees.

²² One responsible for 'Operations', the other for 'Administration'

²³ Usually the resident Camp Master formerly employed by the Guthrie Rubber Corporation; the appointee's authority was notional, and ultimate control lay with the ex-combatant Camp Commander

²⁴ They also 'policed' the camp, dealing with local-level conflicts and dealing the beatings to anyone suspected of 'stealing' rubber (selling rubber out with the proscribed procedure)

The profit from the sale would be returned to the HPRC to be divided between the strategists, political contacts, sponsors, the HPRC, the Camp Commanders and the tappers²⁷.

Payment received was, broadly, the same for resident and ex-combatant tappers. Respondents were reticent about saying how much they earned. Income would be largely dependent on the quality of the allocated tasks, the skill of the production team and the numbers in the team. On some camps the trees are at their productive peak, whilst in others they are old and in need of replacement. Generally, the higher the status of the ex-combatant in the faction, the more likely he would be to receive a higher quality (and number) of tasks.

Income levels were also determined by the current commodity purchase price; at the beginning of the occupation (during the Black Rubber phase) the plantation rubber was being sold at \$90 per tonne. In August 2006 the purchase price was \$885 per tonne. How much of the per tonne price found its way to the tappers is not clear; the public perception is that the ex-combatants were “making thousands of dollars per month”, whereas the ex-combatants assert that the figure was in the “hundreds”.

It is worth noting that, below the camp command and control structures, the ex-combatant tappers also had their own command, or loyalty, groups; often corresponding to their fighting units during the war, these loyalty groups usually formed the basis of the groups working each task.

Whilst security on the plantation was tight to prevent rubber being ‘stolen’, tappers were free to leave the plantation, and to trade, sell or pass-on their tasks, often to family members to permit the tapper to continue schooling or attend to other interests outside the plantation.

5 Group characteristics and circumstances of ex-combatants excluded from DDRR

The rubber was produced by four categories of labourer:

- (i) Resident tappers (former employees of the previous plantation concession-holder)
- (ii) Migrant tappers
- (iii) Ex-combatants registered with the DDRR process
- (iv) Ex-combatants not registered with the DDRR process

The resident tapper population produced the bulk of the rubber; as skilled labourers, most of the resident tappers are now being employed by the IMT. Ex-combatants who also formerly worked for the plantation are increasingly included in this group.

²⁵ Each camp on the plantation gathered rubber on a different day, so the flow of rubber from Guthrie was continuous throughout each month of the occupation

²⁶ Each camp had a designated purchasing company

²⁷ Tappers report that some months they would receive no payment, but be assured that the following month would be a ‘work for yourself month’, i.e. that they would be allowed to tap & sell the rubber; inevitably, the HPRC Commanders would still collect the rubber on the designated day.

The majority of the non-DDRR registered ex-combatants were of a low status within their respective factions; almost 90% classifying themselves as 'combat soldier' or 'private'. As such, their status within the plantation economy was little different from that of the non-combatant tappers; they were allocated 'tasks' of trees,²⁸ and were paid for the rubber they produced in much the same way as the residents.

The end of the occupation has brought a dramatic change in circumstances. Lacking the requisite skills and despised by the IMT because of their past, it is only those formerly resident ex-combatants who have been offered employment. At the end of November 2006, two months after the insertion of the IMT, 149 (38 %) of the 394 identified ex-combatants have left the plantation, some to Monrovia or further afield, most to private farms in the vicinity of Guthrie. The DDRR-registered ex-combatants have the option to re-enter the DDRR process, an option that is not open to the unregistered ex-combatants.

As it stands, the unregistered ex-combatants have no training or employment options. Returning to their home communities is not, at present, an option²⁹ and, while most respondents say they are "tired of war", the prospect of earning "quick money" by enlisting with a faction in Ivory Coast, or indulging in petty crime on the streets of Monrovia³⁰, may be their only survival options.

The unregistered ex-combatants are predominantly young men with several years experience of fighting followed by 3 years in the same, military, structure in the plantation. Abandoned first by the commanders they fought under, then by the LURD plantation management structure, they remain a mobile, resourceful and homogenous group.

5.1 Extent of the problem

The Guthrie group is a small, but probably representative, sample of a much larger group of nationally spread ex-combatants who were excluded from the DDRR process. Without access to transitional payments or education or vocational training opportunities, their main survival options in Liberia will be found in either Monrovia or the main labour-intensive extractive industries (i.e. rubber plantations, gold and diamond mines, logging). It is unlikely that their economic activities will be legal.

The total number of unregistered ex-combatants is unknown. An accurate national figure would be hard to establish; however, interviews with Guthrie respondents, and interviews with ex-combatants in other locations³¹, suggest that the number is likely to be in the region of 5,000.

The key issue is that the predicament of the unregistered ex-combatants on Guthrie is the result of a significant flaw in the Liberia DDRR modality. This flaw has resulted in the exclusion of thousands of core combatants from the DDRR programme. The exclusion of this group not only undermines the principal aim of DDRR, it also presents potentially

²⁸ Typically 450 trees per task

²⁹ The most frequent responses identified the lack of education, training and employment opportunities, and concerns about being "ashamed to return with nothing", i.e. to have fought the war, and then to return with no money, job or prospects.

³⁰ Which has a burgeoning public order problem

³¹ Conducted by Steven Archibald during 2005 in the gold and diamond mining areas around Lofa Bridge, and in the Sapo Forest, the ex-combatant 'ghettoes' in Monrovia, and in rural and urban locations in Bong, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa and River Cess Counties

serious national and sub-regional security concerns, the gravity of which should not be underestimated.

Identifying the numbers of unregistered ex-combatants and providing meaningful RR opportunities should be regarded as a matter of priority for UNMIL and the Government of Liberia.

5.2 Assessing rehabilitation and reintegration priorities

To identify genuine unregistered Guthrie ex-combatants repeated screenings were conducted in each of the 22 functional camps, eventually registering 394 ex-combatants who had not been registered in the DDRR process.

During the interview process respondents were asked to discuss their RR priorities. For 84% the immediate priorities were:

- (i) Skills training in areas that offer *realistic* livelihood options³²
- (ii) Support to establish small businesses at the end of the training period.

Their emphasis on 'realistic' livelihood options is important; most respondents accept that their limited educational attainment levels combined with, the perceived, poor quality of the DDRR training packages, the lack of employment opportunities and the lack of business start-up support means that they are unlikely to develop successful lives in the popular RR choices of auto-mechanic, engineering, construction and driving.

In this respect the Guthrie occupation is instructive; denied the entry to the DDRR process, the Guthrie ex-combatants, have effectively self-demobilised and applied their organisational capacities to create an income generation modality in the rubber sector. The obvious problem is that this has occurred in an illegal context; the challenge is to provide the group with the opportunity to transform its illegal economic activity in to legal economic activity in the wider national interest.

5.3 Aligning RR and post-war reconstruction priorities

Unemployment in Liberia is estimated at 85%³³, with youth unemployment estimated at 88%³⁴. The creation of jobs and small business opportunities is critically important.

Job creation should be combined with high labour requirements and high revenue generating potential. The development of commercial, rather than subsistence, agriculture will have an important potential for the generation of national wealth as well as job creation in both agriculture and industry³⁵. The greatest opportunities lie within the revitalisation of the rubber and agriculture sectors.

³² As distinct from short-term income generating activities such as plantation brushing and brushing traces for road construction, which were suggested and discussed, and trades such as 'mechanic' and 'driver' which initially seem attractive but are recognized as being unlikely to provide permanent employment.

³³ United Nations Common Country Assessment

³⁴ Millennium Development Goals Report 2004, Government of Liberia 2004

³⁵ Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP), Government of Liberia (with ILO), June 28, 2006, p14.

The deterioration of the rubber plantations, and the lack of skilled employees to rehabilitate the sector, has reduced the potential capacity to employ 50,000 people to an actual capacity that employs only 10,000³⁶.

National food security is a prerequisite for peace and stability. Liberia's main staple foods are rice and cassava, but yields of both tend to be low. Today, 95% of urban food needs are met through imports³⁷. Increasing yields for national production of staple food crops requires the revitalisation of the agricultural sector, including:

- (i) Improved access to appropriate rice seed
- (ii) Improved production techniques and capacities
- (iii) Improved access to extension services
- (iv) Improved access to credit
- (v) Improved access to transport
- (vi) Improved market infrastructure
- (vii) Improved access to markets
- (viii) Poor infrastructure constraining access to markets

Liberia's rubber and agriculture sectors offer the most significant source of new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, especially in relation to farm cooperatives and similar ventures that may be particularly suited to the organisational capacities of ex-combatant groups.

6 Addressing drivers of conflict

Thus far, the report addresses functional and systemic issues, including the RR priorities of combatants excluded from the DDRR process, and the flaws in the DDRR system that made their exclusion possible. However, successful rehabilitation and reintegration also requires consideration of the broader contextual issues that led so many young Liberians to resort to violence.

The broader context for the analysis is the well-argued position that the conflict systems in the Mano River sub-region emerged from the exclusion of sections of the population, rural youth in particular, from the benefits of the state during the 1970s-90s.

The Liberia-specific context has at its core "a class of young people who lack faith in any kind of institutions. They consider family, marriage, education, markets and the administration of justice have all failed them. Many have preferred to take their chances with the various militia groups under "the law of the survival of the fittest."³⁸

Analysis of the Guthrie data supports this statement.

6.1 Group characteristics

The research data reveals commonalities of background, social class and life perspectives that indicate the deeper, systemic problems that fuelled the conflict.

³⁶ Source: Government of Liberia, prepared with the ILO; Liberia Employment Action Plan (LEAP), Draft, June 2006

³⁷ United Nations, Common Country Assessment, June 2006 (p10/

³⁸ Richards, Paul, Steven Archibald, Beverlee Bruce, Watta Modad, Edward Mulbah, Tornorlah Varpilah and James Vincent. 2005 "Community Cohesion in Liberia: A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment." *Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction Paper No. 21*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

The average age of the group is 27 years. More than 90% joined their respective factions between 1999 and 2003, meaning that the average age on joining was approximately 19. The majority of the group (69%) are from the rural Counties of Lofa, Bong and Bomi³⁹. At time of recruitment, the average profile was of a young male from a rural setting.

A surprisingly high number (46%) of the respondents admitted to having joined their respective factions voluntarily⁴⁰. The feasibility study aims to identify options through which combatants can be removed from the cycle of conflict. To realise this aim it is important to understand the reasons that young people resort to violence.

6.2 Reasons for fighting

During the course of the research the research team conducted detailed informant interviews with respondents selected at random from all of the 22 camps. Respondents were asked to give the main reasons why they joined their factions, and why they had not returned to their home areas. The most consistent answers referred to:

- Government corruption
- “Big man” politics and “tribalism and favouritism” in politics
- Lack of education opportunities
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of training opportunities
- Lack of business opportunities
- Lack of opportunity to progress beyond subsistence in ‘traditional’ agriculture
- Lack of opportunity to establish and support a family

Whilst these responses might be expected from most rural citizens, ex-combatant or otherwise, they indicate how combatants view the political systems and opportunity structures that determined their life chances in the pre-war period.

It is, therefore, important to pay close attention to their perceptions of how the political system is being reconstructed in the post-war period, and what they think the consequences will be for them.

6.3 The re-establishment of oligarchy: ex-combatant perceptions of the post-war political process

The Guthrie plantation is a major revenue-generating resource. The manner of its transition to government control, and how the occupying combatants perceive the process, is an important barometer of youth and ex-combatant opinion.

There is a clear perception that vested political and commercial interests underlie the resumption of government control of Guthrie, and that the Americo-Liberian political and business elites which, in previous decades, centralised the country’s wealth flows through the Executive Mansion, are now resuming control of the political and commercial spheres in the post-war period. This consistent line of opinion is aptly summed-up by the following statement:

³⁹ The balance are from other rural Counties, including Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount

⁴⁰ Surprising because of the levels of public hostility towards ex-combatants, and because of the ease with which ex-combatants can claim to have been ‘abducted’. Of the 53% who claim to have been abducted, it is probable that this number may include many who joined voluntarily.

“Our problem in Liberia is not tribe, it’s class. You are either congo⁴¹ or you are country⁴²; the congo run the country for themselves, so that they can become rich, we, the country people, are poor, they think of us as their slaves. The war is finished and they are taking control of everything again, the politics and businesses. They are throwing us out of this place to take it for themselves, not for the government. There are big hands involved in this, this is unfinished war business, just them taking this place back.”

Former LURD combatant (Kpelle, from Bong County), 24 years, Mana Camp, Guthrie, 13/9/06

The involvement of former Taylor-regime advisors in the government-appointed company that provides the Guthrie Interim Management Team⁴³ simply adds weight to the perception that the old-established political and economic patronage networks are being rebuilt, and that Guthrie is but one component of this process.

The critical perception here is of the reconstruction of a political culture that, in the eyes of the fighters, was the underlying cause of the war; they simply see the re-emergence of an old order through a process that is legitimised and facilitated by the international community⁴⁴.

The Guthrie ex-combatants are the clearest indicator of the generational issue that must be addressed if the peace is to prove durable. Young people fought the war in Liberia, and youth now make up more than half the population of the country.

To a large extent, the consolidation of peace depends on:

- (i) The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of the former fighters
- (ii) The extent to which the young and marginalised are involved in the reconstruction process, and
- (iii) Their perceptions of the remaking of the political structures and processes that will determine their life opportunities.

These issues are not about personalities, they are about the political system; the problems are systemic, therefore it is the system that must be addressed. The fighters perceive the machinery of government as highly centralised, and responsive and accountable only to a very narrow constituency. There is a need to evolve the system away from this, to engage grassroots constituencies in shaping a post-war political culture that avoids replicating the problems inherent in the pre-war regimes. This process must be community-led and not imposed from above.

6.4 Promoting social inclusion through community-led governance initiatives

Promoting the inclusion of ex-combatants and marginal groups in reshaping Liberia’s political culture must be driven by grassroots actors, and be embedded within a national framework.

⁴¹ Descendent of Americo-Liberian settlers

⁴² ‘Indigenous’ Liberian

⁴³ Rubber Planters Association of Liberia,

⁴⁴ The government-appointed IMT is situated within the UNMIL compound on the plantation, and the IMT representatives tour the plantation with armed UNMIL escorts. From this perspective, the international community is responsible for allowing the system to ossify, rather than facilitating its positive change.

The UNDP-supported District Development Committees (DDCs) provide the framework within which to develop this process. The DDCs, each comprised of 13 'elected' representatives, are intended as the interface between local government, service providers and communities on development-related matters. Endorsed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the DDCs have now been established in 64 Districts of 15 Counties.

A group of highly competent local NGOs established the DDCs and trained the members in basic principles of representation and participation. The training programme did not extend to the representative citizen's organisations with which the DDCs would be expected to interact (such as Town Development Committees).

Thus, with little understanding at grass roots level of how to represent citizen opinion to DDCs or local government, the nature of citizen representation through DDCs will remain problematic, and the perceived disconnect between citizen and government that the Guthrie combatants speak of will persist.

This should be regarded as an opportunity rather than a problem; the principle of citizen representation to local government through the DDCs provides the ideal arena within which citizens and civil society organisations can participate in remaking Liberian political culture in the post-war period.

The Government of Liberia and its partners in the development community should regard the inclusion of ex-combatants and marginal groups in the post-war reconstruction process as an issue of national importance. Particular emphasis should be placed on the creation of functional relationships between representative citizens groups and local government.

7 Rubber sector governance issues

Extractive industries have long been the engine of patronage in Liberia, and have played a clear role in the political system. While recent efforts have sought to address the problems by applying sanctions to the timber and minerals sectors, the rubber sector has been left comparatively wide-open.

With the commodity price consistently high, and opportunities to launder illegal rubber plentiful and easy, the sector has remained in a state of confusion. Clearly, this confusion was functional for certain groups; Guthrie was but one component of Liberia's lucrative illegal rubber trade during the last 5 years.

It is this relative lack of regulation, combined with the strength of Americo-Liberian interest in the sector, that gives rise to the perception that an Americo-Liberian political elite is resuming control of the country's key extractive industries, and that control of those industries will, as previously, be used to reinforce political and commercial capital. This perception is prevalent amongst Guthrie ex-combatants but is certainly not confined to them.

Perceptions, founded or otherwise, are potentially damaging, particularly in a volatile post-conflict context. There is a need for a set of initiatives to promote transparency in the rubber sector, and to discourage the damaging and widely held perception that politics continues to be closely associated with resource patronage.

This area should not be regarded as beyond the remit of this study, there are clear crosscutting areas of concern. With this in mind, the report makes three recommendations in the following section.

8 Recommendations

8.1 Immediate rehabilitation and reintegration requirements⁴⁵

- (a) Focus the initial development of RR initiatives on the sectors that offer the target group the greatest employment and / or business start-up opportunities; in particular, the rubber and agriculture sectors.
- (b) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Liberia Rubber Development Authority (LRDA)⁴⁶ develop a proposal for the rehabilitation of the LRDA training facility at Tumutu in Bong County. Tumutu is a 500-acre site run by the LRDA. The site was abandoned during the war. It temporarily served as an IDP camp; according to LRDA staff most of the fixtures and fittings were looted by the IDPs. The accommodation, office and teaching blocks are structurally sound and, if rehabilitated would provide on-site accommodation and training facilities for up to 400 trainees. The farm includes training facilities for rubber nursery and plantation management, and swamp rice, cash crop and tree crop cultivation.
- (c) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, develop a Memorandum of Understanding for the allocation of responsibilities for the provision of training and services for a projected figure of up to 400 trainees at any one point in time, comprised both of ex-combatant trainees and local resident trainees.
- (d) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, LRDA and CARI, develop professional standard training curricula for rubber culture, rice seed multiplication, cash-crop and tree-crop cultivation, small business start-up and management and marketing. The training curricula will detail the input-support required for both farm-based and class-based activities.
- (e) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and the LRDA, devise a proposal for a programme of institutional support to strengthen the capacity of the LRDA
- (f) In collaboration with qualified local NGOs⁴⁷, develop an on-site social reintegration and psychosocial counselling programme, to run for the duration of the training course
- (g) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, LRDA and CARI, develop a funding proposal for the implementation of the training, social reintegration and capacity building components listed above
- (h) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and relevant line Ministries (i.e. Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy), conclude an agreement on the allocation of land grants to graduates of the training schemes,

⁴⁵ The following recommendations are under detailed discussion with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Liberia Rubber Development Agency, the Central Agricultural Research Institute and Salalah District Council

⁴⁶ LRDA is a technical training department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Currently, LRDA has little institutional or operational capacity, but does have a network of trainers and extension officers

⁴⁷ Several such agencies exist, and the curricula and process are under discussion

either on individual or group cooperative basis.

- (i) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Salalah District Council develop and implement a sensitisation programme to inform the Guthrie ex-combatants and Tumutu residents about the initiative
- (j) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, engage major rubber sector actors in discussion about the potential to support the establishment of smallholder schemes to outgrow rubber
- (k) Identify technical assistance to support establishment of small-scale farming cooperative businesses
- (l) In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, identify other development agency-supported initiatives that could offer collaborative support to, or benefit from collaboration with, the proposed initiative⁴⁸

8.2 DDRR process

- (a) Review the DDRR modality deployed in Liberia
- (b) As a matter of urgency, and in conjunction with Government and UNMIL priorities, conduct further research to identify other ex-combatants excluded from the DDRR programme, and design suitable rehabilitation and reintegration packages. This process should include retired security sector personnel who, whilst in receipt of cash or pension benefits, have not been reintegrated.
- (c) Refine the intelligence-led approach to screening DDRR candidates developed and piloted by the Guthrie feasibility study
- (d) Field test the replication of the approach in post-conflict contexts where DDRR is required to address informal military structures

8.3 Drivers of conflict

- (a) There is an overarching requirement to ensure the inclusion of ex-combatants and marginalised groups in the post-war reconstruction process. An area of key focus should be the strengthening of community capacities to interact directly with local government.
- (b) It is recommended that this be approached through a programme of training and capacity building within the context of development projects that facilitate community-led creation of representative structures.
- (c) It is recommended that the Government of Liberia and its partners in the local and international development communities broaden their concept of community development to encompass principles of social and political inclusion and,

⁴⁸ i.e. The Rubber Alliance, supported by USAID and the Firestone Company, and the Sustainable Tree Crop Programme, supported by USAID and International Institute of Tropical Agriculture

specifically, to emphasise the requirement for functional relationships between *representative* community structures and local government.

- (d) It is recommended that the establishment of the DDC structures⁴⁹ be complemented by a national programme of capacity building for community-level organisations, such as Town Development Committees, NGOs and CBOs, to include basic principles of⁵⁰:
- Community mobilisation
 - Representation
 - Participation
 - Accountability
 - Citizenship and basic human rights
 - Governance
 - Roles and responsibilities local government officials
 - Access to legal advice (including land law)
 - Mediation
- (e) .A coordination mechanism should be established to develop a coherent approach (involving Government of Liberia, international donor and development agencies, national civil society and local and international NGOs).

8.4 Rubber sector transparency issues

- (a) In the short-term, the Government has to increase the accountability of the Guthrie IMT, ensuring that Guthrie rubber is traceable from production to sale and that the revenue is properly processed and accounted for, and protected from manipulation.
- (b) UNMIL should insist that plantation protection details (PPDs) are recruited and trained according to the same standards as national security forces. The private recruitment, by the IMT, of individuals with poor human rights records must not be allowed under any circumstances and the use of illegal coercive measures, including the use of firearms must be closely monitored and prevented.
- (c) In the medium-term, the interim management arrangements for Guthrie and other plantations need to transfer to long-term management agreements as soon as possible. This needs to be done through transparent and accountable procedures.
- (d) In the longer-term, the loopholes that characterise governance in the rubber sector need to be closed. Possibilities include the inclusion of the rubber sector in the EITI agreement or, ultimately, in the absence of an improvement, the imposition of a sanctions regime to clean up the industry.

⁴⁹ Supported by UNDP and endorsed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs

⁵⁰ The feasibility of this initiative was discussed with the group of local NGOs that established the DDC structures, and the representatives of the donor institutions. The initiative is regarded both as feasible and attractive by those approached.