Blessed Unrest: Growing a Future for Life on Earth

How Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Environmental Rights Activists Stopped the Worlds Largest Oil Palm Companies from causing Deforestation in West Africa. What are the Climate Crisis and Public Health Implications: [https://vimeo.com/337395947](https://vimeo.com/337395947)

May 9th 2020, via Zoom

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The Dark Continent - A mission to Christianize and Civilize

The Founding of Liberia

Founded on July 26, 1847 by freed slaves from the United States of America
The military Take over lead by the Aborigines
The Civil War

People fleeing the war
Peace - Election - Democracy - A new beginning!
But is Liberia back in Business As Usual?

A Soccer Icon! A Nobel Laureate!
The Lungs of West & North Africa
Corporate Capture - Africa: the new scramble for Land and Natural Resources

Africa: the new scramble!

From now to 2030, a projected 25 trillion dollars will be invested in infrastructure in developing countries. (Cohen and Steers 2009)

"There will be hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment over the next decade or so in Africa, in ports, rail, roads, mining, hydroelectric, to exploit the resources and bring them to market." (IFC, May 2011)
Scramble for Liberia’s Land and Natural Resources
Foreign Direct Investment to Liberia

The Usual Suspects

In 12 Years!

- Liberia has granted rights to land and natural resources on 75% of its total land mass
- Liberia has attracted
- 20 billion dollars in foreign direct Investment in the
- Oil and Gas
- Mining
- Agriculture
- Forestry
- Some of the leading actors are:
  - Wuhan 60% stake in China Union
  - Arcellor mittal
  - BHP Billiton
  - Sime Darby
  - Golden Veroleum
The investment model
1926: Where the Rubber meets the road - A million acres and 9 Decades of investment
The poor gets the waste
Beast of Burden: Billions Made on the back of kids as slave laborers
Mining
Bio fuels- farmers, charcoal producers and workers left in the balance- World Bank, OPIC, SWEDFUND
Logging-living in a dundgeon
The Oil Palm threats
The grabbing - is it just the land?
Community based land use and land use planning
The Barber

Massive deforestation and land degradation
The Development Paradox

An Orange tree is assessed $6.00 (USD) even though an orange tree produces between 7 to 12 bags of oranges annually at the rate of $10.00 (USD) per bag at farm gate price.
Destruction of villages

This family in the village of Tool shifts is resisting forceful eviction as he gets surrounded by the oil palm.
Pollution of Water Sources

Massive land clearing and diversion of water sources facilitates sedimentation and turbidity of drinking water
Women struggled to climb on a tractor at an oil palm plantation

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
NO TRESPASS ZONE

RESTRICTION ON COMMUNITIES’ ACCESS TO THEIR LAND
EVEN THE DEADS WERE NOT SPARED!

Grave site and burial ground bulldozed by a company
Building the Resistance - Communities Mobilization

Participatory Evidence based Field Research

Educate, empower and Mobilize
LEAVE OUR FOREST LANDS
The legal strategy- which venue

Domestic court  RSPO  ECOWAS Court
RSPO-supply chain and Pressure Point

Zero net deforestation

Free, Prior and Informed consent
Complaints Before the RSPO

- Targeted Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum
- The RSPO Authorized Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum to:
  - Immediately Seize all operations
  - Commence bilateral discussion with the affected communities
  - Seek an amicable resolution of the complaints
Government reacts to the complaint and decision of the RSPO- undermining sovereignty

- The Government quickly set up an inter-ministerial team
- The Inter-ministerial team visit the local communities and attempt to mediate between the communities and the two
- The team demands that the communities withdraw their RSPO complaints saying that the RSPO complaint undermines the Sovereignty of Liberia
- The local communities refused to withdraw the complaints
- The Government team threatens that it will not permit the companies to talk directly to the communities
- Both Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum become extremely aggressive and threatening
- Negotiations broke down!
Threats

Madam President, I am only the Messenger
In May 2015 violent protest erupted at Golden Veroleum operations
The young people demanded to talk to the company executive but the company refused to talk to the young people
The government responded with massive elite police deployment
The company private security forces were also deployed to provide support to the police

Golden Veroleum private security in orange jackets
Homes of local communities were broken into and food and other properties seized.

Here police officers break into the home of local people.
Several community members were imprisoned, with one death among those detained.

Over 200 communities members fled into the forest seeking refuge afraid that they would be arrested and tortured.
GHOST TOWN- Only the police patrolled this town during the protest

Ghost Town: 20 Arrested, Hunt for Loots in Concession Town
ALFRED BROWNELL GOES IN HIDING AS PLAIN CLOTHES POLICE OFFICERS ATTEMPT HIS ARREST ON THE RUN

“I was warned to find a secured place for me and my families as there were plans to go to my home and harass my family. Friday night I slept at a secured location. That night I was informed by neighbors that plain clothes men were asking questions about my whereabouts and issuing threats that they would get me and teach me a lesson. I was also warned to cut of my phone as my conversation was being monitored.”

- Cllr. Alfred Brownell of Green Advocates from his hideout
Stigmatization
While in Exile in the US

At Northeastern University
School of Law

February 2017- RSPO Final Decision- Stop Order

Non-compliance to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles - GVL is found not to have complied with the elements of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Self-identification - GVL decided to work with its own community organizations not the self identified community organization - ABloteh,

The element of “free” was not complied with as the investigation found that the community members largely signed the MoU To free their community members from legal charges following the riots in 2015;

Seek an amicable resolution of the complaints

Engage into no Deforestation
GOLDEN VEROLEUM BECOMES LATEST CONCESSIONNAIRE TO BOW OUT ON LIBERIA

‘TOO MUCH MONEY; NO LAND’

“The owner and shareholders are pissed with Liberian team. More than US$290 million spent since 2010, yet land acquired is small. Plus the government is not doing enough to stop the squabbles between villagers and the concessions. GVL has no choice but to bow out.” – A source at Golden Veroleum, speaking on condition of anonymity
MONROVIA, July 21 (Reuters) - Liberia’s largest palm oil company, Golden Veroleum, quitted a global eco-certification scheme in response to accusations from a global watchdog that it failed to get consent from communities before expanding onto their lands.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) a voluntary global certification body for the industry, ruled that the Singapore-controlled company violated its commitments.
Sime Darby Divest from Liberia
(January 16 2020)

Sime Darby Plantations says completed exit from Liberia

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 16 (Reuters) - Malaysia’s Sime Darby Plantations, the world’s largest oil palm planter by land size, on Thursday said it had completed its exit from Liberia, transferring full ownership of its palm oil concession to a local company.

A Liberian minister first announced in December the planned sale to a subsidiary of the Mano Manufacturing Company (MANCO), Liberia’s largest manufacturer of household health and cleaning products, after Sime Darby faced subpar financial results due largely to stricter environmental standards.
6 million acres of forest temporarily protected
Who is Driving the Oil palm linked Deforestation

Food, beverages, fast food companies and Brands

Assets managers, Banks, Private Equity, pension and Endowment Funds
Planet- A Cinder box ready to explode

We are in this boat together-  Live together or perish
Climate induced migration

Over 30 million people lost their homes due to weather and climate induced disasters in 2012-
2000 million are expected to become displaced

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
Crossing the Sahara and Mediterranean

At the Mercy of the Desert

At the Mercy of Peoples
Smugglers
Zoonotic Niches

Ebola virus trace to Deforestation in West Africa

Zoonotic hot zones and Ebola out break
COVID 19- Is this the Tip of the Iceberg? At what cost?

Mass Amplification linked to habitat destruction

• is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19?
• As Habitat and biodiversity loss increase globally, is this the beginning of mass pandemics
• Global cost for COVID 19 estimated at Trillions of United States Dollars
What will you do – build a wall?
THANKS