

The Effects of Large-scale Oil Palm Expansion Activities on Livelihood Strategies and Outcomes of local Communities: A Case of Senjeh District, Liberia



A Research Project Submitted to Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master of Science (MSc.) Degree in Management of Development, Specialization: Food and Nutrition Security

Submitted by:
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By
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Cooper S. Benda (1956-2014), and my mother, Kemah Kpingbah Benda who believed in advancement in formal education for their children. My wife, Thelma D. L. Benda-Henries and my children, Nukielee and Thelston, for the continuous moral and financial support provided me over the years. This journey couldn't have been successful without any of your support.

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ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

CDA	(Bomi) County Development Agreement
CSO-OPWG	Civil Society Organisations Oil Palm Working Group
CSRs	Corporate Social Responsibilities
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPO	Equatorial Palm Oil Company
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GVL	Golden Veroleum Liberia (Oil Palm Company)
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IMCC	Inter-ministerial committee on concessions
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LEITI	Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
MACs	Ministries, Agencies and Commissions
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MOPP	Maryland Oil Palm Plantation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBC	National Bureau of Concessions
NEI	National level Expert Interview
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NOPPOL	National oil Palm Platform of Liberia
NOPSG	National Oil Palm Steering Group
NOPSL	National Oil Palm Strategy of Liberia
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute
SDPL	Sime Darby Plantation Liberia
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
SSI	Semi-Structured Interviews
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

ABSTRACT

The complexity and high relevance of land and natural resources are very important to all communities throughout the world. In fact, without natural resources rural communities strive to survive. The land, trees, water and animals are all examples of natural resources that rural communities depend on for food, clothing, shelter, jewellery, etc and are very essential in the fight against food insecurity and poverty. This is also the case for local communities located in and around large-scale oil palm plantations in Liberia. Palm oil production has long lasting social, economic and environmental implications on local communities. This research critically ascertains and documents Sime Darby expansion activities and its implications on households' livelihoods in local communities in the study area. The research identified that the effects of Sime Darby expansion activities on livelihoods of local communities are influencing changes in farming activities, limited food availability, limited sources of incomes. There are also signs of elitism, local elite landgrabs and gender discriminatory farm allocations resulting from the community adopting a centralised traditional land governance. According to results, politicians are using these to soft-spots and power to influence employment of local community members within the company. While the analysis openly substantiates the effects of Sime Darby on households' livelihoods, it also outlines unsustainable changes in household's income generating activities and changes in farming practices.

Key words: farming practices, local elite landgrabs and elitism, political influence and local livelihoods

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Oil Palm is believed to have previously been harvested in West Africa as wild tropical fruit that was used mainly as recipe for meals and traditional cosmetics (FAO, 2005; Obahiagbon, 2012). Prior to its adoption as a global agricultural commodity (FAO, 2005), oil palm was cultivated by individual smallholder farmers who were producing for local and national markets. In Liberia, oil palm was literally cultivated by both individual and communal smallholder farmers in rural communities (Siakor, 2012). The rapidly growing demand for oil palm is fuelled by its richness and aptness for food, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products needed for the growing population around the world (Obahiagbon, 2012).

The massive expansion of oil palm plantations across developing tropical regions is influenced by recent increasing demand for oil palm products on the global markets (Davis, D’Odorico & Rulli, 2014; Furumo & Aide 2017). For instance, between 2008 and 2016, oil palm from 210 to 290 metric tonnes between 2008 and 2016 metric tonnes (Voora et al., 2019). This urge to shift to large-scale monoculture agriculture in tropical regions in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa have seen massive clearing of forest landscapes and rural communities’ multi-cropping subsistence farming practices being replaced by oil palm plantations (Godswill et al. 2012; Scanes 2018; Sayer et al. 2012; Fitzherbert et al. 2008, p. 538-545).

Despite claims by governments from the global south for revenue boost, poverty reduction by the new agriculture models, there are multiple reports large-scale monoculture agriculture is reportedly leaving behind negative footprints. Such as abuse of rights of rural communities, loss of arable agriculture lands and settlements of rural communities in developing countries, massive loss of tropical forest and environmental contamination affecting biodiversity including endangered wildlife species as a result of converting tropical forests to large-scale monoculture agriculture plantation (Scanes, 2018; IFPRI 2012; Melbach 2012). According to Melbach (2012) and Cotula et al. (2014) for instance, the new wave of large-scale agriculture land investments is the leading driver that is impacting rural communities negatively. Communities within plantation areas and at the fringes of plantations have less or no access to farmlands and limited means of providing food for their families or afford to keep their children in school.

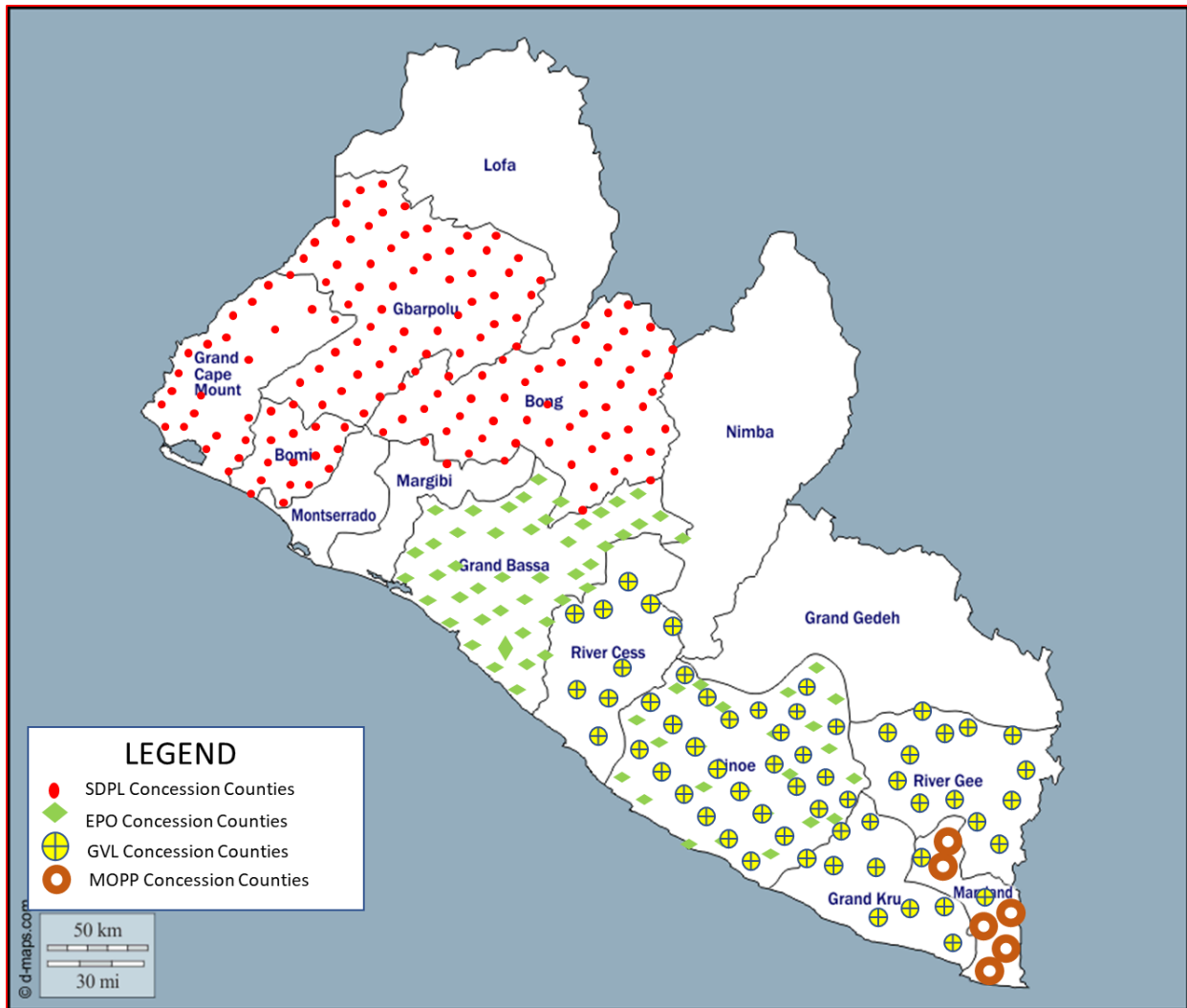
Like other tropical forested developing countries, Liberia in 2006 re-opened doors to multinational companies and awarded several large-scale contracts for investment in the land and natural resource extraction following the end of the 14 years civil war that broke down every sector of the country (Siakor, 2012). Between 2009 and 2011, the Liberian government awarded and rectified four major large-scale oil palm investments (Sime Darby Plantation, Golden Veroleum Liberia, Maryland Oil Palm Plantation and Equatorial Palm Oil) to resuscitate the broken economy, provide employment opportunities and basic social services for its citizenry (LEITI, 2019; NBC Concession Portal, 2016; Siakor, 2012) that was affected by the 14 years of civil war that ended in 2003. These concessions were granted approximately 800,000 hectares of communal land of rural communities (NBC Concession Portal, 2016) across forested regions in Liberia.

Table 1: Summary status of oil palm concessions development in Liberia (till 2016)

Name of Concession	Gross Concession Area (ha)	Total Concession Area (ha)	Outgrower (ha)	Contract Term	County cover	Key Rights Granted	Date Granted	Developed areas (CA) (ha)	Developed areas (outgrower)
Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP)		8,800	6,400	25years, automatic renewable for 10 years	Maryland	Production in concession area (CA) and any additional area; use and sell oil palm products in Liberia; export oil palm products; use and sell carbon rights in CA and any additional area	2/Aug/2011	Unknown	None
Sime Darby Plantation Liberia (SDPL)	311,817	220,000	44,000	63 years renewable	Bomi, Bong, Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount	Production in (CA); use and sell rubber and rubber products and oil palm products in Liberia; export rubber products and oil palm products (other than oil palm by-products) from Liberia.	23/ July /2009	10,411	None
Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO)		70,524	18,201	43 years after 7 years of rehabilitation	Grand Bassa and Sinoe	Engage in the production and utilization of oil palm in Liberia; export from Liberia agriculture product	22/May/2008	8,158	None
Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL)	350,000	220,000	40,000	65 years; 33 years renewable	River Cess, Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland; River Gee	Production in (CA); use and sell rubber and rubber products and oil palm products in Liberia; export rubber products and oil palm products (other than oil palm by-products) from Liberia; use and sell carbon rights related to CA and any additional area.	1/sept/2010	15,005	None

Source : NBC Concessions Information Management System, 2016

Figure 1: Map of Liberia showing large-scale oil palm concessions affected counties



Source: EPO, GVL, MOPP & SDPL Concession agreements and <http://portals.flexicadastre.com/liberia/>

Based on this background, the research seeks to understand the effects of Sime Darby plantation on the sustainable livelihoods of local communities. The purpose of this research is to provide the Sustainable Development Institute with information on the effects of large-scale oil palm expansions on livelihoods of local communities in Liberia.

1.2 Research Problem

In 2009, the government of Liberia signed an agreement in form of foreign direct investment with Sime Darby Plantation awarding 311,817 hectares of arable land for monoculture agriculture plantation (SDPL, 2009; LEITI, 2009; NBC, 2016) as part of efforts to rebuild basic social services, provide employment opportunities and generate national revenue (Lomax et al., 2012; Siakor, 2012). Sime Darby Plantation Liberia (SDPL) inherited 120,000 hectares of current concession area from the previous owned by British-Indian BF Goodrich rubber plantation (SDPL, 2009). However, some local communities have reported that since this concession agreement was signed, SDPL has cleared their farms, damaged their crops, polluted their water sources and encroached on their forest from where they previously gathered traditional medicine, fruits, fuel woods and other non-timber forest products (Siakor, 2012). This expansion into farms and damaging crops affect the livelihoods and food security of affected communities.

This research will investigate and document how Sime Darby Plantation operation is impacting livelihoods of local communities in Senjeh District. Findings will be used to provide the commissioner, Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) with information on the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on livelihoods of local communities in oil palm concession areas. This information will afterwards be used (as a case) by the commissioner during the development of the National Oil Palm Strategy and subsequent policies. The commissioner will also use the findings at existing national level platforms to bring government and oil palm companies' attention on the effects of large-scale oil palm expansion activities on livelihoods of affected communities in Liberia. Such national level platforms will include the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia and National Oil Palm Steering Group - national and international NGOs, large-scale oil palm companies, smallholder farmers, and relevant government agencies.

The research will also identify possible areas for the commissioner to design and implement relevant sustainable livelihood interventions in the region.

1.3 Justification of Research

The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) as lead convener of the CSO organisational Oil Palm Working Group and civil society representative to other multi-stakeholder platforms is working towards influencing policy reforms in the oil palm sector and the environment in general. As such, the information on the effects on Sime Darby plantation expansion activities on livelihoods of households in local communities in Senjeh District, Bomi County. SDI intends to use this research results to influence the National Oil Palm Strategy and subsequent agriculture policies and laws that will govern investment in Liberia's oil palm sector - by extension the agriculture sector. The findings will also be used to begin livelihood enhancement interventions under her (SDI) Sustainable Livelihood Programme.

1.4 Research Objective

The research was conducted to assist the Sustainable Development Institute ascertain and document information on how large-scale oil palm expansion activities are impacting livelihoods of local communities. In other words, the research 'assessed the effects of Sime Darby Plantation expansion activities on livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District, Bomi County'. This provides information for the commissioner to use lobby and advocate for community-friendly agriculture policy and laws. The Commissioner will also use information from the research to identify possible livelihoods intervention areas.

1.5 Research Question

In order to provide the SDI information on the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District, the research provided answers to the following main research questions:

Main Research Questions

1. What are the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District, Liberia?
2. What are existing structures and processes that serve as opportunities for improving livelihoods of local communities affected by SDPL oil palm expansion in Senjeh District, Liberia?

Sub-Questions for Main Research Question #1

- 1.1 What are changes in livelihood strategies of local communities in Senjeh District since Sime Darby oil palm plantation?
- 1.2 What are changes in livelihood outcomes of households in local communities in Senjeh District since Sime Darby expanded there?

Sub-Questions for Main Research Question #2

- 2.1 What are existing laws, policies and institutions that promote livelihoods of local communities affected by large-scale agriculture plantation?
- 2.2 What are best practices from other cases that promote livelihoods of local communities affected by oil palm expansion?

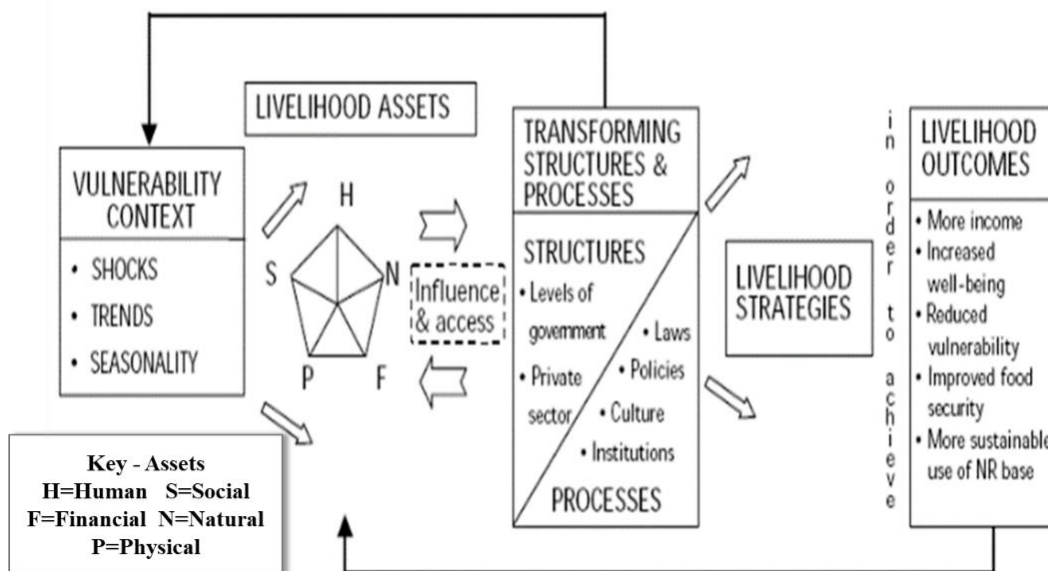
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an explanation of the different key concepts in this research; the livelihood strategies (particularly farming activities) and livelihood outcomes (incomes, food availability and vulnerability) of households in local communities within oil palm expansion activities; existing laws, policies and institutions that support livelihoods of local communities and best case scenario from other area. This chapter also describes the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as a relevant framework to unpack complexities linking oil palm development to food insecurity, poverty and other transforming structures.

2.1 The Sustainable Livelihood Framework

I will analyse how large-scale oil palm plantations in Liberia are influencing livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes of local communities in oil palm concession areas. To aid this process, I will use the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) that was developed in 1999 by the United Kingdom Department for International Development which is used by many development professionals in understanding and analysing different determinants in society that directly or indirectly impact livelihoods of households or local communities. This SLF will enable me to dive deeper in understanding the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansions on livelihoods of local communities in their (Sime Darby) concession area. I will specifically use the SLF to ascertain, analyse and document how livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes of households in local communities are influenced by Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities such as land clearing.

Figure 2: The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF)



Source: DFID, 1999

2.1.1 Transforming Structures and processes influencing Oil Palm and Local Community Livelihoods

This subsection presents existing laws, structures and processes that are affecting livelihoods of communities affected by large-scale oil palm companies or provide opportunities to ensure sustainable livelihoods of these communities that are affected by large-scale oil palm expansion in Liberia. The concession agreements and Land Rights Act are two significant instruments existing that can be viewed either from the rationale of market-based or rights-based (Vermeulen & Cotula, 2010). According to Bebbington (1999: 2002), improved livelihood strategies of local communities are determined by interactions of existing mechanisms put in place either by government aimed at achieving development

agendas or the presence of projects and programmes from private companies or existing community agencies on one hand, and capacity of households in local communities to adapt to, build resilience and survive through the changes they bring to local communities. These might include the existence and implementation laws, policies, regulations and development agendas of government, expansion activities or operation of oil palm plantations, projects of NGOs and practices adopted by local communities. Local communities are losing huge trunks of arable agriculture lands with small-scale subsistence farms and forests where they have hunted and gathered wide fruits, herbs for traditional medications, fuelwoods for cooking, timbers, rattans for furniture and other non-timber forest products and where they conducted cultural practices to large-scale oil palm plantations (BARBIER, 2010; Levy, Spilling and Griffin, 2018; Lucey, J. M. and Hill, J. K. 2011).

2.1.2 Effects of oil palm development on Livelihood Strategies of local communities

Livelihood strategies consist of diversity in activities and options such as farming, employment trading and other income generating activities available for households to meet their needs to achieve improved livelihood outcomes (DFID, 1999). Proliferation of large-scale oil palm plantations across Africa and other developing regions greatly influence dynamics of livelihoods and development in local communities. In other words, livelihood strategies are shown by how people use their assets to derive a livelihood (Ruedin, 2007). Because livelihood strategies are dynamic, local communities adapt different activities like farming household members getting involved with non-farm and off-farm labour, intensifying agriculture practices or migrate to communities for jobs or better livelihood opportunities. And livelihoods strategies including farming of local communities are influenced by existing policies, laws, and other human practices such as oil palm expansion on available livelihood assets. The livelihood strategies of farming households in local communities are influenced by the loss of lands and forest landscapes to large-scale oil palm plantations which limit capacity of local communities to source of livelihoods (Bhaskar Vira et al., 2015). These local communities also often experience either physically or economically resettled or both without suitable resettlement compensations. This leaves local community members to conditionally adjust with little or no space to farm as large-scale oil palm plantations expand across their farmlands limiting their sources of incomes.

In Liberia and other developing tropical regions, rural communities dependent on surrounding lands, environment and natural resources (including forest and water) for their daily subsistence gradually losing these assets to expansion of large-scale oil palm and other mono-culture plantations. These communities become at high risk when they lose their basic sources of livelihoods such as their crops, their farms, arable agriculture land, and or lost access to forest resources for large-scale mono-culture agriculture activities (BARBIER, 2010; Bebbington, 1999). This loss of farms, crops, forest and other resources directly and indirectly affect sustainable livelihoods of communities affected by oil palm plantations.

2.4 Effects of Oil Palm Development on Livelihood outcomes of Local Communities

There different arguments put out by researchers outlining how large-scale land acquisitions impact rural communities' livelihoods in development regions. For instance, Sayer et al. (2010) and Obidzinski et al (2012) showed that even though there are practices of inequitable benefits sharing, revenues generated from large-scale oil palm investments are amongst leading contributors boosting income generation their (developing countries) economies that should have contribute to the socioeconomic growth of these countries with trickle-down effects on livelihoods of rural households and individuals in tropical regions. Liberia by 2016, a total of United States \$16 billion revenue envelope was reported by the government from foreign direct investment active concessions operating in the country including those in the agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas and public private partnerships (NBC, 2016). Despite this massive

boost to the country's national budget and revenue strains, local communities directly affected by activities of these concessions are still on the margins of poverty with limited access to farmlands and forest, increase in food insecurity and poor health care facilities.

On the other hand, FAO (2015) argued that recurrent economic shocks, i.e. massive clearing of lands and forests for oil palm expansions and other large-scale mono-cropping agriculture practices are limiting local communities' access to agricultural land and threatening their food security. Local communities that find themselves within large-scale land concession areas are usually economically and physically displaced or resettled as they lose their farmlands and crops, have limited access to employment and incomes, and their water sources are damaged or polluted. The clearing of land and planting for large-scale mono-culture agriculture are encroaching on farmlands of local communities and destroying tropical forests-based resources and villages and traditional sacred sites for local communities. Hunting households lost access to hunting bushes and those surviving on farming lost access to crops and farmlands (Siakor, 2012; Lomax et al., 2012). Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and Bailey, R. (2011) alarmed the current pattern, and pressure on land and natural resources use has terrifying implications for rainforest and is causing land to run out and fresh water is drying up. Bailey (2011) mentioned that:

'The amount of arable land per head is decreasing. Very often, land that may be termed idle or marginal in fact plays a critical role in the livelihoods of marginalized people such as pastoralists, indigenous peoples and women. Many governments and elites in developing countries are offering up large swathes of land amid clouds of corruption at rock bottom prices. Companies and investors are cashing in, while food-insecure governments are rushing to secure supply'.

Supporters of large-scale mono-culture plantations have continuously argued that oil palm plantations serve as perfect opportunities to provide thousands of jobs, access to schools and education opportunities for children, health care facilities and road networks for local communities within and around these oil palm plantations (Borras & Franco, 2012; McCarthy, 2010). They also argued that large-scale oil palm development comes along with infrastructure projects, market opportunities and other economic enhancement activities that are intended to improve food security and livelihoods of local communities.

Those on the flip side, opposing large-scale agriculture models are arguing that jobs promised and or provided by large-scale agriculture plantations are usually limited short term or contract and those members of local communities benefiting these short term contracts are often paid far below the government of Liberia required minimum wage (Bailey, 2011). With well-paid jobs often occupied by people from other regions or urban areas; because residents of affected communities usually have limited capacities to take on well-paid jobs. They also argue that schools and health facilities are mostly available for dependents of employees of higher job standards undermining the overall livelihoods of rural communities.

2.2 Operationalisation of key concepts

For the researcher to operationalize the SLF and come out with key/concrete results, the research operationalized four concepts; named: oil palm expansion activities (acquisitions and clearing of land for expanding plantations (planting more palm trees) is impacting community farming activities of households in local communities. As stated by FAO (2015), Siakor (2012) and Lomax et al. (2012) land clearing for oil palm expansion can affect local community livelihoods strategies and outcomes. Throughout this research, the impacts on the size of and used that that was cleared, and crops damaged for expansion of large-scale oil palm plantation were identified, ascertained and documented opportunities and challenges on livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes of households in local communities. The research also

identified commonly transforming structures, processes and institutions and best practices. The elements operationalised for this research include:

Oil Palm expansion: This research used this to refer to acquisitions and clearing of farmlands in local communities by Sime Darby.

Livelihood strategies: In this research, this term refers to farming activities and practices, charcoal production, small home businesses and commercial motorbike riding of households in local communities.

Livelihood Outcomes: The research used livelihood outcomes to refer to incomes, food availability and vulnerability of households in local communities, as well as forest management practices available in the study area; and

Transforming processes: The research used this term for existing laws, policies and institutions in Liberia that promote livelihoods of households in local communities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As core to any research, this research employed different methods and tools to collect and analyse data. This chapter provides the information on the research study area, the research design that was used during this research, and the different methods that were used to collect data. Additionally, the strategies used, sampling strategies, methods of data analysis as well as ethical consideration are discussed.

3.1 Research Design

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which spread across over 200 countries, including Liberia and the Netherlands (WorldOMeters, 2020), affecting the human respiratory system resulted in more than 15,689,000 people (more than 637,000 deaths) worldwide, has impacted every aspect of human society such as travelling from one country to another and public gatherings. For instance, the Government of Liberia in March 2020 announced a lockdown of the country and suspended for time indefinite all commercial flights to Liberia (LCAA, 2020) as part of measures to ensure public safety in the fight against COVID-19. Due to these COVID-19 restrictions I was unable to travel to Liberia and had to stay in the Netherlands as such, the research adopted a data collection strategy that enabled me to conduct this research from distance. One of these data collection strategies was the collaboration with two research assistants. Also, two research assistants were identified by my commissioner, Sustainable Development Institute. These two research assistants have previous experiences in facilitating community level meetings and experience in working in the research location (*See Appendix 2, Summary profile of research assistants*). These research assistants are also fluent in the local dialects (Gola and Dey) and are knowledgeable of the traditional cultural and religious terrain of the study and this distant research involved frequent (daily) coordination and communication with the research assistants in order to smoothly and properly generate the needed data primary data. The research assistant also followed all health and safety protocols that were outlined by the Ministry of Health, National Public Health Institute of Liberia and National COVID – 19 Response Task Force.

In order to ensure proficiency, I held frequent planning and information sharing meetings with the research assistants. Field activities began with an orientation meeting held with the research assistants which brought everyone at the same level with the research tools, methods, ethical considerations and logistical arrangement which ensured smooth primary data collection.

3.2 Research Strategy

The research took a case study with problem solving approach to provide the perspective of respondents on the research context that fully explain existing situation. The research took local communities in Senjeh District as a scenario to get in-depth information on how large-scale oil palm plantations are impacting livelihood strategies and livelihood incomes of households in local communities.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The research used a series of different tools to collect primary data from members in the community and at the national level. The research developed and used a structured interview guide, focus group discussion guide, checklist for facilitating development of community livelihood resource maps, Key informant interview and national level exports interview guides. The research, through the commissioner, identified two research assistants that were trained to properly interpret (into special ‘Liberian English’) and administer the instruments to respondents in the study area. These tools, after being approved, were pre-tested on 13th July 2020 in Cooper Farm Community, Dowien District, Bomi County – a community affected by an independent medium oil palm farm.

Field work for collecting primary data began in two-fold. An introductory session was held with members of the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL) during one of its regular monthly meetings which was held in June that held using Zoom due to COVID-19. The objectives, methodology and tentative schedule for data collection were presented to create awareness on the research and targeted respondents were identified. In Beh Sao, an entry meeting was held with the leaders and residents of Beh Sao community to introduce the research assistants, inform the community on the objectives of the study, to request assistance in identifying and selecting the FGD participants and the KII respondents. The research assistants used this meeting as an opportunity to request consent and contribution to participate in discussions that provided information needed for this research. Members of the community were also asked to verify and provide additional information about the community such as demographic, historicity, leadership style and structure and general assets and resources available to the community. In order to conduct this study, a desk study was carried out using secondary data sources like journals, articles, reports, books and laws and policies available online. Information on best case scenarios and existing laws, policies and institutions referred by respondents were collected and compiled in order to set the basis for the qualitative data collection. Table summarises the methodology of this research:

Table 2: Summary of Research Methodology

No.	Research Sub-questions	Data Source	Research Methods	Research Tools
1.1	What are changes in livelihood strategies of local communities in Senjeh District since Sime Darby oil palm plantation?	Community members (men, women, male and female youths),	Focus Group Discussions, Face-to-face semi-structured interviews	Livelihood resource maps focus group guide, Semi-structured interview guide
		community leaders (development chairperson, assistant women leader and youth leader - male)	KII	Interview guide
		SAPAD chairperson, NWOPF co-chair, and, Bomi county CSO chair	KII	Interview guide
1.2	What are changes in livelihood outcomes of households in local communities in Senjeh District since Sime Darby expanded there?	Community members (women, men and male and female youths)	Focus Group Discussions, face-to-face semi-structured interviews	Livelihood resource maps, historical timeline, focus group guide, Semi-structured interview guide
		community leaders (town chief, women leader, youth leader – a male, quarter chiefs)	KII	Interview guide
		SAPAD, county CSO chair	KII	Interview guide
2.1	What are existing laws, policies and institutions that promote livelihoods of local communities in large-scale agriculture plantation?	NOPPOL members (relevant government entities and thematic CSOs working in the study area)	Online expert interviews, documents reviews	Interview guide
2.2	What are best practices from other cases that promote livelihoods of local communities impacted by oil palm expansion?	NOPPOL members (relevant government entities and thematic CSOs working in the study area)	Online expert interviews, documents review	Interview guide

Source: Researcher, 2020

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The tools included a detailed field activities plan that explained the activities that were needed to have been implemented, individuals that were responsible for each task, time each task was expected for completion, the outputs from each activity and section for comments to give reflections and observations on implementation of the different activities. The activities listed in this plan were specifically related to preparation and on the field data collection activities, such as, desk review and completion of other data collection tools, coordination meetings with lead research and research assistants, submission and revising research tools based on inputs from supervisor, online training for research assistants and actual data collection in the field. Aside from the data collection plan, I used the following tools:

Community Profile Template: Field data collection started in the study area by conducting an entry meeting with community leaders (landlords) and members including women heading households, youth (male and female), men, and vulnerable groups, farmers and hunters) during which the research objective, methodology and data collection tools were introduced (*See figure 3, picture from community entry meeting*). The meeting was also used to conduct a profiling session of the Beh Sao community and obtain background information on the community that certified two distinct reasons. Firstly, it verified and gather more information on the socioeconomic compositions of households in the community in addition to previous information gathered from desk study about the community. Secondly and aside from the objective of this research, one of the reasons for the commissioner to select the study area was to understand and to either support or deny claims that the community is one of those that were started demanding resettlement benefits for the Sime Darby taking their farmlands, from the government (through the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning) claimed the lands were government land and unencumbered (vacant) not for the communities. As such, that most of communities in and around the Sime Darby Plantation were either established as hideouts for people during the civil war in Liberia and some came purposely to exploit monies for resettlement because there were (then) speculations that the government was in conversations with potential investors to take over the former BF Goodrich Rubber Plantation. A community profiling template (*see Appendix 3*) was developed by the research and used by the research assistants to gather detailed information such as the history of the community (when, how, who, why started the community? Where did s/he or they come from?), the migration pattern (why, how people move in and out of the community? Who (category) are they?), the population, allied Towns/Villages (who are those? What do you have in common with them? How do you help each other?), description of Community Leadership Structure – who (titles) are those in leadership and roles (what exactly they do in the community?) and general community livelihood capitals.

Figure 3: Research Assistants at Community Entry Meeting in Beh Sao



Source: Field Data, 2020

Semi-structured interviews/Household Interview: An interview guide of open-ended questions was developed and was used to enable the research gathering in-depth understanding of different household members' knowledge and experiences on information such as changes in livelihood strategies of households in local communities, changes on incomes of households, existing laws, policies and process that support local livelihoods and best case scenarios from other regions that promote livelihoods of local communities. This guide was also used to authentic information income generating activities and access to land that were provided during the different focus group discussions held with men, women and youths of Beh Sao Community; to ascertain information on household activities that generate incomes, their access to land, and availability of livelihood services provided by key informants. Also, information on households' access to land, availability of income generating activities, provision of livelihood services and usage and practices for managing natural resources gathered from interviews with national level.

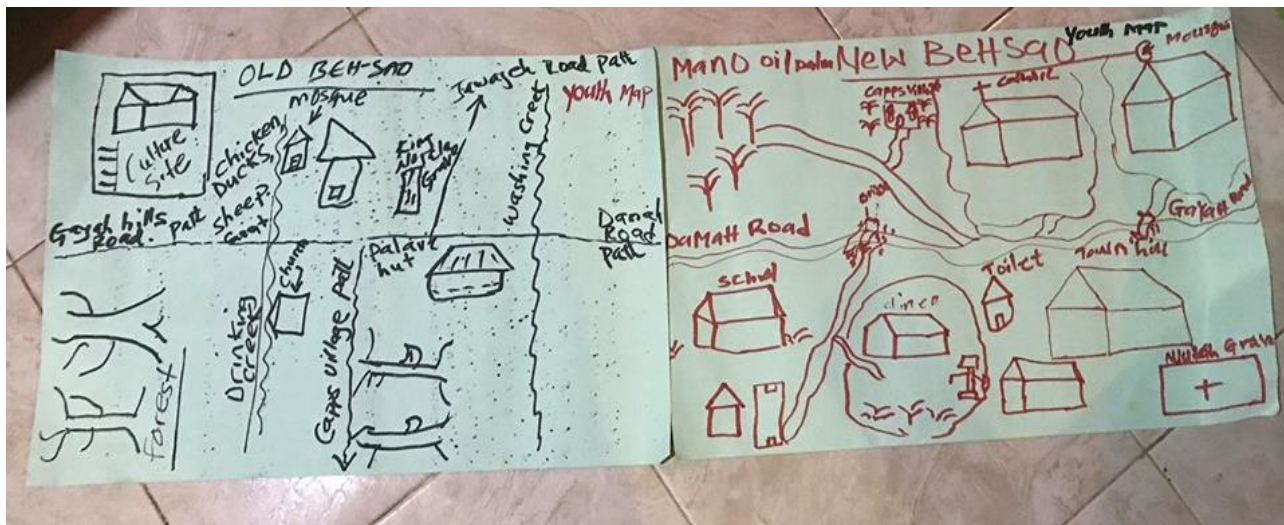
The semi-structured guide (**See APPENDIX 4**) was used to conduct a total of 14 (out of 16 planned) interviews with households in the four quarters of Beh Sao Community – with the remaining two household members absent during the dates set aside for household interviews because they had gone as community delegates to a political party's primary which took place in Tubmanburg City. The households interviewed were randomly selected with a representation of four households from each quarter of the community (**See description in text box below and Figure 4: maps drawn by youth FGD**). Data collected were used to answer the main research question 1 (**What are the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District?**) providing information on incomes generating activities, access to land, livelihood enhancement services provided the community, implementation of corporate social responsibilities (relevant to livelihoods) and practices and usage of natural resources available to the community. This also gathered household

composition in terms of socioeconomic characteristics such as sex, age, year spent in the community, education level, income generating activities and household size. An essence for employing semi-structured interviews is to reduce the level of biases for this research. With my continuous supervision, daily check-ins and update discussions, the research assistants interviewed and probed 14 household respondents at their various homes with each interview lasting for an average time of 40 minutes. The household interviews were conducted on the last two days of data collection in Beh Sao. Based on previous experience of an NGO implicating a community in Grand Cape Mount County in a research publication during the onset of Sime Darby, respondents were reluctant to be captured in individual photographs, or have the conversations recorded. As such, the research assistants wrote down responses against each interview questions asked and responses for probing were written in separate notebooks. The research assistants transcribed and sent the responses and probing questions and observations presented in separate document.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF HOUSEHOLDS SAMPLING

The research numbered the four quarters in the community as quarter 1, 2, 3 and 4, beginning from the left (as quarter 1) upon entering the community from the plantation. Quarter 2 for the first quarter on the right entering the community from the plantation; Quarter 3 for the second quarter on the left side of the road after quarter 1 and quarter 4 for the second quarter on the right side after quarter 2. The main boundary separating quarter 1 and 3 from quarter 2 and 4 is the car road that runs through the community leading off the Monrovia – Bo Waterside highway through the Sime Darby Plantation. The research assistants.

Figure 4: Photograph of Maps of old and new Beh Sao



Source: Field Data, 2020

Key Informants Interviews (KII): All six (6) planned key informants interviewed were conducted in Senjeh District, Bomi County. The research assistants conducted three (3) informant interviews with community and opinion leaders in the Beh Sao community. Informants interviewed in Beh Sao included the youth leader, assistant women leader and the community development chairperson. Each of these informants

was interviewed at their homes in the community lasting for between 30 to 40 minutes. In addition, I conducted three key informant interviews with the chairperson of the Senjeh Action for Peace and Development - SAPAD (the local land management structure that represent the interest of local communities in Senjeh District), the chairperson of Bomi County Civil Society Organisations and a co-chair of the North-Western Oil Palm Forum (a regional multi-stakeholders platform comprising representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry Development Authority, civil society organisations, community structures and select leaders of communities in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties). The interview with the SAPAD chairpersons and the county CSO using Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp for the co-chair of the North-Western Oil Palm Forum. All three online interviews were conducted around mid-night hours (Liberia local time) when respondents were home with their respective families for an average 50 minutes.

The interviews with key informants were used to gather information incomes generating activities of households in communities in Senjeh District impacted by SDPL expansion activities, changes in households' access to land, provision of support to livelihoods and existing structures that support community livelihoods. The guides (***See APPENDIX 7***) used for interviews with key informants contained questions that provided additional answers to main research question 1 (***What are the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District?***).

National level Expert Interviews: To have a broader perspective on the research context, I administered 11 of the 14 targeted online interviews with members of the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL) using WhatsApp. These interviews were to be conducted with four thematic government entities (Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Finance and Development Planning; and the Liberia Agriculture Commodity Regulatory Authority), an international independent land and natural resources expert (Silas Siakor), a network of small and medium oil palm grower (Local Farms Incorporated), a community relations officer of Sime Darby and respondents from four civil society organisations from civil society organisation oil palm working group (Alliance for Rural Democracy, Foundation for Community Initiatives, Rights and Rice Foundation, Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development). These respondents were selected based on their roles and activities in the oil palm sector relevant to community livelihoods activities, compliance monitoring in the oil palm, land and natural resource sector – with particular to the research study location and context. There was also one respondent from the community engagement department from Sime Darby Plantation, now Mano Palm Oil Plantation. This interview guide (See Annex 6) provided data for each theme and information gathered were used to answer main research question 2 (***What are existing structures and processes that serve as opportunities for improving livelihoods of local communities affected by SDPL oil palm expansion in Senjeh District?***).

Each interview began with (after introduction) asking respondents to state their role and organisation/entity's role relevant to the scope of the research – oil palm and community livelihoods enhancement. Based on the roles presented, the questions in the interview guide and probing questions were asked to suit each respondent roles and organisation/entity's work. In other words, the research developed and used a generic national level expert interview guide for all stakeholders from the different categories, but these questions were reframed that enabled respondents properly and sufficiently answered with needed information.

Following the presentation of the research objective, methodology and identification of targeted respondents, I obtained and verified contact details (email addresses and mobile phone numbers used on WhatsApp). Each targeted responding organisation and government entity was served emails officially

requesting online interviews with them. Follow up emails and calls were done to confirm and prepare respondents for the interviews. The interview guide was also shared respondents for preparation

Despite sending official request to all targeted members of the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia and placing several follow up emails, WhatsApp and direct calls, I was unable to interview the Ministry of Labour (who is direct custodian of employment for all sectors in Liberia), the National Bureau of Concessions (responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance to concession agreements, laws, policies, regulations and other agreements), the Liberia Land Authority (responsible for all land deals across Liberia) and one civil society organisation, Green Advocates (one of the environmental organisations that initiated engagement with communities and Sime Darby during the earlier years of the company operation. Efforts were made for these organisations and entities to designate relevant individuals to be interviewed but no one committed for interview. For instance, a staff from the office of the research commissioner pay several follow up visits to these entities but none prove fruitful. On another occasion, my wife made follow up calls (using local numbers) but was told for me to call instead.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): With help from members and leaders of Beh Sao community, the research assistants identified participants for three separate groups of FGD in Beh Sao community – a group of six (6) female (elderly women, household heads, spouses, farmers), another group with six (6) males and one group of six (6) mixed female and male youth. The research assistants facilitated these FGDs for two days and each FGD lasted for at least 3 and a half hours including 15 minutes bio-break and break up groups. The 15 minutes bio-breaks (for each FGD) were given for each to attend to nature, wash their hands and attend to other urgent personal matters; while the smaller break up groups of three (during each FGD) were introduced for participants themselves to brainstorm – ‘buzz’ and cross-check among themselves the responses they provided the research assistants. The responses from participants during the FGDs provided information on income generation activities of households, access to land and the different structures that exist in Beh Sao community. The FGD guide (*See APPENDIX 5*) contained open-ended questions that were developed and provided answers to main research question 1 (***What are the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District?***).

As part of gathering more in-depth information during the FGDs, the research assistants facilitated development of three livelihood resource maps (*See Appendix 6, checklist for facilitating session on the maps and figure 5 & 6 – youth & women FGD participants drawing the maps*). These livelihood resource maps that were developed by separate focus group participants, indicate different livelihood sources available to the community and the changes in livelihood (access to farmland and resources) that have occurred in recent years. The research assistants were to also facilitate the development of these maps to show visual representation of changes in livelihood sources (farmlands) and natural resources and present the social structures (different groups, structures/institutions) that exist in the community.

Figure 5: Photograph of Youth FGD Participants drawing maps of the Beh Sao



Source: Field Data, 2020

Figure 6: Photograph of Women FGD participants drawing maps of Beh Sao



Source: Field Data, 2020

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

This subsection explains how step-by-step process of data analysis throughout this research. Data collected by each research assistant were jointly reviewed with me (as lead researcher) and the two research assistants daily to ascertain if the data were properly arranged as per the research guides, if the interview questions were answered, and in the instance where a particular was not clear, the research assistants had to verify with respondents the next of data collection. This involved cross-checking and arranging available data into tables with columns containing lists of data collection methods used and themes (as explained below under 'Disassembling'). While the roles contained data collected from each source per theme using the different data methods and tools. The responses were coded and coloured to clearly create the linkages for properly triangulate the results and finalise data analysis. This process is further explained in the following steps below:

Compiling Data – This phase involved identifying the necessary data sources – primary and secondary data. The stakeholders that were engaged, interviewed and those that provided support to achieving the research objective were all identified during this phase. The compiling process in other words involved employing the different research tools and data collection methods during the field activities – such as the semi-structured, key informants and national level expert interviews; mobilising and facilitating meeting community profiling meeting and focus group discussions. This phase of the research was also used to conduct quality checks on data collected, transcribe and write out observations from field data collection and interpreting maps developed during focus group discussions in the community. The data quality checks were done through daily debriefing sessions with the research assistants to review and strengthen the data collection and followed up with respondents on clarity of information/data collected.

The research also used this phase to sort out and review available documents referenced by respondents that provide information necessary to help answering the research questions and gathered relevant information from previous publications such as books, reports and journals that were available on the internet.

Disassembling Data – The primary and secondary data collected and compiled from the different methods and tools were categorized under selected themes and with responses assigned specific codes (with letters of interviewers first and last names, tools or methods used and place/rank of respondents) to differentiate and easily identify sources of information. For instance, data from the first national level expert interviews collected by Wynston Benda-Henries was coded: WBH-NEI #1. The organisation of data collected during this research was done in a table, with the tools/methods listed the roles in column 1 and the five themes drawing from the five sub-questions (namely: Changes in Households Livelihood Strategies, Current Households Livelihood Strategies, Changes in Households Incomes, Existing laws, policies and institutions that promote household livelihoods and Best practices of best case scenario that promote households livelihoods) as headings for column 2 to 6. The responses gathered from each tool/method, coded and listed against relevant themes.

Reassembling Data – During this phase of the research, data collected were reorganised based on similarities of issues raised or provided to enable easy comparative analysis of data collected from different methods and tools used. This phase created space to organised presentation of the research results.

Discussing or Interpreting Data – The research used this phase to present the results that came from the different tools and methods employed during different stages of the research. The data that were unravelled and reorganised were again, systematically organised and presented here. Also, the research

used this phase to discuss the results in the context of the research and provided answers to the research questions.

Also, as part of the analysis process, the research used the opportunities and threats components of the SWOT analysis to identify and document opportunities and challenges households faced during expansions activities and operation of large-scale oil palm plantations in local communities in Senjeh District, Bomi County.

Concluding – this phase concluded analyses done during the research. The research used this phase to summarise trending issues that came out of research and generalized these results to a broader context of the situation. Also, the research used this phase to document and recommend applicable actions that are needed to help improve the situation and outlined relevance future research that are needed to provide information on gaps identified during this research.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

To ensure ethical professionalism and leadership, the research included in the introductory statement component that sort permission from respondents to start each interview, record the conversations and make photographs. The data collection took into consideration the traditional, cultural and religious happenings of the people in the research location as well as protecting the confidentiality and privacy of respondents. For instance, the initial date that was set to begin data collection in the community interfered with burial rites for one of the local leaders of an adjoining community. As such, this was rescheduled for a week later. The research assistants also ensured and observed that respondents in the research community were following the health and safety measures outlined by the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

3.7 Research Limitations

Aside from constraints caused by COVID-19 as stated the sub-section on the research design, the ongoing political activities across Liberia also created hindrances for the field works. Liberia has planned ‘Special Senatorial Elections’ to elect or re-elect 15 senators whose 9-year tenures have expired - for the 15 counties in Liberia, By-Elections to fill in voids created by death of two House of Representatives members; and a National Referendum to vote for or against proposals to amend certain provisions of the constitution of Liberia. These elections are all scheduled for December 8, 2020 but political parties are busy conducting primaries and other individuals have started rallying support from local communities. These election nearing activities also saw ministers, directors and other government officials all more involved with primaries of their respective political parties’ and spending less time in their offices or making time up for other activities. For instance, I could not gather full information on local communities employment because the Deputy Minister for Manpower Development or the Director of Statistics at Ministry of Labour were busy with their ambitions to contest as the ruling party’s candidates for Montserrado and Margibi Counties, even though they earlier committed to for interviews. The Director of Compliance Monitoring at National Bureau of Concessions who had earlier consented lately turned down on grounds that he was suspended for time indefinite.

Also, the research assistants did not facilitate development of historical incomes timelines with the different focus groups because most of the community residents were participating in political rallies in Gbah Jekeh (one of nearby communities). This created gap in results for them research. Know the sensitivity that people are often reluctant to disclose their incomes, adopting the historical income

timeline was going to be perfect opportunity to document the trend of changes in household's income over the last 12 years (2008 – 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH CONTEXT

This Chapter contains an overview of the Commissioner, Sustainable Development Institute involvement in the oil palm sector of Liberia and a summary description of the research study area

4.1 Sustainable Development Institute Involvement in the oil palm sector

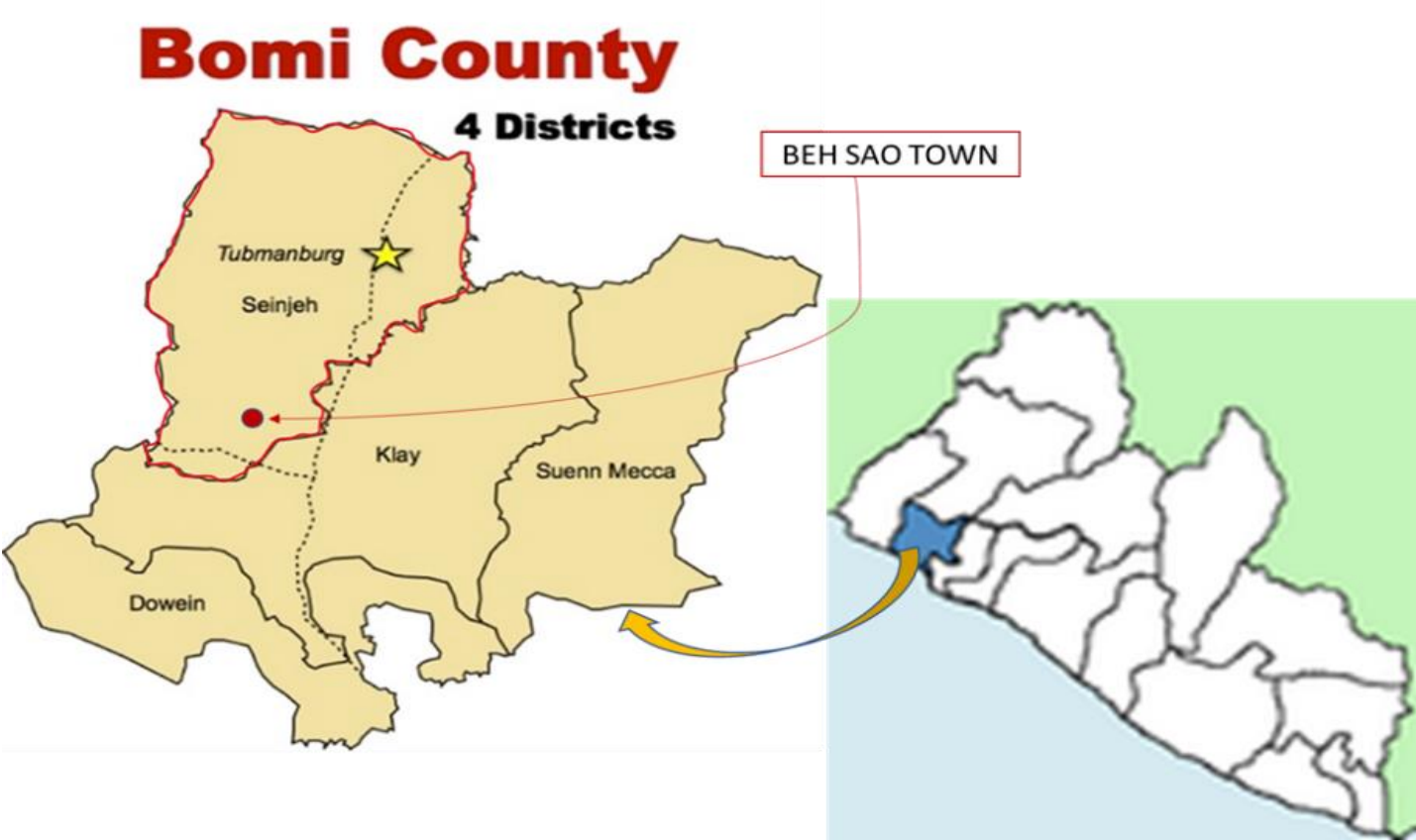
SDI is the convener of the Civil Society Organisations Oil Palm Working Group (CSO-OPWG), a coalition of 16 Civil Society Organisations (14 national and 2 international campaign organisations); a secretariat member of the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL), a national level multi-stakeholders platform; and CSOs' representative to the National Oil Palm Steering Group, a high-level platform consisting of sector representatives including ministers (proper) from the government of Liberia inter-ministerial committee on concessions, civil society organisations and international development partners. SDI (uses these actively lead country-level civil society organisations involvement in drafting a National Oil Palm Strategy; drafting National Interpretations for the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil principles and criteria (RSPO-NI); and 'redefining forest'/ 'forest definition' for Liberia. These platforms and processes provide perfect opportunities to advocate and influence community and environmentally friendly provisions.

4.2 Research Study Area

Bomi county is located western Liberia of 1,942 square kilometres (750 sq mi) land area (MIA, 2008) with predominately Gola and Dey ethnic speaking and Muslim dominated population (LISGIS, 2008; CDA, 2008-2012). The county (now) has five districts and a population of approximately 84,119 with Senjeh District as the largest and most populated of the five districts (previously four) with approximately 30,027 (15,445 males; 14,585 females) (LISGIS, 2008). Senjeh District hosts the county capital city, Tubmanburg (MIA, 2008) with about 70% of its population involved in subsistence farming and hunting activities as a source of livelihood (LISGIS, 2008; CDA, 2008 – 2012). Senjeh District has been the host to several large-scale mining and agriculture concessions since 1954, including the 25,000 hectares (ha) of 57,008 ha of land in Bomi that was awarded as part of SDPL 311,817 ha concession area (Concession Agreement, 2009; Siakor, 2012).

The district has three clans Upper Togay; Manoah; Zeppeh; Lower Togay and several towns including William Village, Beatoe, Darmahn Junction, Beajah, Borbor, Bola and Befini. Other towns are Zamain Town, Government Farm, Gbah Jeikeh, Johnson Farm, Gaya Hill and Beh Sao (CDA, 2008 – 2012).

Figure 7: Map of Study area



Source: Liberia Ministry of Internal Affairs website

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The rationale for this study was to identify, ascertain, document the impacts of the large-scale oil palm companies' expansion activities on livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes of households in local communities in concession areas. Specifically, the study focused on describing how Sime Darby Plantation expansions activities (land acquisition and clearing) are affecting livelihood strategies and outcomes (incomes, reduced vulnerability and sustainable use of natural resource base) of households in local communities. The results are presented under this section as socio-economic characteristics of household respondents, changes in livelihood strategies, changes in livelihood outcomes, existing laws, policies and institutions that promote livelihoods of local communities, and best-case scenarios that promote livelihoods of local communities. Aside from answering the research sub-questions, the documented summary profile of Beh Sao as a strategy to more historicity of the community and set the scene for applying the research tools. The summary result from this profiling session is included in the below text box.

Figure 8: Summary Profile of Beh Sao Community

Summary Profile of Beh Sao Community

According to participants of the entry meeting in the community, Beh Sao is one of the oldest communities in Senjeh District and has a population of around 1200 persons (according to records from the community clinic) was started by a community prior to coming from the freed slaves from the Americas. The community was started by 'King Nyolla', a traditional Gola warrior. King Nyolla is believed one of Liberia's toughest warriors who fought to secure customary community lands from the hands freed slaves from the Americas. The name Beh Sao, *'The Missing Treasury that was found'*, was given to the area when King Nyolla and his mates were in search of a free, suitable and central place to settle during the ancient tribal wars. Besides being freed and safe for settlement, they saw the place as a central point (also on top of a hill) for gathering. King Nyolla is believed to have travelled from a town called 'Kooonhah' in Gbarpolu County (formerly part of Lofa County).

Beh Sao has closed tie with some communities; amongst them are:

Alfred (Karmo) Village – share common livelihood activities including farming, charcoal production, and use of forest resources (particularly harvesting wild palm fruits);

Jarwejeh – share common traditional practices such as fishing, marriage, trade and sports activities; and

Damah Community – share common traditional and farming activities

The meeting participants also named some physical structures available to the general community. The structures available are: one government (public) school, one clinic constructed and operated by the government (in good condition); one town hall for community meeting constructed by World Bank through CCF; 2 churches; 2 mosques; 7 hand pumps (3 functional producing clean water) constructed by World Vision (4), World Bank through CCF (2); 3 Modern latrines constructed by Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE); and a football field. There is a cultural site and a museum built by the government and a road passing through the Community which becomes deplorable during the raining season. Residents of Beh Sao go to Gbah Jekeh (a nearby community) for weekly meetings. And natural resources available include land (a little over 2000 hectares); forest (not large amount), rivers/creeks, rocks, gold and diamond.

Source: Field Data, 2020

5.1 Socio-economic characteristics of household respondents

This research included sections to document household composition in the semi-structured interview guide that were administered to the 14 households that fell in the random sampling and interviewed. The household composition for this research focused on looking into socio-economic characteristics of household respondents particularly described the gender, age range, education level, household size and length of stay in the study area as well as religious affiliations.

The semi-structured interviews were administered to both males and females from the four quarters in Beh Sao Community. Because respondents at this level were randomly selected, 10 of the household heads interviewed were males and four (4) were women headed households. Out of the 14 interviews conducted, eight (57%) of the head of households interviewed are in youthful and middle age groups that are in active working age range of 18 to 50 years and while six (or 43%) of those household heads interviewed are older and above 50 years of age and might not be active in providing for their households for a long time more. The result on the education attainment for head of each household, five (5) or 39% of the respondents have not attained any formal education - falling in response categorised as 'none'. 31% of respondents reported to have attained some formal education not above 'primary level and 15% mentioned attaining some level of formal education but no more than 'secondary' education. The other 15% household heads interviewed reported having 'tertiary' education - acquiring some level of post-secondary education such as attained vocational education, attended college or university. The result also indicates eight (51%) of household heads interviewed are Muslims, while six (43%) interviewed are Christians; and six (43%) of household heads interviewed have lived in the community more than 30 years, another six or 43% household heads interviewed have lived in the community between 21 to 30 years, while the other two (14%) household heads interviewed have lived in the community for less than 10 years.

5.2 Changes in Livelihood Strategies

Results from majority of the households interviewed, all six key informants interviewed and all participants from the FGDs group discussions indicated households in the study area experienced changes in farming practices as a result of the 1900 hectares of farmland acquired by Sime Darby. The responses indicate the changes emanate from limited availability and access farmland and local land governance system due to the community losing portion of their farmlands to Sime Darby. The changes affected respondents in two ways., One change is said to be affected their farming practices from crops produced and the other change saw farming moving to other activities supporting livelihoods of their households. According to the results, farmlands were previously owned and managed by different families which led most families (or households) to have planted tree crops such as rubber, cocoa, coffee, oranges and oil palm. But since Sime Darby acquired places that had some of these individual family farms, they are conditioned to change farming practices from a more dominant tree crops farming to small-scale rice, cassava and vegetables farming. The results indicate changes in farming practices are due to new local land governance system/regulation adopted by the community which restricting planting tree crops and allowing food crops (vegetables and small-scale rice) farming. According to them, this was done to allow everyone in the community to farm. And, respondents complained that the new location set aside for farming is far and difficult getting there just for small space to plant rice, so they prefer making gardens close to the community or selling at homes or doing other things. Results from interviews with all the households (both male and female household heads) mentioned changes are causing more women headed households to leave farming for other activities because the process for women wanting to farm must firstly be recommended by her spouse or male relatives (who should also be members of the community as well) staying in the community.

*'The first thing to consider when you are talking about livelihood of people living in any oil palm company area, is oil palm plantations take a lot of land. They will lose their land they used to farm on. And when that happens the people will have nothing left but find another means to survive so yes, Sime Darby had this in mind before coming but the government did not consider this before signing concession agreement.... And now everybody looking at the company'.... **WBH-NEI #7** (a Sime Darby community relations staff stated)*

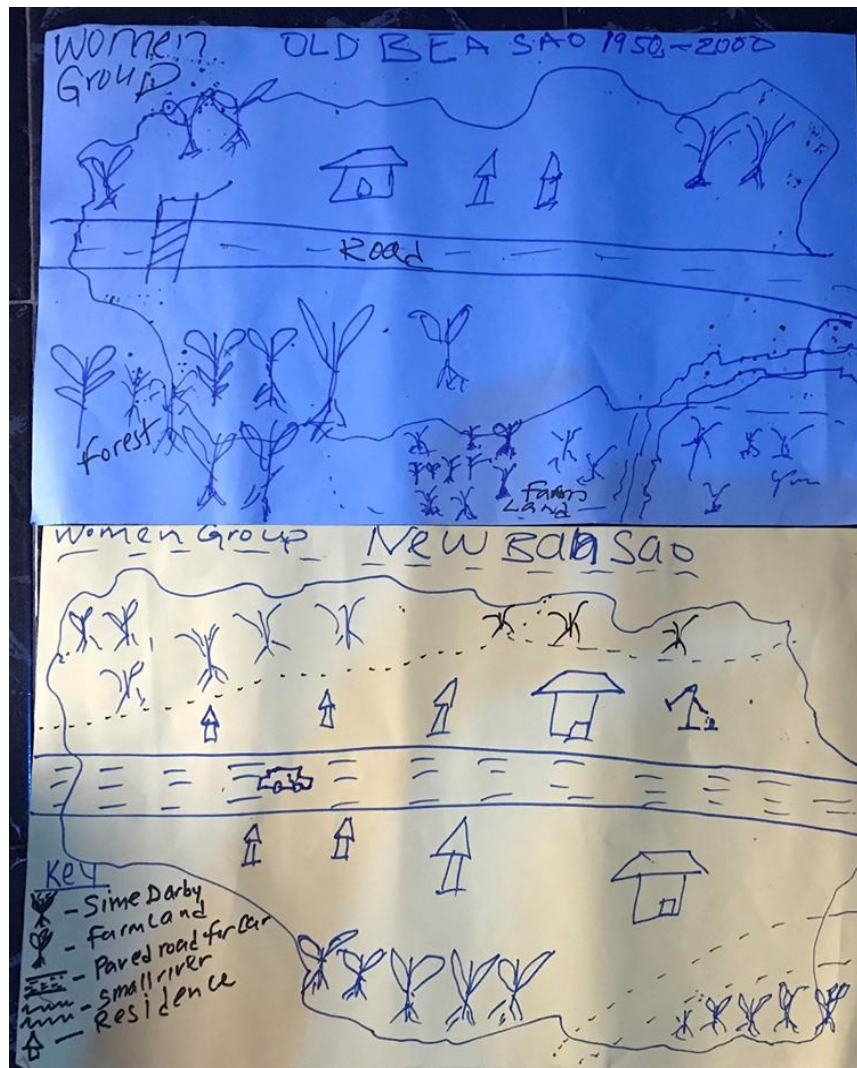
Six semi-structured interview respondents (in quarter #3 and #4) and the men focus group participants said they have not experienced any significant changes activities as they are still farming as they used to and are still harvesting from their tree crops farms. Three households in Quarter # 3 also indicated their spouses previously doing short-term contracts with Sime Darby but were told to wait for the next time the company will need people. One semi-structured interview respondent stated: Me and my other family members are still farming the same way, on the same amount of land, nothing has changed (JFK-HH Q3 #3). On the other hand, results from the eight interviews conducted in Quarter #1 and #2, four participants from the women and all six participants of the youth focus group discussion indicated changing from in farming practices and to other activities. Three of these households indicated switching to commercial motorbike riding; two households mentioned they do not have tree crops farms anymore and the space for highland rice farming is not enough, so they are now farming in vegetables. The other three households reported now depend on teaching, charcoal production and working daily contract services because their farms were taken by Sime Darby. According to households that mentioned changes, they said they switched because their farming was taken by Sime Darby. These respondents said the community still has more land for farming except the processes that other community members go through to get land for farming as mentioned by other respondents and no one is now allowed to plant tree crops.

Results from all the respondents indicate households in the study area are now dependent on small-scale farming, small home businesses, charcoal production, commercial motorbike riding, teaching and short-term contract services provided by Sime Darby and other individuals. The results show most households are dependent on subsistence agriculture activities (such as small-scale rice farming, cassava, pepper, bitter buds, cucumber, and other vegetables for incomes), small home businesses (petty trade) and charcoal production as three main sources of income. The results from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions also indicate some households depend on commercial motorbike riding, short-term contract services from Sime Darby to collect palm fruits and apply fertilisers to the palm trees – mostly done by women.

Results from the semi-structured interview and men and women focus group discussions also indicate that some households are involved in teaching, producing palm oil, harvesting forest fruits, susu activities, and remittances from families as secondary income sources. The three key informant interviews conducted at Senjeh District level and nine (9) of the national experts interviewed confirmed results from Beh Sao on the primary and secondary generating activities, however, further indicated some members of Beh Sao and surrounding communities are working with Sime Darby are either as security or unskilled labourers without define job descriptions.

'I had rubber planted to where the company took and I used to make farm around the same place but the took the place, so I'm burning coal (producing charcoal) now on the other side' and my woman (his wife) selling small small thing home (petty trade)... CNC-HH Q2#02 (an elderly male charcoal producer stated)

Figure 9: Photograph of Maps of Beh Sao visually indicating changes in changes in farming - drawn by Women FDG



Source: Field Data, 2020

5.3 Changes in Livelihood outcomes

The results from the different interviews conducted and the maps produced by participants from the three focus groups clearly indicate actual changes that affected farming practices, food availability and incomes of households in the research area. However, results from five semi-structured interviews, the men and youth FGDs indicate that small-scale rubber, cocoa and coffee farms were lost to Sime Darby – on the 1900 hectares. According to the result, each household with farm in the area (1900 hectares) earned at least US\$550.00 from sale of their products. They said these farms were taken over by Sime Darby and

compensations given by the company were far less than their monthly earnings from these farms. For instance, one household respondent mentioned he monthly earned at least US\$175.00 per cocoa tree he had planted. But compensation for all his 97 bearing cocoa trees was far less than what he earned monthly as Sime Darby marked 50 trees as still bearing fruits, 28 as immature trees and 19 as non-bearing trees. According to him, Sime Darby paid US\$90.90 for trees bearing fruits, around US\$55.00 for immature trees and US\$30.00 for non-bearing trees. Also, results all FGDs, and five semi-structured interviews (***also visually seen on the map drawn by the women FGD participants – presented under changes in livelihood strategies***) stated households' incomes have reduced because their farms are smaller than before, those vegetables producing cassava and vegetables often sell them cheap or eat them because not many people are willing to buy cassava and vegetables. Those doing home businesses normal end up using the money and have to credit from the village savings and loan association group in the community to buy good for their market. The result also indicates those surviving on charcoal production are complaining because trees are scarce, and no one can cut down trees in the remaining forest. The results also from five semi-structured that experienced changes in incomes and all focus groups indicate the reduction in size of farmland contributing limited production of crops farmers are experiencing; also the abrupt changes of farming practices from tree crops and upland farming to vegetable and lowland are reducing the amount of produce and earnings from their farming activities.

Speaking to claims about crops compensations done in the study area, one respondent stated Beh Sao and surrounding communities received around US\$200,000.00 as compensation for crops planted on lands Sime Darby acquired in Senjeh District including the 1900 hectares. The respondent said Sime Darby did not carry out crops census and pay compensations based on special arrangements with local farmers that had crops planted. According to the respondent, the compensation payment was done as a way creating relationship with community. Despite different claims made by respondents, the research did not gather any supporting documentary evidence on how expansion activities of Sime Darby into Beh Sao and neighbouring communities are influencing changes in livelihood outcomes of households.

5.4 Existing laws, policies and institutions that promote household livelihoods

The results there are community agencies that exist in Beh Sao in form of different social groupings and an organised leadership structure (***See Table 3***). The research documented during the entry meeting with leaders, and other community members (women, youths and men) that exist 3 daily saving susu groups (financial saving groups), MEASURGOON Women Village Savings and Loan Association, Beh Sao Youth Association, Beh Sao Community Football Team, A cultural group and other seasonal social networks (kuu) all of which jointly working together during the farming season, brushing the community roads, fixing the bridges, standing in solidarity others and other community development initiatives. The research also documented that the community has a traditionally organised governance structure comprising of town chief, assistant town chief, chairlady, youth chairperson and a development chair. Others include, dean elders (considered as landlords), zoes (for women) and darzoes (for men). See below list and functions in the community

Table 3: Showing leadership structure in Beh Sao

Category	Key Role
Town chief	Gives orders, looks after the people and settles conflict, supervises development works in the community
Assistant Town chief	S/he closely assist the Town chief to lead the community
Chairlady	Coordinates activities of women including meetings and village saving and loan association (VSLA) and helps provide hospitality for strangers who enter the community

Development chairperson	Oversees every development of the community; helps to lobby for development; coordinates development work including brushing and general community development
Youth leader	Coordinates activities of the young people and helps to enforce the laws that govern the young people
Dean Elders	who provides pieces of advice and helps to resolve conflict; provides historical information of the community
Zoe (women)	Traditional leader of women and provide guidance
Darzoe (men)	Eases tension; provide traditional history; educate and training and help to ensure the laws and order in Beh Sao

Source: Field Data, 2020

Respondents from the semi-structured key informant interviews and the focus group discussions indicate a process new local land governance and centralised traditional decision-making system in the community. According to respondents, the new system is to make sure that every community member has place to farm. This new process is said to now have the lands managed by the landlords or dean leaders (family members of founders of the community) and anyone wanting to farm must firstly be willing to abide by the 'no planting of tree crops' regulation before going to meet his/her quarter chief with request that will be forwarded to the landlords with a token (like a chicken, or farm produce) to finally grant or reject the request to farm. The respondents also mentioned farming in the area is now permitted for only community members. However, some respondents said the new process for farming is different for women and men. The respondents indicating the difference said, a man wanting to make farm must first take his request to his quarter chief who will then take him to the landlords for them to decide if he can farm to wherever identified. But for a woman wanting to make farm must go through the same process and must be accompanied or recommended to her respective quarter chief by her spouse or any male relative living in the community.

All the national expert and key informant interview results indicate the processes leading to awarding Sime Darby the concession agreement did not consider livelihoods of local communities. According to these respondents, the government told Sime Darby that all lands mentioned in the concession agreement were government's lands, unencumbered and those residing there squatters without considering the lands were used by members of local communities that have spent their entire lives in farming, hunting and doing other things to survival. So, Sime Darby was encouraged to start clearing the land, damaging crops and planting their palm with meeting the communities.

The responses from interviews with nine (9) of the 11 national level experts and all the key informants on availability of livelihood supports were directed to experiences with Sime Darby and the United Nations FAO. These results named the payment of land rental fees (US\$5.00 per developed hectare per annum and US\$1.25 per undeveloped hectare per annum), establishment of community outgrower plantations and purchase local community products as key livelihood supports outline in the concession agreement awarded Sime Darby. The results show none of these was done or started in the study area. This also made local communities to request for livelihood and demography survey to be included in the MoU (signed between communities and Sime Darby), and skills training programmes for community members (mostly women and youths) who used to farm in the area and are employed can do other things to survive – and Sime Darby is yet to do any of these on grounds that these not their legal obligations. One national level respondent stated:

All the large-scale oil palm concessions in Liberia are running their own canteens with none of them buying local produce (food or furniture) from those in local communities... WBH-NEI#2 (Respondent from Local Farms Inc.)

Two national level expert interview respondents mentioned Sime Darby provided livelihood support to the communities particularly in Grand Cape mount County and the land rental fees were paid to the government for onward disbursement to the communities. This respondent said, the company was committed to implementing the MoUs but wanted to expand and communities are not willing to give the lands for the company to expand and the company was not making profits.

Furthermore, all the key informants and six (6) national level experts expressed concerns Sime Darby sold out to Mano without addressing outstanding issues with local communities and with no local stakeholders or relevant government entities in the know of the arrangement. According to the respondents, the process of granting or negotiating concessions that will take away the main source of livelihoods (farmlands) of local communities without their free prior and informed consent violates the Land Rights Act of Liberia. The respondents projected negotiation for Sime Darby to sell the plantation to Mano out the knowledge of local communities and other relevant stakeholders, will have serious consequences on livelihoods and food security of local communities. The reasons for the projection are because no one (interviewed excluding Sime Darby respondent) was not aware of Sime Darby selling out its plantation to Mano. Nor have seen any document to determine how Mano will operate in the community or address the issues of livelihood and food insecurity constraints facing communities. The respondents also expressed concerns on expansion plans of Mano (if they will expand or not) and hoped for having the National Oil Palm Strategy in place that will be strong enough to address some of these problems in the future. In a side (phone) conversation, one national level land and natural resources management professional mentioned to me that the involvement of government in this (Sime Darby – Mano) arrangement at the level of the President’s office. And also said, similar arrangement is going on to have Golden Veroleum Liberia- GVL (another large-scale concession), directing all monies to road work in the south-eastern region of the country.

Results from interviews with all national level experts, key informants and households indicated the major corporate social responsibilities implemented by SDPL are the payment of revenues to the national government, construction of schools and a clinic for dependents of employees, maintenance of roads within the plantation, maintenance of some hand pumps and periodic provision of six hundred United States Dollars (US\$600.00) worth of medical supplies to health centres within the communities. Even though all responses highlighted the above mentioned, five (5) national level experts and three key informants questioned the quality of services at schools and clinics constructed, mentioning the schools are not free to members of local communities who are not employed by the company. And all six key informants also stated that the quarterly supplies for medical support to the communities were not regularly given and local communities cannot feel the impacts of the county and social development fund paid through revenue to the government.

*Some of the benefits they should have given the communities were not forthcoming. And when SDPL was asked they would say if they are not able to expand, then how could they generate money that would be able to support their corporate social responsibilities. So the issues were two ways, SDPL could say ‘if the communities refused to give the lands to expand, how could they be able generate money to meet up with their CSRs’ and the communities on the other hand could say “if SDPL cannot meet up with the obligations for the lands already taken, then what guarantee is there to encourage them (local communities) to give more land to SDPL’.... **WBH-NEI #1** (an employee from LACRA said)*

Results from interviews with majority of the national experts and all households did not clearly indicate practices that are in place either by the company or local communities. Respondents pointed to instances

of high carbon stock/high conservation values (HCS/HCVs) that prohibit the environmental law and the concession agreements protecting the land, water and forest from destruction. The household respondents stated that the 1900 hectares taken by / given to the company has not been developed because of a high conservation value/high carbon stock stopped the company from clearing the place. According to them, nobody can farm or do anything on this land even though the company is not using the land. They further mentioned that the remaining land which has the forest is where they are using for doing their farming and garden activities; others mentioned using the forest for charcoal production and hunting - even though the company and their (community members) activities are carrying the animals farther, and the fishes are as they used to be in the river because water is always polluted with chemical the company uses under the palm trees. The other respondents stated no knowledge on laws or practices being used to protect the land and environment.

These key informants representing community structures interviewed (the chairperson of SAPAD, the county CSO chairperson and co-chair of the North-Western Oil Palm Forum) further mentioned residents of local communities find difficult to get jobs with Sime Darby because employment of local community members are mostly recommended by national and local politicians. They said, the place Sime Darby send information when they are about to hire is to the lawmakers. The chairperson of SAPAD, the community structure that represents the interest engage the company regarding community benefits from land and natural resources deals is quoted as below:

One of the main reasons most of our people are not working is because those in the employed in these positions by the company are directly recommended by national politicians particularly lawmakers.... WBH-KII 2 (SAPAD respondents said)

The results from interviews with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP) and a community relations officer at Sime Darby (now with Mano Oil Palm) mentioned most of the workers of the company are Liberians and from local communities. The MoFDP respondent did not give specific details on employment but said most of those employed with the company are from the communities in the concession areas. However, the Sime Darby respondents (who was the political officer for Senjeh District Representative prior to his employment with Sime Darby) gave a breakdown that the company had two categories of employees. Indirect employees – those sub-contracted by companies hired by Sime Darby to carry out specific tasks and are not entitled to full benefits from the Sime Darby. Also, there are a total 1599 employees (in Liberia), 15 of which are non-Liberians and 20% of the Liberian employees are from local communities in Senjeh District who are considered as direct employees, have full benefits of Sime Darby as per job levels. This respondent further mentioned, majority of those employed from Senjeh District are placed in floating labour category and few serving as security and drivers, and couple more as farm superintendents, because they don't have the skills and knowledge to occupy other positions.

5.5 Best practices from other cases that promote household livelihoods

The research sorted of from experiences of national level respondents their knowledge of cases where have best practices instituted to promote livelihoods of local communities. No one respondent could point to a case in Liberia or elsewhere where large-scale monoculture plantations are significantly impacting lives of local communities. However, results six national experts' interviews point out two case scenarios that Liberia should learn from to promote livelihoods enhancement of local communities. One is the forestry sector of Liberia, aside from the concession agreements awarded companies, there are other laws that legally obligate companies to directly and indirectly support communities. the results stated that National Forestry Reformed Law calls for companies to into separate account 30% land rental fees, cubic

metre fees and stumpage fees directly for local communities in places companies are operating. And said monies are being managed by a delegate committee comprising of community structures, government entities and civil society organisations.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research discussed results of the research (presented in the previous chapter) using relevant literature from chapter two of this report and other related literature and resource information. This research is using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework in analysing impacts of large-scale oil palm expansion activities on livelihood strategies (particularly farming) and livelihood outcomes (incomes, food availability, vulnerability and natural resources management practices) and how Sime Darby is impacting changes in the main sources of incomes for households in local communities. This research also looked through transforming processes (to laws, policies and institutions) and best practices that promote livelihoods of local communities.

6.1 Changes in Livelihood Strategies

This research found out that households in Beh Sao and other communities in Senjeh District that once depended on smallholder tree crop farms are now mostly dependent on small-scale farming. Some households are said to be relying small home businesses, charcoal production or commercial motorbike riding for their survival. Very few of the households interviewed are dependent on teaching, producing palm oil, harvesting forest fruits, susu activities, and remittances from families as secondary income sources. The results show confirms report rural population that are economically active depend on mostly farmers (producing rice, pepper, bitter balls, corn, other vegetables) for survival (CFSNS, 2010; 2018; LISGIS, 2014/2015). On the other hand, this research contradicts claims that of those supporters and campaigners for large-scale monoculture agro-commodities that deals come with some set of unique benefits to and impacts on, such as enhancing growth of smallholder farms in local communities through extension of pro-poor and ecologically sustainable economic development and jobs (Borras and Franco, 2012; McCarthy, 2010).

The research revealed the farming practices, productivity of farms, food availability and vulnerability of households in Beh Sao and surrounding communities are influenced by the presence of Sime Darby expansion activities. The presence of Sime Darby has caused changes in farming practices from small-scale tree crops farming and rice farming to more vegetables farming. Other households have turned to small home businesses, charcoal production, commercial motorbike riding as sources of livelihoods. These changes are reportedly having impacts on food availability as they cannot produce much more or have suitable means to purchase. It also has the proneness on the capacity of farming households to cope trend of increasing food prices. The research validates report from the Ministry of Agriculture (CFSNS, 2018) that more than 80% of food consumed (with the stable – rice, the highest) in Liberia are imported because lots of farmers are venturing into off-farm and non-farm activities such as charcoal production, youths (mainly) going into commercial motorcycle riding and petty trade as sources of livelihoods. This result of changed in household farming practices supports claim from Ruedin (2007) that livelihood strategies (including farmlands) of local communities are dependent on how households use resources (including lands) to sustain their livelihoods. In other words, farming households in local communities at fringes of large-scale oil palm plantations are conditionally shifting away from their farming practices because they are experiencing low productivity resulting from overused of farmlands. The analysis here thus provides that the new phenomenon for farmlands rush on local communities is economically resettling farming households, leading them to conditionally get involved with on-farm, off-farm and other non-farm income activities very far away from the community which are reducing chances of making necessary incomes and food available for their families. The result also indicates gender discrimination in that new local land governance practice adopted by Beh Sao and surrounding communities is affecting women headed households and the community farming practices. The new-normal for management the community farmlands that requires spouse or male recommendation before households headed by women farm is causing women to skip normal farming for small-scale vegetables farming, small home businesses, contract

services, and other non-farm activities. This also create difference in power relations between women and men limiting farming practices and food availability of women headed households and the community despite it is reported rural communities in Liberia are mostly dependent on women who are leading participants in farming and other livelihood activities (CFSNS, 2008).

6.2 Changes in Households Outcomes

Even though documentary evidence to support claims made by respondents, the research highlights expansion activities of Sime Darby into Beh Sao and neighbouring communities are influencing changes in livelihood outcomes of households in local communities. The changes in household livelihood outcomes documented by this research are associated limited market opportunities for cassava and vegetables produced by members of the community, constraints affecting purchasing powers of households to ensure food availability, incomes and vulnerability. This is believed to have small-scale vegetables farmers producing very less because of limited space for farming, limited inputs supply and skillsets to upscale production and add values. The limited market opportunities are discouraging the new venture - small-scale vegetable farmers from upscaling or add values to their production which leaves farmers to either sell their produce cheap or eat them. This contradicts claims from McCarthy (2010) and Borrás & Franco (2012) large-scale monoculture plantations provide perfect opportunities for small-scale farmers to market their products for local communities. Also, the abrupt changes of farming practices from tree crops and upland farming to vegetable and lowland are reducing the amount of produce and earnings from their farming activities. For instance, the research documented changes in incomes of some tree crops farming households that had tree crops on the 1900 hectares were earning at least US\$550.00 monthly from sale of products which have since reduced because their new ventures do not bring in much money as market opportunities are limited.

The research also highlights that managerial and well-paid positions in the company are occupied by foreign nationals and Liberians from other region of the country with limited employment opportunities for members of local communities. Workers from local communities are said to be mostly casual labourers without clear job description and high-risk redundancy. Employment of local people are also said to be influenced by either limitation of needed skills, knowledge and education to occupy positions with considerable earnings or are directly recommended by politicians. These challenges couple with reports of Sime Darby failure to facilitate skill trainings for women and youths are said to increase rate of unemployment, vulnerable and informal employment of community members. These confirms the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS, 2014) Expenditure Survey which states 82.5% and 71.9% member of local communities earning incomes in western Liberia (including the study area) are vulnerably and informally employed (respectively). It also acknowledges the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019) Human Development Index findings that majority of Liberians falling within vulnerable employment and employment in agriculture (informal employment). Drawing from the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2018) working definition, vulnerable employment are those non-subsistent self or family workers with less or no formal with inadequate earnings and who lack decent working condition, adequate social security and limited voice. The ILO associate informal employment with unregistered and unregulated small-scale activities (enterprises) that generate income and employment for the poor. This means local communities who are already having limited capacity to cope with challenges are prone to suffer from increasing cost in the standard of living in the country.

6.3 Existing laws, policies and institutions that impact Livelihoods of Local Communities

The research identifies the existence of community agencies that play different supporting roles in the development of the study area and an organized traditional governance system. These structures are essential in influencing development and may serve as conduit for linking with opportunities for enhancing

livelihoods of local communities, such as, farming supports from ally communities and opportunities for social protections. The research also identifies that Sime Darby's presence also influenced restructuring of decision-making of the communal land management from family and quarter-based practice to a centralised system where farming practices all the community members are decided by the dean elders (called landlords) who are descendants of families that established the community. This is having implications on households from two fronts. It is serving as opportunity for the communities to collectively ensure welfare of each household's livelihoods. On the other hand, it is promoting elitism amongst members of the community as some households in Quarter # 3 and 4 where the research assistants observed as quarters of the dean elders. This also shows signs of contributing a caste system amongst members of the community and discriminations among men and women headed households.

The research also documented the MoU between local communities and Sime Darby, concession agreement signed between the government and Sime Darby, and the Land Rights Law are key instruments with provisions promote livelihoods of local communities in the study area. However, provisions within the law and MoU remains major concerns for local communities and the company is reportedly reneging on adhering to supporting local livelihoods. For instance, conducting participatory mappings of total lands developed or taken create perfect opportunities for local communities to demand compensations for damaged on their farms, crops, forest and cultural sites and as well the company to advance on implementing provisions of the concession agreement such ensuring setting up community development funds management committees and payment of land rental fees that are said to have accumulated since 2009. This result supports claims that local communities are losing their mainly sources of livelihoods (small-scale subsistence farms and forests) to large-scale oil palm expansion with limited options from these companies (BARBIER, 2010; Levy, Spilling & Griffin, 2018; Lucey, J. M. & Hill, J. K. 2011).

Furthermore, there are different structures at the district, county and national levels that tend to promote livelihoods of local communities aside from structures in Beh Sao, some of which participated in the research. For instance, there are structures such as the Senjeh Actions for Peace and Development (a district level platform comprising representatives from each community), the North-Western Oil Palm Forum (a multi-stakeholders platform comprising representatives from local communities, relevant government entities and civil society organisations in the region) and the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (a national level multi-stakeholders platform that is reportedly developing a national oil palm strategy). This draft oil palm strategy has provisions specifically focus on strengthening smallholders and local communities and forest conversion, which if adopted and fully implemented might help to address some concerns of limited support to livelihoods of local community livelihoods as well as supports local communities' efforts to curb destruction of forest and forest resources plantations.

Another law that promotes livelihoods of local communities is the Land Rights Law of 2018. This law provides a ground-breaking chance to communities across Liberia to formalize their customary land ownership rights or land claims and re-opens the door to communities to secure their land tenure for today and future generations. The law laid down a process for local communities to ensure inclusive, broad-based decision-makings about their livelihoods. With results indicating Sime Darby sold out the plantation without consulting communities didn't abide by provision of the 2018 Land Rights Law which states lands under concessions should go back to communities when the concessions end, and renegotiations should be held with the communities; it is not clear what constitutes end for the Sime Darby-Mano case (Liberia Land Rights Act, 2018).

6.4 Best practices from other case scenarios that promote households

Finding a case scenario for large-scale monoculture module that best supports livelihoods of households in local communities was difficult as no respondent for this research could single out. But reviewing what seems to be working (supporting local livelihoods) from the different foreign direct investments in Liberia are those in the forestry sector. The research found that, unlike the agriculture sector, there are other laws and regulations that mandate logging and timber companies to direct support local community, other than concession agreements. The research documented that the National Forestry Reformed Law of 2006 mandates companies to directly to a separate account rental fees, cubic metre fees and stumpage fees with a multi-stakeholder process (including local community structures active participation – as co-chair) that ensure accessible by local communities. This in a way puts local communities in the driving of their own development programmes and implement their own priority projects with some communities haven used these monies to build and operate vocational training centres that are building technical capacity of the youths and women in local communities.

6.5 Reflection on the research process

Research in general is an arduous task. And this research was conducted under distinct circumstances as the COVID-19 pandemic struck sending shockwaves across the World and forcing companies, organisations, government entities and individual homes into either total melt-down or relaxed operations to design coping strategies to deal with the shocks. Key amongst which include banning regular movements and physical gathering of people across the global society, greatly impacting the second and most exigent half of our academic programme. Likewise, any other company across the globe, normal learning activities at Van Hall Larenstein University (VHL) were conditioned to switch and adapt to a new normal of e-learning for the seven months of this master's programme. The change to a new-normal also affected the entire research study from the instruction module, 'Research Designs and Implementation', to field work and finalising the research report. This reflection summary description of (as researcher) my experience from this research process, including writing the research proposal, selecting research assistants, collecting data from the field, and writing of the report.

Settling on a topic and research focus with my commissioner (SDI) on one hand and the requirements of VHL was difficult. My commissioner, a pro-advocacy organisation, with ambitions to initiate a new programme that will see them (SDI) working to support sustainable livelihood interventions for local communities, continuously pushed for broader research focus; while VHL requires students to narrow focus as time allotted for the research is limited. I had to revise the research topic and focus at least five times to find common ground between the two. This dangling between my commissioner and VHL coupled with the panic-stricken psychological tension of COVID-19 began my stress for this research. The dangling continued to write the research proposal, as I had to send every draft version for feedback from both my commissioner and supervisor at VHL and sit for extra hours to incorporate inputs and address comments. To satisfy the research commissioner and VHL on the research focus, I had to zero in on several techniques that allowed me to collect the research data from distance, including using research assistants.

I was conditioned to use two research assistants that collect data from the field as I could not travel myself due to COVID-19 pandemic. I developed a set criterion for selecting external research assistants that are not working with my commissioner. This was done to reduce internal influence from my commissioner on the research results. Two research assistants were identified after placing several calls to programme staff of partner organisations on their availability for field work during the research period and are familiar with the research study area. Fortunately, the two research assistants identified were already in the research study area on personal activities due to the compulsory COVID-19 break and both agreed to collect needed

data. I also reached an agreement with them and expedited logistics that were needed for data collection.

The research was qualitative which required the subjective perspectives of respondents, observations, experience of the researcher and documented evidence, as such needed interviews and interactions with respondents to dig deeper in understanding the situation. With this in mind, I facilitated an online orientation session with selected research assistants for them to apply tools and strategies and collect data in the community. Despite training the research assistants and pilot testing the tools and strategies, it was very hectic research from afar. One key challenge was collecting data through the research assistants was the way in asking questions to generate information from the respondents. I noticed from the first day the difference in direction that asking questions, probing and following up on answers in the study area were based on knowledge of the research assistants. I organised regular online feedback sessions with the research assistants at the end of each day to review and adjust interpretations of research tools in the study area. One positive from the regular feedback sessions was to have research assistants write down a list of probing and follow up questions and take note of responses and observations during data collection. Another challenge was having the research assistants to facilitate sessions for the different focus group members to develop history timelines that would have indicated trends of households' incomes over 13 years. According to the research assistants, the dates agreed with the community were interfered by ongoing political rallies across Liberia. The research also assistants administered the semi-structured interview guide to 14 households, held three of the six key informant interviews in Beh Sao community, facilitated three focus group discussions and facilitated a session to profile the community (Beh Sao) during the entry meeting.

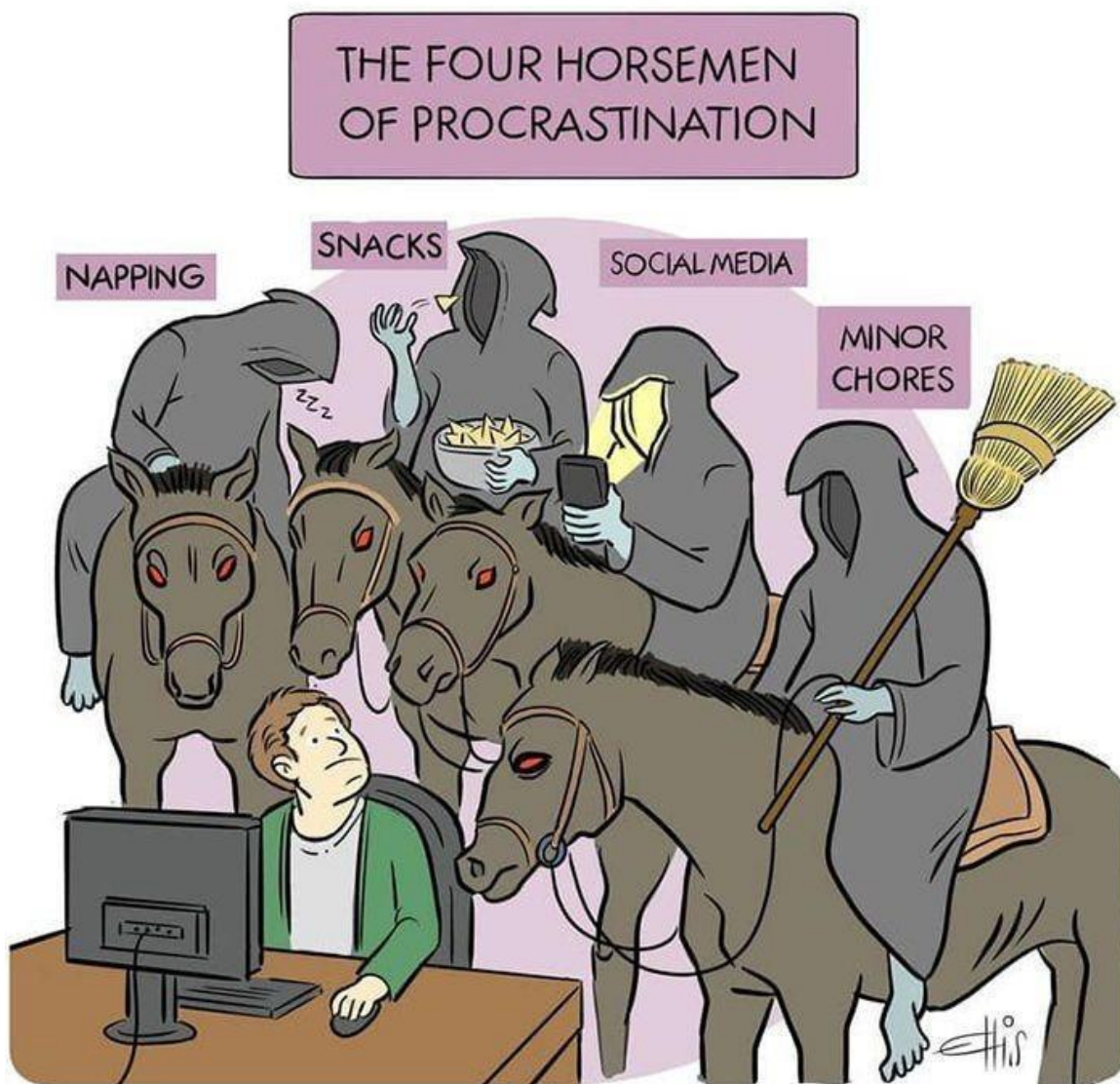
As lead researcher, I conducted scores of interviews with some of the respondents using WhatsApp and messenger. I conducted online interviews with three key informants at Senjeh District level and 11 level national experts. My initial strategy of using google forms to collect data from national experts was changed to online interviews (using WhatsApp) interviewing because respondents complained of challenges of internet connectivity filling out the google form. Conducting these interviews as an internal researcher seems to have influenced responses from interviewees. I tried to present myself as an external researcher, but all respondents recognised me as an internal - connecting my previous work and commissioner to responses. For instance, when I asked respondents for their knowledge on existing laws, policies and institutions that promote livelihoods of local communities affected by large-scale agriculture plantation, all of them told me I, as civil society representative on the National Oil Palm Platform, should know this is one of the reason Liberia is developing national oil palm strategy. I tried to find ways to handle this situation by asking a colleague of mine to conduct a couple of interviews on my behalf but was told that I call myself for the interviews. Had I known these challenges could have come along the way, I would have included allowed the research assistant to conduct these interviews on my behalf.

Another experience was getting targeted respondents on agreed dates and time for the interviews. Several national level interviews were rescheduled two to three times because respondents were not available on time. I had to send some respondents money to purchase a mobile data package because they complained of limited internet connectivity due to COVID-19 compulsory break. Also, as stated in under the subsection on limitations, I could not get full employment data and earnings of local communities from the Ministry of Labour because the respondent that consented for interview resigned during the research period. I also could not verify from the National Bureau of Concessions, National Investment Commission, Green Advocates (all of which were referenced) information that Sime Darby has failed to comply with provisions that support livelihoods of local communities. These difficulties to gather information from all the respondents limited my space to triangulate from different sources.

Compiling, arranging and making sense of a huge trunk of information was the last dash of stress and headache for this research. I find it challenging swimming in the information and organise the most relevant ones that answer the research questions. My initial thoughts were combining the chapters on results and discussions into one and arranging into themes as per subsections in the interview guides. This made my work even more confusing to read and grasp the meaning of what I wrote – all thanks to my supervisor for the guidance. I had to revise and condense the research sub-questions in line with results generated from the research and separated the two chapters and reorganised as per the results and discussions themes in the research sub-questions.

On the other hand, see *figure 10* below visual explanation of my experience with the four horsemen I had to navigate through while conducting the research during COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 10: Visual explanation of experience researching from home during COVID-19



Source: Cartoon Collection, 2019

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter highlights conclusions and recommendations from the results and discussions presented in the last two chapters that answered the main research questions: What are the effects of Sime Darby oil palm expansion activities on household livelihood strategies and outcomes of local communities in Senjeh District, Liberia? And what are existing structures and processes that serve as opportunities for improving livelihoods of local communities affected by SDPL oil palm expansion in Senjeh District, Liberia? This chapter further presents suggested some actions that need to be taken by the commissioner in order to help remedy challenges and support local communities enhance their livelihoods. Also, areas for further research based on information gaps identified are presented.

7.1 Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions of the research results presented in the last two chapters, it can be concluded that:

The acquisition and clearing of farmlands for oil palm plantation is causing local communities to conditionally change farming practices, reduction in productivity and limiting food availability for farming households. Most farming households are changing to smaller-scale and farming in different types of crops which seems not meet needs of households or meet the market value in order to purchase stable food. Most respondents in the community highlighted notably significant decreased in productivity of previous dependable household incomes sources since the oil palm companies expanded to their communities. Also, the reported failure of Sime Darby to help close the skills gap with agreed upon trainings and political influencing members of local communities who lost farms and crops from earning incomes for their households. This is leaving households vulnerable to food insecurity and limited capacity the handle the high cost in the standard of living.

The women groups (such as the Beh Sao village saving and loan association -VSLA, MEASURGOON Women Village Savings and Loan Association and the Kuu – for joint farming) in Beh Sao and surrounding, the Senjeh Action for Peace and Development, and the National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia are some structures promote livelihoods of local communities. These structures are local community agencies that play different supporting roles in the development which is a perfect opportunity for supporting livelihoods but seem to lack transparency and inclusiveness as effects of the traditional decision-making on the new farmland redistribution system are experienced differently by households in different quarters of the community (Beh Sao). This system also has gender implications which puts women headed households at risk of food insecurity limits means for generating income. Also, there is not an agriculture law or any fixed legal framework to hold companies' feet to the fire and ensuring local communities' livelihood are supported, other than the concession agreements and MoUs that are not working.

7.2 Recommendations

The Sustainable Development Institute is keen on ascertaining and documenting how large-scale oil palm expansion activities are impacting livelihoods of local communities. The commissioner intends to use the information to lobby and advocate for community-friendly agriculture policy and laws, as well as identify possible areas for the commissioner to design and implement relevant sustainable livelihood interventions in the region. Based on the above-mentioned aim of the research and results, the below recommended actions are needed from local communities and the commissioner to ensure improved livelihoods of local communities:

Local communities

The existing community agencies in the study area are good beginning to securing livelihoods of households across the community. As such, the new local land governance system which puts dean elders at helm of decision-making in Beh Sao and surrounding communities need to be strengthened to ensure equitable farming practices for both men and women, and to avoid possibility elite landgrab.

Also, with the research result showing Beh Sao and other local communities not aware of the implications the transition from Sime Darby to Mano Palm Oil Plantation will have on their (local communities) livelihoods, the communities need to organise and seek support to formalize their claims to customary lands under the newly passed Land Rights Law. When Beh Sao and surrounding communities formalised ownership rights to their land as per the Land Rights Law, it will not only put them (the communities) at the forefront of future of decision-making for concession negotiations, but also help them develop a shared community vision on addressing current livelihood and development constraints

The Commissioner

The ongoing development of the national oil palm strategy is a perfect space to making case for local communities' livelihoods as it will guide oil palm activities; while going into passing an agriculture law for Liberia. The research recommends the commissioner use results which indicate local communities were not consulted during Sime Darby concession negotiations and renegotiations have limited their livelihood strategies and outcomes, to strengthen the Smallholders and Communities, and Forest Conversions provisions of the draft national oil palm strategy. Using the results at the National Oil Palm Platform and other multi-stakeholders to strengthening these provisions of the national oil palm strategy, will lead to a system that legally obligates the government, Sime Darby and other oil palm companies to promote and protect livelihoods of local communities; and subsequently feed into developing a community friendly agriculture law.

Also, with the result that vegetable farmers are experiencing losses of their products due to limited market, the commissioner work with communities and other relevant stakeholders to ensure communities have capacity to scale up their productions through a climate sensitive process on one hand, creating market opportunities local communities products on the other hand. For instance, the Commissioner can work in promoting and supporting the development of local household enterprises as a means of increasing family earning and increase food availability, as well local community economic development.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Due to the continuous complaints from local communities losing livelihood sources due to expansion activities of large-scale oil palm companies, this research is proposing a research to:

- Further gather and document information on effects of traditional land governance system has on livelihoods of households in local communities that impacted are by large-scale oil palm concessions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: The Commissioner – Sustainable Development Institute

The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) is a leading Liberian environmental rights-based non-governmental organisation that works to transform decision-making processes of natural resource management, so the benefits are shared equally. The organisation is keen on creating space for rural communities to free participate in decision making processes on natural resources across Liberia. Since its establishment in 2002, SDI works directly with rural community structures and local leaders through Community Land Protection Programme, Forest Governance Programme, Community Rights and Corporate Governance Programme and Sustainable Livelihoods Programmes as thematic areas. The organisation has over the years worked with community structures and leaders of communities affected by oil palm expansion to protect their land and livelihoods.

Vision and Mission

The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) will work to ensure that natural resource management in Liberia involves the participation of local inhabitants, is transparent and accountable and provides equitable benefits for present and future generations.

SDI is working to transform the decision-making processes on natural resource management, to promote equity in the sharing of benefits derived from natural resource exploitation. To achieve this, SDI work aims to:

1. Create space for the participation of local communities in decision-making processes on natural resources;
2. Support and enhance community contributions to those processes;
3. Strengthen mechanisms that will ensure that communities receive and equitably manage the benefits derived from natural resource exploitation;
4. Ensure that community land and tenure rights are formally recognized and respected;

The Programme

Community Rights and Corporate Governance - CRCGP

This program goal is to promote inclusive and equitable development in Liberia by championing respect and protection of community rights and challenging corporate and government actions that threaten those rights. The program utilizes a broad, overarching analysis of the policies and practices of government and corporate concessionaires in Liberia to inform advocacy. The program evaluates the social, economic, and environmental effects of natural resource policy and activities in the country. It advocates a rights-based approach towards rural communities while proposing sustainable policy alternatives that promote socially just and environmentally sound economic development. The program focuses on four issues: Natural Resource Management Policy, Corporate Governance and Social Responsibility, Protection of Community Rights, and Revenue Flows and Accountable Use; whilst monitoring the government's interactions with concessionaires and affected community members, as well the conduct of those concessionaires. Information generated is then used in local and high-level advocacy with Liberian policymakers, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders, as well as educating communities about their rights.

Forest Governance Program -FGP

The goal of this Program (FGP) is to improve governance of Liberia's forests and benefit sharing with forest communities. It focuses on forest policymaking, public access to forest sector information, forest corruption and illegal logging, law enforcement and community rights in the forestry sector. The FGP aims to influence policy-making processes by monitoring, documenting and reporting on forestry operations

including the impact of policy implementation and to tackle the root causes of forest destruction and poverty in forest communities. It works to strengthen community engagement in the forestry sector by empowering communities to meaningfully participate in policy making. Current activities of the FGP targets strengthening civil society organizations to:

1. Enable them to monitor the implementation of the VPA
2. To report on the impact of the agreement
3. Monitor the coherence of the EU policy regarding the promotion of forest governance in Liberia. This will involve monitoring and documenting the role of EU agencies in the natural resource sector, especially those that have implications for forestry in Liberia.

Community Land Protection Program - CLPP

The Community Land Protection Program's (CLPP) goal is to proactively strengthen communities' ability to protect, enforce and defend their land rights. The CLPP works for genuine protection for community and customary land tenure alongside recognition and respect for customary land rights as legally enforceable ownership claims. It aims to ensure community control and inclusive authority over land and natural resources within their areas, with management and governance decisions made by the communities themselves.

The CLPP focuses on comprehensive community empowerment to ensure strong community capacity to realize and actualize their legal rights through good governance and administration at the community level that fosters equity, justice, fairness and accountability for leaders, community members, vulnerable groups, and external actors alike. It promotes community stewardship and sustainable land and natural resources management, with local communities consciously managing the land and resources in trust for the future generations. It also advocates for equitable investor-community partnerships that result in tangible land and natural resources benefits for communities, with communities fully empowered to: request and negotiate for benefits; manage these benefits equitably and justly; and take legal action should the benefits not be forthcoming.

Current activities of the CLPP include:

1. Scaling-up community land protection activities throughout Liberia
2. Expanding and strengthening a civil society and community actors protecting community land rights through knowledge sharing and facilitation
3. Influencing national land policy and practice in Liberia

Sustainable Livelihood Program

The goal of the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) is to empower communities that are affected by oil palm plantation/conservation/ community forest expansion with alternative livelihood options. These options will enable them to make use of their resources and protect their land. This program is still in the development phases and will be designed to be an independent initiative from the other SDI activities. The program will look at other means of income for the communities such as agriculture to help them sustain themselves, which in turn will make them less vulnerable especially to companies operating palm oil plantation and other forms of investment that do not provide long term and adequate benefits. The program will also link communities to organizations such as Farmers Union Network of Liberia or FAO to build their capacity and support them with agro inputs.

APPENDIX 2: Summary Profiles for Research Assistants

Research Assistant Code	Key area	Summary description
Research Assistant One		
JFK	Full Name	John F. Kelvin
	Years of experience	10 years
	Current organisation/Address	Rights and Rice Foundation (RRF)/ Joe-Bar Paynesville, Monrovia Liberia
	Role	Programme Manager/ Former Regional Coordinator (Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount County)
	Previous organisation(s) – if any	Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY); National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE); Liberia National Students Union (LINSU); Agency for National Development and Advocacy (AGENDA)
	Area of specialty	Land Rights Advocacy, participatory development planning
	Connection to the research study area	Born and grew up in Tubmanburg City, Bomi County; high understanding of the culture, traditional, religious practices and fluent in local dialects (Gola, Vai, Dey and Kissi); understanding of the political landscape in the area; 10 years working with communities
Research Assistant Two		
CNC	Full Name	Cyrus N. Cooper
	Years of experience	5 years
	Current organisation/Address	Mary's Meal/Tubmanburg City, Bomi County - Liberia
	Role	Project Assistant/ School Feeding Programme (Bomi, and Grand Cape Mount County)
	Previous organisation(s) – if any	Rights and Rice Foundation (RRF)/ Community Mobiliser – Bomi County; Ministry of Health/General Community Health Volunteer – Tubmanburg City
	Area of specialty	Community mobilization, community facilitation
	Connection to the research study area	A native born, grew up and live in Tubmanburg City, Bomi County; high understanding of the culture, traditional, religious practices and fluent in local dialects (Gola and Vai); familiar with different stakeholders in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount County

APPENDIX 3: COMMUNITY PROFILE TEMPLATE

Community Profile (To be completed with community members during entry meeting): Hold an introductory meeting with members of the community – community leaders and members (women, youth, men, and vulnerable groups); before beginning to employ other research tools. This will set the bases for information gathering in the community.

Date: _____ WK Day: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

City/Town/Village	Population	Location		History (when, how, who, why started the community? Where did s/he or they come from?)			
		County: District: Chiefdom: Clan:					
Migration Patterns: why, how people move in and out of the community? Who (category) are they?		Dominant and minority tribes		Allied Towns/Villages (who are those? What do you have in common with them? How do you help each other?)			
		> 95% of community: < 5% of community:					
Description of Community Leadership Structure: who (titles) are those in leadership and roles (what exactly they do in the community?)							
Diagram of Community Leadership Structure: what are the decision-making processes within the community/leadership?							
Community Livelihood Capitals							
Financial Sources							
Built Resources (Infrastructure): availability, condition, locations and initiated by who		Roads: Markets: School: Clinic: Town Hall: Church: Mosque: Hand Pump: VIP Latrine: Others: _____					
Social Resources		(existing groups in and around the community/impacting people in the community)					
Natural/ Environmental Resources (available to the community)	Land/ Amount of Land	Forest/ forest size	Water sources	Rocks	Mountains	Minerals	Others

Human Resources (Social determinants of Health and Education access)	Health Facilities	Health Referral	Water system	Latrines / Sewage	Education	Sport/Recreation	Social Networks	Diseases
	Education Facilities: Health Facilities:							
Cultural Resources of community								
Vulnerable groups in community	Total vulnerable people:	Type of Vulnerability Old () Cripple () Blind ()				How long have they lived in the Community?	Means of survival:	
Status of development of community	List of past or on ongoing development initiative(s) in the community. Who (organisation/entity) is facilitating the development initiative(s)? Where is/are the initiative(s) in the community?							
Community Development Opportunities								

Facilitator/Research Assistant observation:

Categorize community members in the meeting	
Participation:	Were responses provided by a person or segment of the community? Yes () No ()
	Did the responses reflect the views of the community? Yes () No ()
	Did women and men provide responses? Yes () No ()
	Were there disagreements over any of the responses provided? Yes () No ()
	If yes, who provided the information they disagreed upon? Role in the community (maybe name also) _____ Did any community member speak in local dialect while response(s) was provided? Yes () No ()
Seating Arrangement	Did the community members (male, female, youth) all sit together? Yes () No ()
	If no, briefly describe their seating arrangement. _____ _____
Others	

APPENDIX 4: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

We are interviewing the heads of households or suitable adults (male and female household members that are able to tell us about the family) that can proxy for the heads of households.

Hello again, my name is _____. I am working with Wynston Benda-Henries to collect this data. The research is intended to ascertain and document information on existing opportunities and challenges of large-scale oil palm expansions has on livelihoods of affected communities. You are a great value to this research, as such, we would like you to contribute to information needed for research by sharing with us your experience of how expansion activities of large-scale oil palm plantations affect livelihoods of households in local communities. And we guarantee that there will be no trace of information research to you or any respondents; except you willingly suggest we do so. As such, do you agree to participate in this research? Yes [☐] No [☐]

Are you also ok if I record or take pictures during this interview? These are just for reporting sake. Yes [☐] No [☐]

Community Name: _____ Clan: _____

District: _____ County: _____

Research Assistant ID	Research Assistant Name: _____
Household Location	(Quarter Name): _____
Household ID	
Household Headed By	Gender: _____
Home of Record	
Hosting Family	Yes (<input type="checkbox"/>) No (<input type="checkbox"/>)
Staying with host Family	Yes (<input type="checkbox"/>) No (<input type="checkbox"/>)
How long have you lived here?	
What is your religion?	

Household Composition

	Host family Member	Age				Gender		Education level (some or completed)				Earn income	Skills/Occupations				
		0-5	6-17	18-50	>50	M	F	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	None		Farming	Employed (specify)	Trade	Teaching	Others
Head of Household																	
2																	
3																	
4																	
5																	
6																	
7																	
8																	
9																	
10																	
11																	
12																	
13																	
14																	
15																	

1. Where were you living before Sime Darby came to this Community/Senje District?
2. What do you do here to make money or your living?
3. What were you doing to make money before Sime Darby came to this community/Senje District?
4. If a farmer, what is the size of your farm?
5. What is distance from your house to your farm?

6. What was distance from your house to your farm before Sime Darby came to this
7. Has there been any changes in the size of your farm?
8. If yes, what are changes in the size of your farms? What do you think is the cause for the changes?
9. What crop(s) do you plant on your farm? (arrange crops produced in order from most important)
10. What crop(s) were you planting before the changes happened?
11. What are number of times you harvest your crops in a year?
12. What assistance do you get to support your farming?
13. What are the three main sources of income (monetary) for your household since Sime Darby came to this community/Senje District?
14. What were three sources of main sources of income (monetary) before Sime Darby came to this community/Senje?
15. What are formal employment activities any of your household members are involved with?
16. community/Senje District?
17. What is the source of drinking water used in your household?
18. What is the distance from your house to your source of drinking water?
19. Has the quality of the water changed?
20. What is the source of washing water for your household?
21. What is the distance from your house to your source of washing water?
22. What are the THREE most important uses of natural resources/forest and land for your household?
23. What changes in the usage of natural resources/ forest and land, have your household observed in this community/Senje District?

Thank you for the information, do you wish to say anything or ask any question(s)?

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE INTERVIEWER AFTER S/HE LEAVES RESPONDENT'S HOUSEHOLD

BACK CHECK: How many times did you visit respondent's household before s/he completed the interview: _____
Where was the interview conducted? _____
Was there anybody else present during the interview? 1. Yes 2. No If yes, did the person interfere with the interview?
To what extent was respondent interested in the topic at the beginning of the interview? 1. Very interested 2. Moderately interested 3. Very uninterested
General evaluation of respondent's cooperation 1. Very unresponsive; refused to answer majority of the questions 2. Unresponsive; hardly completed the interview 3. Responsive, but (s)he was not giving detailed answers 4. Responsive, (s)he gave some detailed answers 5. Very responsive, (s)he was giving detailed answers and explanations
Have you faced any specific problems regarding wording and notions? 1. Yes 2. No If yes, specify _____

APPENDIX 5: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) Guide

We are interviewing the heads of households or suitable adults (male and female household members that are able to tell us about the family) that can proxy for the heads of households, community members and experts in the community and at the national level.

Hello again, my name is _____. I am working with Wynston Benda-Henries to collect this data. The research is intended to ascertain and document information on existing opportunities and challenges of large-scale oil palm expansions has on livelihoods of affected communities. You are a great value to this research, as such, we would like you to contribute to information needed for research by sharing with us your experience of how expansion activities of large-scale oil palm plantations affect livelihoods of households in local communities. And we guarantee that there will be no trace of information research to you or any respondents; except you willingly suggest we do so. As such, do you agree to participate in this research? Yes [☐] No [☐]

Are you also ok if I record or take pictures during this interview? These are just for reporting sake. Yes [☐] No [☐]

Name of Community	
County	
District	
Population	
Main ethnic group	
Minority ethnic groups	
Main sources of livelihood	

FOCUS GROUP MAKEUP:

Circle one: Men/Women/Youth

Number of participants:

Ethnicities:

Please summarize the activities of the different institutions and/or groups in this community. (Let participants of the FGD discuss and write down the below)

Type of Institution / Group	Role in the Community & Activities

DESCRIBE THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, NGOS, AND PRIVATE BUSINESSES WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Note whether NGOs are local, national, or international. Note the amount of time they have worked in the community.

Type of Institution (Name, where they are from)	Length of time in community (years)	Role in the Community & Activities	Achievements

PROBLEM SOLVING

1. Are there any police or courts present in the community? If not, how far are they from the community?
2. How are problems normally solved in this community? [Please write down a few examples of problems and how they were solved].
3. Who are the problem-solvers of this community?
4. Why did the people choose those individuals to solve problems in this community?

ACCESS TO FOREST RESOURCES

1. Do you do farming?
2. What types of farmlands do you have and use in this community?

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

1. What are the three main sources of income (monetary) in this community for your households?
2. Are any of the residents of your community engaged in any other income-generating activities? If yes, what are the other income-generating activities?

ACCESS TO LAND

1. What changes have households have in accessing farmland?
2. What were the processes for access farmland before Sime Darby came to this community?
3. How much land does this community have for farming?
4. Who are those that own/manage land in this community?
5. What is the process for female to access farmland in this community?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. Have you had any training on natural resource management? If yes, by whom?
2. What are the THREE most important uses of the natural resources available in this community?
3. What are the natural resource management practices that you have observed in this community?
4. Are the observed natural resource practices effective? If yes, why do you think so?

APPENDIX 6: Checklist for Community mapping

These maps are to be developed by participants of the different FGDs to provide an invaluable visual representation of livelihood sources and natural resources of the community. These maps will physically/visually indicate changes in land size and access to farmland and natural resources for households in the community before and after the arrival of Sime Darby. These maps will also include social structures (indicating different groups, structures/institutions in the community). The maps are to be drawn, discussed and agreed upon (separately) by participants of each focus groups.

Map of Community: What are the current and past sources of livelihood of the community in terms of land and forest use? Let the youth, women and men draw separate maps (of their interest) indicating their sources of livelihoods before SDPL and currently with SDPL.

1. Gather community members for entry meeting
2. Ensure all categories of community members are present in the meeting
3. Explain guidelines/make up for the community map (a map showing different sources of livelihoods for members of the community before and after Sime Darby expansion activities)
4. Ensure community members are separate break-sessions for smaller groups (women, men, youth) of maximum six participants each.
5. Hold focus group discussion with each (using the FGD guide) and at the end of each session, guide participants to develop a map indicating different areas they do farming and areas of other natural resources, different social groups, structures/institutions in the community.
6. Let each group participants themselves draw the community resource map (collectively)
7. Bring each group map for discussion, inputs and check if information provided on the map reflect everyone's view
8. Cross check with again with if these maps reflect the community different agriculture areas and natural resources, different groups (their importance to the community) within the community and different livelihood activities
9. Remember to record the different groups interactions
10. Identify local opinion leaders in the community
11. Identify (with support from each FGD) groups of households associated with particular livelihood activities and resources and noting where they live and where they can be contacted and see if they provide additional information either through KII or may fall within sample for the semi-structured household interviews.
12. Obtain a more detailed understanding of the resources and livelihood activities by asking probing questions about the people involved (who?), the way resources are used and activities carried out (how?), the seasonality and timing (when?) and location (where?) of resource use and the reasons behind particular patterns of use (why?)
13. When the final maps are agreed upon, take (quality) clear pictures of the final map and leave it with the community

Include these extra notes as part of drawing the maps during FGDs

DESCRIBE COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

1. Does the community have youth groups?
2. Does the community have women groups?
3. Does the community have business associations?
4. Does the community have community decision-making councils? E.g., Traditional councils?
5. How effective (or ineffective) are the different groups?
6. What are some of the traditional or cultural sites in the community? Who manages them?

7. How is the leadership of the community structured?
8. What is the size of each group?
9. Access to farmlands
10. What types of farmlands do you have and use in this community?

PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. Are there any police or courts present in the community? If not, how far are they from the community?
2. How are problems normally solved in this community? [Please write down a few examples of problems and how they were solved].
3. Who are the problem-solvers of this community?
4. Why did the people choose those individuals to solve problems in this community?

[Combine this also with the mapping activity. Have these actors on a list, so in case they e.g. don't draw the police or courts, ask them if they are present. Then ask these other questions while referring to the map.]

APPENDIX 7: Guide for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Community-Based Respondents

We are interviewing the heads of households or suitable adults (male and female household members that are able to tell us about the family) that can proxy for the heads of households, community members and experts in the community and at the national level.

Hello again, my name is _____. I am working with Wynston Benda-Henries to collect this data. The research is intended to ascertain and document information on existing opportunities and challenges of large-scale oil palm expansions has on livelihoods of affected communities. You are a great value to this research, as such, we would like you to contribute to information needed for research by sharing with us your experience of how expansion activities of large-scale oil palm plantations affect livelihoods of households in local communities. And we guarantee that there will be no trace of information research to you or any respondents; except you willingly suggest we do so. As such, do you agree to participate in this research? Yes [] No []

Are you also ok if I record or take pictures during this interview? These are just for reporting sake. Yes [] No []

Name of Community	
County	
District	
Name of Interviewee	
Role in the community	
Why this person selected to be interviewed?	

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

1. What were the main sources of income (monetary) for households in this community before Sime Darby came?
2. What are the main sources of income (monetary) for households in this community now?
3. What are the non-farming livelihood activities of households in this community?
4. Where do the people of this community do farming?
5. What types of farmlands do the people of this community farm on?

ACCESS TO LAND

1. What were the processes for access farmland before Sime Darby came to this community?
2. What changes have households faced in accessing farmland?
3. How much land does this community have left for farming?
4. Who are those that own/manage land in this community?
5. What is the process for female to access farmland in this community?

LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT

1. Are there livelihood support activities provided to this community?
2. What are livelihood support activities provided to this community?
3. Who are providing those livelihood support activities to this community?
4. How long have these activities been going on?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. What types of natural resources are available in this community?
2. What are the most important uses of these natural resources for this community?
3. Who are the people that are using these natural resources from this community?
4. Under what terms and agreements are the natural resources being extracted from this community?
5. Are the terms and agreements being fully implemented by all parties? If not, what is missing? What has the community done to ensure full compliance? What are the results?
6. What are the natural resource management practices that you have observed in this community?

APPENDIX 8: Guide for National Level Experts Interviews

Hello, my name is Wynston Benda-Henries, a Liberian international student at the Van Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. I am conducting my dissertation in Liberia on livelihoods of households in local communities in large-scale oil palm concession areas. The research is intended to ascertain and document information on existing opportunities and challenges large-scale oil palm expansions has on livelihoods of households in local communities. You are a great value to this research, as such, we would like you to contribute to information needed for research by sharing with us your experience of how expansion activities of large-scale oil palm plantations affect livelihoods of households in local communities. And we guarantee that there will be no trace of information research to you or any respondents; except you willingly suggest we do so. As such, do you agree to participate in this research? Yes [☐] No [☐]

Are you also ok if I record or take pictures during this interview? These are just for reporting sake. Yes [☐] No [☐]

Name of Organisation	
Name of Interviewee	
Position of Interviewee	
Role in the Concession	
Why was this person selected to be interviewed?	

STATUS OF CONCESSION

1. What is the current status of implementation of Sime Darby Oil Palm concession agreement?

PROVISION OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES AND SERVICES

2. Has this concession signed a Social agreement with the affected communities for the provision of Sime Darby oil Palm Concession?
3. What are the social infrastructures and services promised to local communities by Sime Darby oil palm concession?
4. What are the social infrastructures and services provided to local communities by Sime Darby Oil Palm Concession?
5. What are the terms and conditions for providing the social infrastructure and services that this concession has promised to provide to the affected communities?
6. What mechanism has the government put in place to ensure timely implementation of livelihood provisions within the concession agreement? Is it effective? If not, what needs to be changed to make it effective? If yes, what makes them to be effective?

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)- relevant to livelihood enhancement

1. What are some Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs of Darby oil palm concession for local communities?
2. Who manages the CSR program of Sime Darby oil palm concessions in local communities?
3. Are large-scale oil palm concessions presently implementing CSR projects and programs for the benefit of the local communities? If not, why? If yes, how are the programs implemented?
4. If large-scale oil palm concessions are implementing CSR programs for the benefit of local communities, what are the scope and coverage of their CSR programs and projects?
5. What category of people have benefited of CSR programs of Sime Darby Plantation in Liberia?
6. To ensure just distribution of benefits to local communities, what are mechanisms has Sime Darby instituted for is CSR?

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT FOR ANCILLARY BENEFITS

1. What is the policy and strategy for employment of people from local communities in oil palm concession areas? (If there is a written policy, strategy or regulation that calls for employing members of local communities, I would request you share with me for further reference.)

2. What is the policy and strategy for supporting additional income generating of people from local communities in oil palm concession?
3. How much employment opportunities are available for local communities in concession areas?
4. If any, how many members of local communities are currently employed by Sime Darby?
5. If not, why there are not opportunities for employment of people from local community?
6. What level of employment is available to members of local communities in concession areas?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. What types of livelihood support programme Sime Darby concession presently implementing or had implemented in local communities extracting from the concession area?
2. What are the most important uses of these natural resources for local communities in Sime Darby concession areas?
3. What terms and conditions for promoting livelihoods of local communities in oil palm concession areas in Liberia?
4. What is the status of implementing terms and conditions stipulated in large-scale oil palm concession agreement for local community livelihoods? If not started, what is in default? What actions have the relevant government organisation taken to ensure full compliance? What are the results?