
[Liberia: Report exposes dire working and living conditions in Firestone rubber plantation](#)

The Liberian NGO Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU) has conducted an inquiry into the Firestone Rubber Plantation Company's 69 years of operation, and the result is the report "Firestone: The Mark Of Slavery" (to see the full report: <http://www.samfu.org/firestone.html>).

Firestone's plantation - established in 1926- is amongst the world's largest rubber plantations. The area it now covers --a coastal low-land, interspersed with marshes, creeks and streams-- was originally owned and inhabited by the Mamba Bassa tribes who were evicted from there by the Firestone Plantations Company and the Government of Liberia during the signing of concession agreement without benefits to these local inhabitants.

Firestone has been joined by Bridgestone as a partner in its operations. Since the inception of this company, it has produced billions of tons of dry rubber and latex but, according to the report, has not been able to establish any factory to manufacture some of its products into finished products.

The inquiry exposes the dire working and living conditions of the bulk of the company's labor force. Firestone has a workforce of about 14,000. Approximately 70% are labourers (tappers) who are mostly illiterate and unskilled Liberians. The lack of employment for unskilled labourers in Liberia, and the inability of the Liberian government, past and present, to monitor the activities of the Company have given rise to the abuse of labourers and the poor working and living conditions they have to endure.

Most laborers and their families live in single room units, in over-crowded camps which may host up to fifty families, but with ten bathrooms and latrines. They have no access to safe drinking water and electricity. Employees complained of poor health care delivery system saying that they are not properly attended to, which often leads to permanent disabilities.

Most of the children of the labourers at the plantation are not attending school because of its absence at most of the Company's camps, and the quest of most parents to allow their children assist them to complete their daily task. Children, who are successful to have primary school in their camps, are learning under poor conditions as the schools are substandard with poor facilities.

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

The report ends with a set of recommendations, including that Firestone Plantation Company take immediate steps to improve the living and working conditions of the tappers; take steps to outlaw the use of child labour on the plantation; cleans up the solid waste that has accumulated in its plantation over the years as well as the polluted creeks and the Farmington river.

SAMFU also demands the Liberian government to conduct an immediate environmental impact assessment in the concessions and instruct the company to improve the working and living conditions of its employees; compel it to comply with international labour standards and principles; and request it to begin manufacturing finished products for domestic consumption and export.

In its report, SAMFU also calls on international human rights organizations and consumers of Firestone rubber to pressure Firestone to take steps to address the issues highlighted in the report or stop buying their product on the international market until reforms are put into place.

Article based on information from: "Firestone: The Mark of Slavery", Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), E-mail: samfu1@yahoo.com, <http://www.samfu.org/index.html>