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Seizure of Local Community Land: Case Study on the Negative Impact of Firestone's Involvement in Liberia

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Abstract

Land seizure by foreign investors in Liberia can pose a threat to the individual security of local communities. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the impact of land and housing rights seizures in Liberia. Dependency theory is used to analyze the asymmetric relationship between multinational companies and local communities, while human security theory is used to understand the threats faced by individuals in this context. The research findings show that land and housing rights seizures by foreign investors in Liberia can threaten individual security. Multinational companies often exploit vulnerabilities and legal uncertainties to acquire land unfairly, resulting in the loss of housing, livelihoods, and physical security for local communities. The power disparity between companies and local communities is clearly evident, as demonstrated by the negative impacts experienced by the local communities. This research also explores alternative economic models or community-led initiatives in other regions that have successfully ensured fairer economic benefits and sustainable development. These case studies provide valuable insights into how local communities can assert their rights and achieve more equitable economic outcomes, offering potential pathways for Liberia to mitigate the adverse effects of land seizures and promote sustainable development.

Introduction

Africa is a region with a long history of colonialism. This history has had a significant influence on the current state of Africa. Nonetheless, Africa is the second-largest continent after Asia, with a land area of over 30 million square kilometers (Soboyejo & Madsen, 2018). Therefore, Africa is often considered a highly desirable continent with great potential for foreign investors. At the same time, many countries in Africa still face economic problems and financial challenges. This occurs due to a significant dependence on foreign aid and loans to meet economic development needs.

Dependency has resulted in an imbalanced relationship, where foreign countries gain more benefits from exploiting Africa. According to Dutta et al. (2016) research, excessive dependency has indeed brought serious consequences, even controlling the economic and political sovereignty of the recipient countries. Although funding sources are essential for African countries, especially in improving infrastructure, there are always side effects, one of which is the issue of economic independence. Foreign aid is often unstable and can change at any time, frequently causing economic and social uncertainty in African countries. Additionally, increasing foreign debt makes Africa vulnerable to global market fluctuations and pressure from international creditors (Isaacs & Kaltenbrunner, 2018). As a result, Africa is trapped in a debt cycle that is difficult to escape, increasing the risk of financial crises.

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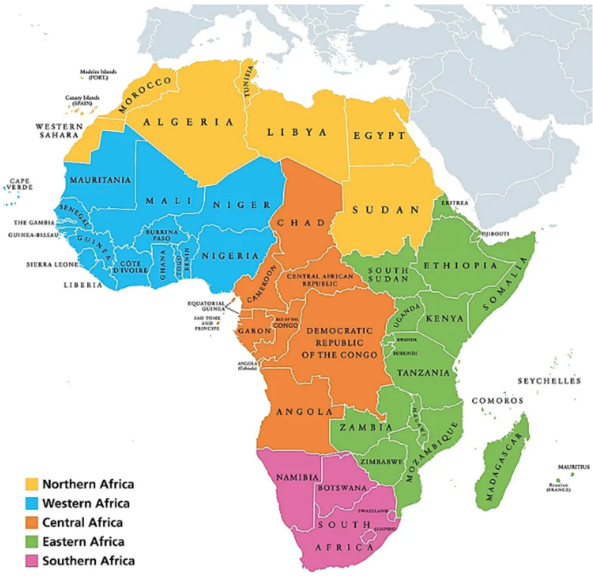

Figure 1. The African Continent

Source: worldatlas.com

One of the case studies the author will describe is about the Government of Liberia, which has been burdened with significant foreign debt, ultimately forcing it to grant considerable leeway to foreign investors solely for funding (Paczyńska, 2016). This situation often provides opportunities for multinational companies to expand in ways that threaten the security of local communities. The case study of Liberia is a clear example of the negative impact of foreign dependency. In particular, frequent cases in Liberia involve the seizure of land and housing rights of local communities, as seen in mining, rubber, and palm oil projects. This is supported by Whyte's (2022) research, which states that the American company Firestone Natural Rubber Company controls most of Liberia's land. Firestone has been operating since 1926 and has acquired rights to extensive rubber plantations. It has even exported rubber worth 160 million dollars between 1940 and 1965, while the Liberian government only received 8 million dollars in revenue.

Land and housing rights seizures in Africa, commonly carried out by multinational companies, are closely correlated with human rights violations. According to Grant & Das (2015), these are fundamental rights recognized in various international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This refers to everyone's right to have adequate and safe housing, where they can live with dignity. The case study of Liberia is a real example of how these practices threaten individual security and put people in vulnerable and dangerous situations. It can even lead to conflicts and violence, as well as increased crime and exploitation, because people live in fear and uncertainty.

Human security has become a crucial issue in the contemporary era, given the increasingly complex and interconnected world. Threats such as conflict, terrorism, climate change, and even exploitation by multinational companies impact not only individuals and communities but also threaten regional and global stability. Therefore, this study analyzes how the seizure of land and housing rights of local communities in Liberia by foreign investors threatens individual security of local communities. This research is formulated to contribute to the study of human rights and international relations, highlighting the failures of the global economic system.

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Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory

In analyzing this research, the author employs Dependency Theory. According to Enuka (2018), Dependency Theory provides a useful explanation of the imbalance in the global economic system, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of Third World development and the significant economic disparity between countries. There are three elements that distinguish the characteristics of Dependency Theory from other theories. First, countries are classified based on their nature in the international order, specifically as dominant countries and dependent countries. Second, Dependency Theory asserts that only a few external parties play a crucial role in driving the capitalist system in the economic activities of dependent countries. Third, the patterns and dynamics of the relationship between dependent and dominant countries are interpreted as having a strong historical basis in exchange activities, forming a pattern of inequality. Therefore, within Dependency Theory, it is essential to understand why a country cannot develop and remains impoverished while another country becomes wealthier. Consequently, Dependency Theory focuses on case studies of issues arising in peripheral countries due to their tendency to rely on dominant countries.

According to Andre Gunder Frank, a researcher from Latin America, peripheral countries that are often exploited by core countries will not be able to catch up with their economic lag in line with international economic advancement (Dugis, 2018). This thinking stems from the idea of the decline in terms of trade. This concept highlights the trade dynamics between core and peripheral countries. It posits that the value and prices of finished goods produced or sold by peripheral countries tend to increase more slowly than the prices of raw materials produced or sold by core countries. In this scenario, peripheral countries may indirectly suffer losses because the raw materials they export do not have equivalent value to the finished goods produced or sold by core countries. However, these raw materials are sold to countries with higher economic capabilities than core countries. Therefore, the cooperative relationship between Liberia and Firestone Natural Rubber Company illustrates the exploitative relationship conducted by the relevant MNC in Liberia.

Human Security Theory

In examining the threat posed by multinational companies regarding land grabbing in Liberia, the author employs human security theory. This theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the direct impact on the security of individuals and communities experiencing land appropriation. According to Newman (2020) in his book, human security theory tends to focus on individuals as the main reference and beneficiaries, emphasizing freedom from want and fear related to threats to core individual needs. By focusing on fundamental human rights, human security theory highlights the vulnerabilities experienced by local communities in the face of powerful external forces, such as multinational companies. An analysis based on human security theory allows for a better identification of the injustices that occur, including the power asymmetry between companies and local communities.

Supported by research from Sprincean et al. (2021), human security theory is relevant because it encompasses both individual and social protection as a whole. Additionally, this theory focuses on living conditions and basic needs, and strengthens mechanisms to address risks and threats related to security. Especially in this contemporary era, where the world is increasingly facing complex challenges. Therefore, human security provides a better framework for understanding, preventing, and responding to 21st-century security challenges (Mitra & Srinivasan, 2022). Given that the author highlights case studies related to personal security, it can be defined as part of the human security concept. Furthermore, according to Sokołowski

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(2019), personal security is defined in the perspective of security science as the identification of various cause-and-effect relationships in a complex reality.

Literature Review

The concept of human security was formulated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994, and it has since become broad and multidimensional, encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (Zyla, 2019). Human security can be said to have two main aspects. First, it means safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression. Second, it means protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in daily life patterns, whether at home, at work, or in the community. Such threats can exist at all levels of income and national development (UNDP, 1994).

The concept of human security has been reconfigured by the UNDP by integrating human rights, needs, and security for sustainable and inclusive development. However, de facto, this concept lacks operational power in determining actual policy actions (Zondi, 2022). Nevertheless, human security is urgent amid the complexities of an interconnected world. According to Mitra & Srinivasan (2022) in their book, human security provides a framework for understanding, preventing, and responding to 21st-century security challenges such as climate change, pandemics, natural disasters, and terrorism.

Aligned with Singh's (2019) research, human security tends to focus on human freedom and dignity as priorities. This is also emphasized in Sprincean et al. (2021) research, which states that human security will always ensure the holistic protection of individuals, especially regarding basic needs, and strengthen mechanisms to address risks and threats related to security. Therefore, human security provides protection, particularly in aspects such as poverty, violence, instability, lack of education, health services, financial stability, and other issues (Sakamoto, 2021).

Developing countries are always vulnerable to humanitarian threats and are often trapped in problems related to the fulfilment of human rights, especially basic needs. There are several previous studies on case studies illustrating the struggles of developing countries in facing humanitarian threats. One such study by Jean-Baptiste (2022) highlights that, like many countries in the African region, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced numerous challenges due to foreign intervention, leading to humanitarian threats. His research points out how globalization and the involvement of informal actors have often deviated from humanitarian missions, especially for those who openly exploit Congo's natural resources.

The involvement of foreign parties is not only carried out by state entities but also by several non-state actors, such as companies, organizations, or even individuals. Several literatures mention that companies are most related to human security issues. Núria (2019) describes that humanitarian threats often occur, especially regarding land grabbing by multinational companies, which impacts local and indigenous communities. One case study in the research by Sovachana & Chamber (2019) indicates that there has been an escalation of land grabbing in Cambodia, resulting in a severe human security crisis. This is exacerbated by the gap between Cambodia's legal framework and the implementation of land concession policies, leading to a power asymmetry that favors elite groups with political and economic connections over vulnerable groups or local communities.

In the African region, land acquisition or even land grabbing occurs significantly due to the expansion of MNCs. This is supported by Tobias's (2019) research focused on case studies, which show that several countries in Africa, such as Morocco, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi, have experienced land ownership drama affecting marginalized groups

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caused by foreign investors who have agreements with state officials and local elites. Therefore, in several studies, it is mentioned that multinational companies play a crucial role in the political and economic debates in Africa, often assumed to be a new form of colonialism in the region. Ukhami & Doumbia (2021) also explains that MNCs symbolize foreign capitalist interests perceived as "bad players" in the domestic politics and economy of various countries, especially in Africa.

As a case study illustrating that capitalist interests have negatively impacted Africa, one example is land grabbing in Liberia. This is closely related to human security issues and has even been highlighted in several studies. Research by Gobewole (2021) indicates that land grabbing is rampant in Liberia, mostly caused by oligarchs, often foreign entities. According to Whyte (2022), it is well-known that Liberia is an American colony, exemplified by how Firestone Tire & Rubber Company has controlled most of the land in Liberia.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative method. According to Abdussamad & Sik (2021), the qualitative method is an approach aimed at understanding phenomena within a context by focusing on detailed and in-depth descriptions related to the conditions in their natural context, regarding what actually happens in the field. The approach in this research uses a descriptive qualitative case study approach, which examines one or more specific cases in real life with a particular purpose through in-depth and detailed data collection involving various sources of information (Creswell, 2017). This research uses a case study approach aimed at obtaining in-depth information and data about land grabbing and the housing rights of local Liberian communities by foreign investors in the 20th and 21st centuries, specifically in this case study, Firestone Natural Rubber Company, illustrating an exploitative relationship in Liberia. The data collection for this research was obtained through secondary data. Secondary data was obtained through a desk study approach, which consists of journal articles, books, and previous theoretical studies that are relevant to the topic of the research. The data analysis technique in this research uses the interactive model, which involves the following stages: 1) Data collection, 2) Data reduction, 3) Data presentation in the form of narrative text, 4) Drawing conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Dynamics of Relations between Local Communities and Investors

The dynamics of the relationship between local communities in Liberia and foreign investors play a crucial role in the economic development of the country. Liberia's economy has faced various significant challenges that can affect the nation's growth and stability. Civil war, pandemics, and the global economic downturn have negatively impacted Liberia's economy. From 2015 to 2019, Liberia's economy cannot be said to have experienced growth**.**

Liberia's economy heavily relies on the export of rubber and iron ore, representing 82% of its export income (Ali et al., 2015). However, global demand often fluctuates, reducing the country's revenue. Economic challenges faced by the community affect high poverty rates, economic inequality, and lack of access to basic services such as education and health, which are major obstacles to improving the welfare of the people.

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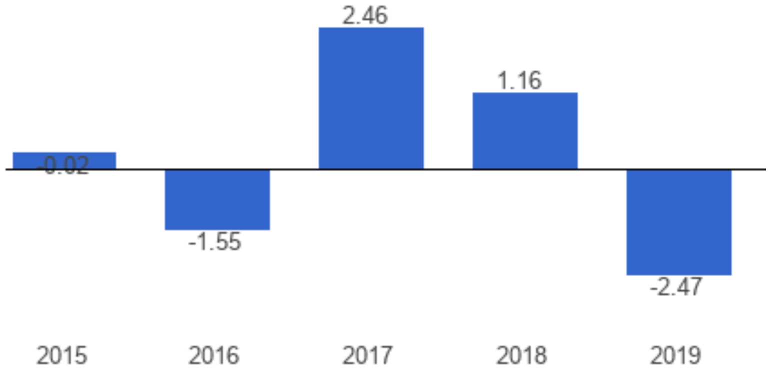

Figure 3. Liberia's Economic Growth 2015-2019

Source: The Global Economy (2024)

The Liberian government hopes that the influx of foreign investors can support accelerated economic growth and overcome various structural barriers faced by Liberia. Through pro-investment policies, the government aims to attract foreign companies into key sectors such as agriculture, mining, and job creation (Dukuly & Huang, 2020). This has significantly increased the dominance of foreign influence in Liberia.

If we trace back, this situation can be linked to the early history of the arrival of the first major foreign investor, Firestone Tyre and Rubber Company. To avoid colonization by France and Britain, Liberia was forced to accept a loan of 5 million US dollars from the Finance Corporation of America, a subsidiary of Firestone. This loan was granted with a high interest rate of 7 percent, which trapped Liberia in a long-term concession agreement. Liberia signed a 99-year lease agreement for one million acres of land at a very low cost, just 6 cents per acre (Kieh, 2012; Pailey, 2024). Firestone's presence allowed foreign companies to exploit Liberia's natural resources, especially raw rubber, without providing significant economic benefits to the local population. This situation exacerbated economic inequality that remains visible today, where people work hard but continue to live in poverty due to the lack of improved welfare from the economic expansion by multinational companies.

As argued by Getachew (2019), countries in the 'Global South' such as Liberia experience unfair integration into the global capitalist system. This injustice is caused by the immense power held by multinational private companies like Firestone, which, in the process of globalization, create an unequal distribution of rights, obligations, and burdens. The case of Firestone in Liberia is a clear example of how local people's land was seized for rubber plantations, benefiting foreign interests more than the Liberian people themselves.

Multinational companies have massively expanded into developing countries, including Liberia, by exploiting mineral reserves and natural resources such as iron ore, gold, rubber, and palm oil (Gobewole, 2021). Their goal is to maximize profits through the extraction and export of primary commodities. However, this dynamic often leads to various problems. The local community often feels the negative impacts of company activities, including land exploration, environmental degradation, and the unequal distribution of economic benefits to local communities.

Impact of Foreign Investment on Local Communities

Political Impact

Foreign investment through multinational companies has significant implications for the political landscape in Africa. One interesting case study is the presence of Firestone, a

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multinational rubber company, and its impact on the political sphere in Africa, especially in Liberia. According to research by Dass & Jamal (2018), the investment of multinational companies in developing countries often has broad implications for local political dynamics. Multinational companies tend to have substantial power to influence government policies through political lobbying and economic pressure. Moreover, the lack of good governance in Africa makes its political institutions vulnerable, especially in terms of policy control.

Firestone, which began operations in Liberia in 1926, has played a significant role in shaping Liberian government policies, even forming land development policies that resemble neocolonial practices (Martin, 2020). The company received a land concession of one million acres under highly favorable terms. The Liberian government often has to adjust tax policies and regulations to support Firestone's operations. This reflects a significant dependency on foreign investment and shows how multinational companies can influence national policies.

The presence of Firestone in Liberia is also associated with high levels of corruption. Government officials are known to accept bribes or incentives from Firestone to facilitate its operations. Transparency International frequently ranks Liberia as one of the countries with high corruption levels, and the presence of multinational companies like Firestone exacerbates this problem.

Economic Impact

In the economic sector, multinational companies always have a significant impact in many countries, including in Africa. However, the positive effects are not widely felt by the local population, especially in African countries like Liberia. The presence of Firestone in Liberia creates various economic problems, such as low wages for local workers (Lustig, 2020). Although the company provides jobs for thousands of residents, the wages are often insufficient to meet the basic needs of the workers and their families. Working conditions are also poor, with many workers having to work in dangerous environments without adequate health protection. This creates serious welfare issues for local communities dependent on jobs in rubber plantations.

Firestone is often assumed to engage in exploitative practices towards local labor. Workers on Firestone plantations must work long hours with little or no additional compensation for overtime. Harsh working conditions and low safety standards worsen the situation, causing many workers to suffer from work-related illnesses and injuries. This exploitation highlights the lack of labor protection and effective employment regulations.

According to Gregg Mitman (2021), local workers employed as laborers or heavy laborers had to work between eight to eleven hours a day, often without significant breaks, especially during the rainy season. The tasks assigned to the workers were extremely demanding and involved intense physical activity, such as rubber tapping, manually applying fungicides, and clearing areas around the trees. This work was carried out almost throughout the month, with about twenty-six or more working days per month. Despite working long and exhausting hours, the compensation they received was highly disproportionate, reflecting an injustice in the distribution of wealth.

These harsh working conditions highlight the poor quality of life and socio-economic well-being in Liberia, contributing to its position as one of the poorest countries in the world. On the 2021 Human Development Index (HDI), Liberia ranked 178 out of 191 countries, indicating that the country faces serious challenges in terms of health, education, and living standards.

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Population	M	5.3	HDI		0.481	GDP p.c., PPP	$	1725
Pop. growth[1]	% p.a.	2.1	HDI rank of 189		178	Gini Index		35.3
Life expectancy	years	60.7	UN Education Index		0.459	Poverty[3]	%	60.6
Urban population	%	53.1	Gender inequality[2]		0.648	Aid per capita	$	115.3

Figure 4. The HDI in Liberia is derived from the Bertelsmann Stiftung, (2024)

Sources (as of December 2023): BTI 2024 Country Report, The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22.

Additionally, the presence of Firestone has led to Liberia's significant dependence on the rubber plantation sector, hindering the diversification of its economy. This dependency makes Liberia's economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global rubber prices. When rubber prices drop, the country's revenue and the well-being of local communities are affected, exacerbating their economic conditions.

The most significant economic impact is the economic injustice that occurs. Economic distribution is often unequal. Most of Firestone's profits flow out of Liberia. Therefore, this wealth distribution exacerbates economic inequality between the elites associated with the company and the impoverished working-class community. This disparity creates social and economic instability, worsening poverty, and hindering local development.

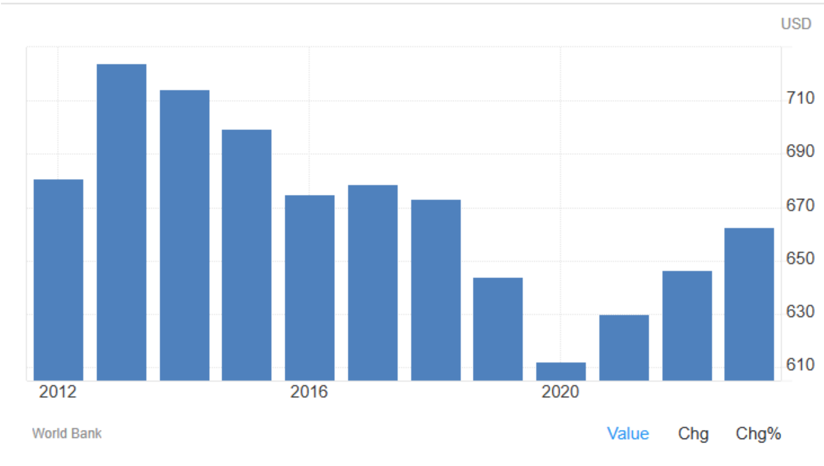

Figure 5. GDP in Liberia 2012-2023, produced by Trading Economics

Source: Trading Economics, 2023

Based on the data above, in 2023, Liberia's annual GDP was recorded at $662.5 per capita (Trading Economics, 2023). This figure places Liberia in the low-income country category according to the classification set by the World Bank. This classification divides countries based on income levels, with the threshold for low-income countries being a GDP per capita of less than $1,145 per year.

With a GDP per capita far below this threshold, it is clear that Liberia faces significant economic challenges. Despite Liberia's integration into the global economic system, and even with the long-standing presence of multinational corporations such as Firestone, the country has not experienced significant economic growth.

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One of the reasons why the expansion of MNCs like Firestone has not been able to boost GDP in Liberia is due to the business model and economic structure that is export-oriented, with most of the profits not flowing back into the local economy. Furthermore, many of the jobs provided by companies like Firestone tend to be low wage, with harsh working conditions and a lack of skill development or technology transfer to the local population (Pailey, 2023).

Environmental Impact

Large-scale operations by Firestone in Liberia have caused significant deforestation. Land clearing for rubber plantations results in the loss of forests that serve as natural habitats for various species of flora and fauna (Broderick & Appleton, 2018). This deforestation not only threatens biodiversity but also disrupts local ecosystems that are crucial for the livelihood of local communities relying on forests for food, medicine, and building materials.

Large-scale rubber planting by Firestone has led to soil quality degradation (GNNLiberia, 2020). The excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides reduces soil fertility and affects its ability to support other crops. This soil degradation hampers agricultural productivity for local communities, who rely on the land for farming and meeting their food needs.

The use of pesticides and other chemicals in Firestone's rubber plantations has polluted local water sources (Newspaper, I. 2023). These chemicals often seep into the ground, contaminating groundwater and rivers around the plantations. Water pollution negatively impacts the health of communities using the water for drinking, bathing, and farming. Cases of water contamination-related diseases, such as diarrhea and skin disorders, have become more common among local communities.

Deforestation and environmental degradation caused by Firestone's operations contribute to local climate change (Mukpo, 2019). The loss of trees that function as carbon absorbers increases carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, accelerating global warming. This climate change has long-term impacts, such as altered rainfall patterns, droughts, and more frequent and intense storms. Local communities dependent on agriculture become more vulnerable to these extreme weather conditions.

Firestone's takeover of vast lands previously used by local communities for farming, hunting, and fishing has reduced their ability to obtain vital natural resources for their daily lives. Additionally, soil and water quality degradation affects the productivity of the remaining land, worsening economic instability and the well-being of the communities.

Violation of Fundamental Rights of Local Communities in Liberia

In 2019, land grabbing by Firestone in Liberia covered a significant area. Firestone, which has been operating in Liberia since 1926, obtained a land concession of 1 million acres (approximately 404,686 hectares) for 99 years at a very low price (Whyte, 2022). This concession covers about 4% of Liberia's total land area and nearly 10% of the country's fertile land (County, 2024). As part of the agreement, Firestone also promised to build infrastructure such as roads and healthcare facilities, which initially seemed beneficial for the then-impoverished Liberia.

However, after several decades, Firestone's role in Liberia began to be questioned. Many view Firestone as a new form of economic imperialism where multinational companies exploit natural resources and cheap labor in developing countries without providing adequate compensation. Firestone monopolized the rubber industry in Liberia and made significant profits while its contribution to the local economy was relatively small. This has led to economic injustice and an excessive dependence on a single foreign company.

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The story of the land takeover by Firestone is not only recorded in historical documents but also captured in a 1926 film shot by Loring Whitman, a photographer from the Harvard expedition. The film shows the Bassa and Grebo tribes dancing on the land that would later be developed into rubber plantations (Siegel & Mitman, 2016). However, for the local communities, this footage is more than just cultural entertainment. When shown to the elders in Queezahn, a small village southeast of the Firestone concession area, it triggered strong emotional responses. The images of their ancestors reminded them of their displacement, lost traditions, the destruction of their crops, and broken promises. In fact, the name of the place, Queezahn, which means "The White man took us from there," signifies that both Firestone and the Liberian government were involved in the land seizure process.

This reflects how Firestone's expansion not only affected the local economy but also impacted the cultural and social identity of the Liberian people, exacerbating the injustice fueled by an imbalanced global capitalist system. Although Firestone was granted access to 1 million acres of land, land conflicts remained a persistent issue for the company. As reported by William Francis, the U.S. Minister to Liberia in 1929, land disputes and local grievances hindered the company's operations (Mitman, 2021, p. 104). This illustrates that even though the agreements were formally signed, ancestral lands were often excluded from the concessions, and the Liberian government tended to disregard the land claims of local tribes.

Firestone’s expansion into areas like the Cavalla River in Maryland County, near the Ivory Coast border, demonstrated how the company’s need to expand its operations often came at the expense of Indigenous land rights. The Liberian government, involved in land concession agreements with Firestone, frequently ignored the rights of local communities over land that was crucial to their sovereignty and livelihoods, as seen in the Kpelle region. This highlights how the power dynamics of the global capitalist system led to deep economic and social injustices, with local communities often being the ones most affected by land acquisition processes by multinational corporations like Firestone.

Interestingly, this view aligns with the arguments made by George Brown, an American doctoral student at the London School of Economics, as written in the book Empire of Rubber: Firestone's Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia by Gregg Mitman. Brown observed how land seizures by foreign companies like Firestone threatened the sustainability of the collective economy that was characteristic of Liberia’s Indigenous communities. In his observations of the Vai and Gola peoples, Brown documented how land held a central meaning in maintaining the social and spiritual balance of the community. For Brown, land concessions to foreigners, such as those made to Firestone, were not just economic issues but also destroyed the communal foundations passed down through African traditions (Mitman, 2021, p. 168-173). He warned that Firestone's land acquisition would replace collective economies with individualistic and competitive ones, ultimately undermining Liberia's social order.

Local Community Reaction to Firestone Company

The reaction of the local community in Liberia to the presence of Firestone is varied. Initially, some saw Firestone's presence as an economic opportunity that would bring development and jobs. However, over time, dissatisfaction began to grow among the local community. They felt that Firestone was exploiting their land and labor without providing fair compensation (Ort, 2022). Many local workers labor under poor conditions with very low wages. Additionally, Firestone's promises to build significant infrastructure often went unfulfilled, adding to the community's disappointment.

Moreover, the issue of land ownership injustice by foreign companies, which has been overlooked by the government, ultimately sparked resistance from local communities. After

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years of oppression and land loss, rural communities finally raised their voices. The protests, especially led by women in Monrovia in May, during the early rainy season of 2018, demonstrated that the land issue was not just an economic matter, but also part of the struggle for social justice and human rights. These protests urged the government to immediately pass the Land Rights Act, which had been delayed for four years. This law, eventually passed in September 2018, provides legal rights and protection for rural communities to collectively own their land according to customary law.

This legislation marks a significant step in addressing the long history of customary land acquisition for foreign concessions like Firestone. Although there is still a long way to go for fair implementation, this law brings hope that Indigenous communities in Liberia can protect their land from foreign control, so they no longer fall victim to an unjust global capitalist system.

Alternative Economic Model

Based on research conducted by Zachary Kaplan, Director of the Sustainable Business Group at DAI, published in the ECDPM magazine article, Kaplan analyzed one multinational energy company operating in Nigeria's Niger Delta, highlighting its success in maintaining operations despite ethnic and religious conflicts, as well as issues related to poverty. Chevron's approach, however, diverges significantly from traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) models, which often fund one-time infrastructure projects or services. Instead, Chevron has adopted a sustainable approach to address the fundamental development challenges of local communities, actively helping to stimulate inclusive economic growth (Kaplan et al., 2018).

Chevron has even been referred to as a "Corporate Social Enterprise" for its strategy centered on creating income and job opportunities for local communities, contributing to greater stability and prosperity. To achieve these goals, Chevron established the Niger Delta Partnership Initiatives (NDPI), an independent development organization with an initial funding of USD 100 million. NDPI then created a local implementing partner in Nigeria, Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), institutionalizing new approaches to economic development, capacity building, peace initiatives, and analysis and advocacy. Working with a range of stakeholders, primarily local citizens, PIND explores local markets to find ways to strengthen production, services, and wages.

PIND's economic development strategy is based on a market-systems approach that encourages market-driven solutions to foster inclusive economic growth. Its core principle is "Partnership," building consensus around intervention agendas and goals. PIND hosts extensive consultation processes with leading public sector institutions and stakeholders to set policy and growth agendas. Partners include the World Bank, U.K. Department for International Development, U.S. Agency for International Development, and invested private-sector actors, including oil companies, that participate in evidence-based analysis to prioritize targeted areas.

The sector selection process targeted markets based on growth, employment, and income generation potential for PIND's targeted communities, aligning with NDPI objectives and the feasibility of working with local partners. PIND conducted a participatory value chain analysis with local partner staff for three priority sectors: palm oil, aquaculture, and cassava. The analysis also assessed the weaknesses faced by each chain. Based on these findings, PIND created strategies to bridge gaps in these markets, especially for the poorest communities.

The tangible impact of PIND as a Corporate Social Enterprise was evaluated by the Initiative for Global Development (IGD) in 2016, which concluded that "These catalytic resources bring hope and are captivating and empowering people of the Niger Delta." IGD's statement is

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supported by evidence that NDPI and PIND, along with their partners, successfully: 1) Enhanced the Niger Delta's attractiveness, paving the way for further development investments. NDPI and PIND have catalyzed over $92 million in new investments into the region, including over $730,000 in new loans from local financial institutions; 2) Piloted 13 key innovations, achieving significant momentum for "stickiness" and scalability, which includes turning 20 best practices into model pilot projects or technological innovations. Nearly 4,000 "peace actors" and a network of 500 organizations now drive change by engaging to shift cultural norms; 3) Created a blueprint for a new type of development model across Africa and beyond, establishing a physical presence and hiring top local talent in three locations, including a world-class economic development center in Warri.

Chevron's initiatives have successfully contributed to value chain development, especially for aquaculture, palm oil, and cassava sectors, benefitting those who cultivate, transport, process, sell, and purchase these products. They also led to improved government partnerships, strengthened collaboration with development actors, donors, and the private sector, and improved alignment between federal and state agencies to prioritize and fund market system development.

NDPI/PIND activities have also promoted the development of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. The foundation's long-term WASH goals include increasing access to clean, affordable water, with the government addressing WASH needs and entrepreneurs seizing opportunities to meet WASH infrastructure gaps. The development of business associations and related institutions has also received high scores in evaluations.

NDPI's success demonstrates that multinational companies can create systemic benefits for the local communities in which they operate. Crucially, for the sustainability of this and similar programs, these benefits work in two directions: supporting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, enhancing Delta businesses' ability to deliver local content, and supporting Chevron's social license to operate.

More MNCs are recognizing the importance of engaging local communities in economic development interventions. Chevron's new paradigm through PIND is an innovative approach that is not merely driven by business interests; it genuinely aims to transform natural resources into local wealth creation.

Discussion

The issue of land grabbing by Firestone in Liberia in the 20th and 21st centuries can be analyzed using the Dependency Theory approach, which highlights the power relations between advanced industrial countries and developing nations. According to Dependency Theory, as discussed by Özekin (2024), industrial countries tend to exploit the economies of developing countries for their own economic benefit, often through practices that exploit natural resources and labor.

Firestone, an American rubber company, has been operating in Liberia since the early 20th century. The company has extensive rubber plantations in the country, which have become one of the pillars of Liberia's economy. However, criticisms of Firestone include claims that the company has exploited Liberia's political and economic weaknesses to maximize profits at minimal costs.

In the context of land grabbing, Dependency Theory indicates that multinational companies like Firestone tend to reinforce Liberia's economic dependence on foreign investment and technology while providing minimal benefits to the local community. This often occurs through

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contractual agreements that favor foreign companies but do not always fairly consider the local social and economic welfare.

Criticisms of practices by companies like Firestone often involve issues of human rights, environmental impact, and social justice. In the case of Firestone in Liberia, a detailed analysis must consider the long-term economic, social, and political impacts of this land grabbing on the Liberian community, as well as how it reflects the global structure driven by Dependency Theory.

The land grabbing by Firestone in Liberia in 2019 can be deeply analyzed from an individual security perspective using Human Security Theory. According to Pathak (2021), this theory expands the definition of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, and political dimensions, all of which impact individuals.

First, from the perspective of individual economic security, land grabbing by Firestone results in the loss of access to resources that are essential for the livelihood of the local community. The land taken over is used for rubber plantations, benefiting the company but providing no direct economic benefits to the local population. This leads to unemployment and the loss of livelihoods, forcing individuals to seek alternative employment that may not be available or stable. As a result, many families fall into poverty, unable to meet their basic needs.

Second, individual food security is threatened as land previously used for subsistence farming is now diverted to rubber monoculture. Individuals who lose their farmland struggle to obtain sufficient, healthy, and affordable food. Dependence on imported food increases, which is not only expensive but also vulnerable to international market price fluctuations. This exacerbates food insecurity among the affected individuals and families.

Third, the health impact on individuals is significant. Loss of land reduces access to clean water and proper sanitation, as resource exploitation for large plantations often contaminates local water sources. This contamination increases the risk of waterborne diseases, such as diarrhea, which can be fatal, especially for children. Additionally, the loss of income reduces individuals' ability to access healthcare, medicine, and adequate nutrition, worsening community health conditions.

Fourth, land grabbing by Firestone causes environmental damage that directly affects individual well-being. Deforestation and soil degradation due to rubber plantations destroy local ecosystems that support the community's life, including forest resources that provide food, natural medicine, and building materials. Loss of biodiversity and environmental damage also reduce the community's ability to adapt to climate change, putting them at greater risk.

Fifth, from a political security perspective, land grabbing by multinational companies like Firestone can disrupt local social and political stability. Individuals who feel they have been treated unjustly may become frustrated and angry, potentially leading to social conflict. Additionally, the dominance of external forces in local political decision-making reduces individuals' participation in the political process, eroding their trust in the government and institutions that should protect their rights.

The psychological impact of land grabbing cannot be ignored. Losing land that holds deep cultural and emotional value for the community causes significant psychological trauma. Individuals feel a loss of identity, social connection, and sense of belonging, all of which are important for mental well-being. Feelings of helplessness and uncertainty about the future exacerbate stress and anxiety, potentially leading to long-term mental health issues.

Therefore, an in-depth analysis using Human Security Theory shows that land grabbing by Firestone in Liberia not only impacts economic, food, health, environmental, and political

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dimensions but also directly threatens individual security. This comprehensive approach is essential for understanding and addressing the negative impacts of land grabbing practices in developing countries.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the impact of land grabbing by the multinational company Firestone in Liberia resulted in significant economic injustice, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. Firestone, with its long history of exploitation in Liberia, exacerbates the country's economic dependence on foreign investment without providing commensurate benefits to the local community. Poor working conditions, low wages, and environmental pollution reflect exploitative practices that harm the well-being of Liberian society. Environmentally, Firestone's large-scale operations lead to significant deforestation and soil degradation due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This not only threatens biodiversity and disrupts local ecosystems but also contaminates water sources, negatively impacting public health. Additionally, the loss of access to vital natural resources diminishes the community's ability to meet basic needs, worsening economic and health conditions. An approach that integrates the perspectives of dependency and human security is crucial for understanding the negative impacts of land grabbing practices by multinational companies in developing countries like Liberia.

Suggestion

For future research, it is suggested to conduct more comprehensive field studies that include qualitative interviews with affected community members, workers, and local government officials to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and social impacts of land grabbing by multinational companies like Firestone. Additionally, researchers should explore the effectiveness of existing policies and regulations in protecting local communities from exploitation and environmental degradation. Comparative studies with other regions facing similar issues could provide valuable insights into successful strategies for mitigating negative impacts. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate economic, social, environmental, and political perspectives are recommended to develop holistic solutions that promote sustainable development and equitable growth in developing countries

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