



Doing Business in Liberia: 2009 Country

Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

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Chapter 1: Doing Business In Liberia

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Market Overview

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- In 2008, Liberia improved 13 places on the International Finance Corporation's (IFC's) "Doing Business" survey, to 150 out of 181 countries; the government is determined to continue to improve the rating.
- Investment increased 32% in 2008, and investment agreements by February, 2009 had already passed the 2008 level.
- GDP grew an estimated 7.1% in 2008, down from 9.5% in 2007.
- Average annual inflation was an estimated 17.5% in 2008, up from 11.4% in 2007.
- The March 2008 Census determined Liberia has a population of 3.5 million, with a growth rate of 2.1% since 1984.
- Rubber accounted for about 86% Liberian exports in 2008. Diamond exports (\$10 million) resumed, under the Kimberly Process, and there was growth in gold exports (to \$13 million).
- Food and Machinery/Transport Equipment each accounted for over a quarter of total imports in 2008; rice alone accounted for 16%.
- Imports (\$798 million) exceeded exports (\$239 million) in 2008.
- Liberia is no longer under UN Security Council sanctions, but some close associates of former President Charles Taylor are sanctioned as individuals and an arms embargo remains in effect.

Note: The government of Liberia is revising laws and regulations related to trade and investment. Data collection is improving, but many figures are estimates, as official data have not been systematically collected since the 1980s.

Market Challenges

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- Liberia is rebuilding after a prolonged civil war that ended in 2003; about 12,000 United Nations peacekeepers still provide security and stability throughout the country.
- Liberia remains one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated real GDP of \$507 million in 2008 (or \$145 per capita).

- The judicial system is weak and unreliable. Laws applied to businesses and contracts are inconsistent and are routinely breached.
- The labor force is largely unskilled and the literacy rate is low.
- Infrastructure -- roads, bridges, ports of entry, the electrical grid, and water system -- are all in need of major rehabilitation. Domestic travel and transport is difficult. At present, only the Port of Monrovia is used for international trade; its services are limited and expensive.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) monitors prices of a wide range of basic products, and sets ceiling prices for rice, cement and petroleum products.
- Liberian law prohibits ownership of land by non-Liberians and reserves 26 business sectors for Liberian investment only. (See Chapter 6.)
- Registration of a company is not, under current practice, interpreted as providing Liberian corporate nationality. (That is, only a company with majority Liberian ownership (51%) is permitted to own land.)
- Businesses in Liberia are required to register annually with MOCI.
- Tariffs and fees can be arbitrary. For example, GST may be charged on trans-shipped goods; invoiced prices may be revised upward by the government for customs duty calculations.
- There is a 20% penalty for imports that do not undergo pre-shipment inspection.
- Firms report that negotiating major investment agreements is slower and more frustrating than in other regional markets.

Market Opportunities

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- Investment is increasing and the government has demonstrated commitment to reforming trade and investment policies to encourage private sector-led economic revitalization.
- There is tremendous demand for reconstruction of damaged infrastructure including roads, bridges, ports/airports and power generation.
- The Government of Liberia plans to commercialize operations at the Monrovia Freeport, which should create demand for port services equipment and rehabilitation engineering.
- Other promising sectors include mining, telecommunications, petroleum exploration, financial services and travel/tourism.
- In agriculture, principal growth sectors are expected to be in forestry, fisheries, rubber, oil palm, cocoa, and food production and processing.
- The UN Security Council has lifted sanctions on the export of diamonds and timber. In 2007 Liberia was admitted into the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI).
- American products are popular in Liberia, and the U.S. dollar is legal tender.
- The United Nations peacekeepers, plus the large number of civilian UN and NGO employees provide a short/medium-term market for many American products.
- Liberia has a solid legal framework to protect intellectual property rights, although enforcement is still weak.

- Potential investors may contact the National Investment Commission (NIC) and the Ministry of Commerce for more information and guidance.
- U.S. companies interested in doing business in Liberia should consider hiring an agent, attorney or distributor to develop local partnerships.
- It would be imprudent to attempt to enter the market without doing thorough market research on Liberia to become familiar with the business environment.

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Chapter 2: Political and Economic Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link below to the U.S. Department of State Background Notes.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

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The Liberian government is revising laws and regulations pertaining to trade and investment so information may change quickly. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is updating the handbook of procedures and processes for businesses operating in Liberia and has established a web site <http://www.moci.gov.lr/>. The government is also working towards harmonizing tariffs with ECOWAS neighbors. Some of the most detailed information on doing business in Liberia is found in the International Finance Corporation's "Doing Business" index and the National Investment Commission official site: <http://www.nic.gov.lr/>

Using an Agent or Distributor

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The agent must be a registered business entity and may be used to bid on government tenders and assist in marketing. U.S. companies have encountered unscrupulous and unqualified individuals presenting themselves as agents. Offers to circumvent established business procedures or draw on political connections should be treated with extreme caution. U. S. companies are highly encouraged to exercise due diligence in hiring the service of an agent or a counsel. Banks, lawyers, and the business associations can assist with references or due diligence. (Contact information is on the Embassy Monrovia website <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>.)

Establishing an Office

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Only Liberian citizens may purchase land. Establishing definitive property ownership in order to rent can be complex, and the presence of the large UN and NGO expatriate community has put upward pressure on rents and other prices. Electric power is not reliable and may have to be self-generated. Internet access is characterized by limited

bandwidth and high cost. Skilled employees can be difficult to recruit. Many businesses decide to retain private security services.

Franchising

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There are a few foreign franchises in Liberia in areas such as remittances, petroleum marketing, automobiles and power generators. The lack of electricity and other infrastructure, poor intellectual property rights protection, scarcity of skilled labor and weak transportation links make establishing a franchise challenging.

Direct Marketing

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Most advertising is by radio or billboard. Low literacy and/or lack of electricity limit the effectiveness of print, on-line or television advertisements. The domestic postal system is not yet fully functioning, so direct mail is ineffective. No trade shows are scheduled for 2009.

Joint Ventures/Licensing

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Most activity is in the service sector. Some legal and accounting firms have partnered with larger foreign firms to increase recognition or credibility with potential clients.

Selling to the Government

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The government is the largest purchaser of goods and services. Foreign suppliers may bid for goods and services that involve international competitive bidding. Government tenders are regulated by the Public Procurement and Concession Act, which established the Public Procurement and Concession Commission: <http://ppcc.gov.lr/>.

Distribution and Sales Channels

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A credible agent with extensive private and public contacts is crucial to effective representation. Most products enter Liberia through the Freeport of Monrovia and Roberts International Airport. Transportation outside Monrovia can be difficult and expensive.

Selling Factors/Techniques

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For many Liberians, disposable income is extremely limited and Diaspora remittances are an important source of income. There is a market for quality imported goods targeted towards businesses and government officials, as well as UN and international NGO employees.

Electronic Commerce

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Most Liberians do not have access to the Internet and e-commerce is in its early stages. Credit cards are not used. There is no home mail delivery system. Some Liberians in the United States manage e-commerce ventures such as online shops and content publishing targeting Liberians.

Trade Promotion and Advertising

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There is little trade promotion. Radio remains the favored advertising medium and captures half of the market. Other media include television (only in the capital city), print, billboards and websites. Advertising is in English or one of the 16 indigenous languages.

Pricing

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The Price Analysis and Marketing Division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry monitors prices and sets price ceilings for rice, cement and gasoline. Efforts at price control can result in scarcity and black-market sale of those goods. Importers are required to submit cost information to the ministry for approval. Permitted mark-up varies according to product, and is based on FOB value. However, invoiced prices are subject to arbitrary revision.

A partial list of other sensitive items provided by the ministry in February 2008, included baby supplies, dairy products, canned fish and other basic foods such as wheat, sugar, frozen foods and livestock, drugs/pharmaceuticals, agricultural tools, building materials, toiletries, stationery/school supplies, petroleum products, auto parts, bathroom fixtures and appliances.

The government is trying to respond to business' concerns about the opacity of pricing and access to import/export licenses. The Liberian Better Business Forum and other groups are working to increase the efficiency of business procedures and improve Liberia's rank on the IFC's "Doing Business" indicator. However, there remains a strong perception, among the public and many officials, that Liberia should be exempt from world prices and the laws of supply and demand.

Sales Service/Customer Support

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Sales service and customer support is variable.

Protecting Your Intellectual Property

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Introduction

It is vital that companies understand that intellectual property is primarily a private right and that the U.S. Government generally cannot enforce rights for private individuals in Liberia. It is the responsibility of the rights' holders to register, protect, and enforce their rights where relevant, retaining their own counsel and advisors. While the U.S. Government is willing to assist, there is little it can do if the rights holders have not taken these fundamental steps necessary to securing and enforcing their IPR in a timely fashion. Moreover, in many countries, rights holders who delay enforcing their rights on a mistaken belief that the USG can provide a political resolution to a legal problem may find that their rights have been eroded or abrogated due to doctrines such as statutes of limitations, laches, estoppel, or unreasonable delay in prosecuting a law suit. In no instance should USG advice be seen as a substitute for the obligation of a rights holder to promptly pursue its case.

It is always advisable to conduct due diligence on partners. Negotiate from the position of your partner and give your partner clear incentives to honor the contract. A good partner is an important ally in protecting IP rights. Keep an eye on your cost structure and reduce the margins (and the incentive) of would-be bad actors. Projects and sales in Liberia require constant attention. Work with legal counsel familiar with Liberian laws to create a solid contract that includes non-compete clauses, and confidentiality/non-disclosure provisions.

IPR Resources

A wealth of information on protecting IPR is freely available to U.S. rights holders. Some excellent resources for companies regarding intellectual property include the following:

- For information about patent, trademark, or copyright issues -- including enforcement issues in the United States and other countries -- call the STOP! Hotline: 1-866-999-HALT or register at www.StopFakes.gov.
- For more information about registering trademarks and patents (both in the United States as well as in foreign countries), contact the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) at: 1-800-786-9199.
- For more information about registering for copyright protection in the United States, contact the U.S. Copyright Office at: 1-202-707-5959.
- For information on obtaining and enforcing intellectual property rights and market-specific IP Toolkits visit: www.StopFakes.gov. This site is linked to the USPTO website for registering trademarks and patents (both in the United States as well as in foreign countries), the U.S. Customs & Border Protection website to record registered trademarks and copyrighted works (to assist customs in

- blocking imports of IPR-infringing products) and allows you to register for Webinars on protecting IPR.
- For assistance in developing a strategy for evaluating, protecting, and enforcing IPR, use the free Online IPR Training Module on www.stopfakes.gov.

IPR Climate in Liberia

Liberia has a solid legal framework for protecting intellectual property and has acceded to most international conventions on IPR. However, regulators and the judiciary lack the ability to enforce laws and regulations.

As of January 10, 2008, all imports of intellectual property must be so identified on the import permit (rather than being identified as "general merchandise"). All businesses dealing in intellectual property must reflect that on their business registration form. The Ministry of Commerce has further information on IPR in Liberia. The Copyright Office is housed at the Ministry of Finance, while the Patent and Trademark office is at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For more information, see Chapter 6.

Due Diligence

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U.S. firms wishing to do business in Liberia are encouraged to conduct thorough due diligence on potential business partners. Hiring a local attorney or accounting firm is recommended and contact information for attorneys, accounting firms, banks, and business associations is available on the Embassy Monrovia web site <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>.

Local Professional Services

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There are several business associations. Lists of banks, accountants, and lawyers are on the Embassy Monrovia web site (below).

Web Resources

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U.S. Embassy Monrovia Commercial Office
<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>

IFC "Doing Business" evaluation:
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness/Details.aspx?economyid=111>

National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce and Industry
Ministry of Finance

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
<http://www.mofliberia.org>

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Mining (iron, diamonds, gold) (MIN)

Overview

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The mining sector is expanding rapidly. Liberia signed a \$2.6 billion Mineral Development Agreement for iron ore with China Union in early 2009. Until then, the largest investment in Liberia had been \$1.5 billion by ArcelorMittal, also for iron ore. Before the war, iron ore mining was Liberia's economic mainstay, contributing two-thirds of total exports, half of government revenues and a quarter of GDP. Gold exports are increasing, reaching \$13 million in 2008. There are also deposits of bauxite, manganese, columbite, uranium, tantalite, copper, tin, lead and zinc. Liberia's diamond deposits are primarily alluvial, and artisanal mining is widespread. Kimberlite pipes may also exist, although major pipes have not been located. Diamond exports under the Kimberly Process have just resumed after lifting of UN sanctions, with total exports in 2008 of just under \$10 million.

Best Prospects/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Potential for support services for every aspect of iron ore mining;
- Key areas are supply chain support for operational needs, mine site personnel needs and employee support.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

Agreements signed with ArcelorMittal, China Union, and other large investors include commitments to rehabilitate railroads, port facilities, roads and to provide schools and clinics.

Resources

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Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy:
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce

<http://mlme.net/mlme/index.php>
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Construction (CON)

Overview

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Liberia is rebuilding after years of civil war. Infrastructure has deteriorated, and most homes and businesses were looted. According to the Central Bank, construction activity increased a cumulative 55% in 2005-2007 and continues to grow. International donors are funding rehabilitation of roads and bridges, the power sector, water and sanitation facilities, ports and airports. Several hotel projects are underway, and there is tremendous demand for housing in Monrovia and in conjunction with investment in mining or plantations around Liberia.

Best Prospects/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- The construction boom has created a shortage of equipment, supplies and trained workers.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

A management contract for the National Port Authority (NPA) will involve considerable construction. Rehabilitation of the destroyed railways and port facilities is critical to the resuscitation of the iron ore mining sector. Donors are focusing on expanding and improving farm-to-market roads throughout the country. There are opportunities in low income housing and serviced office space.

Resources

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Ministry of Public Works: <http://www.mpw.gov.lr/>
National Investment Commission <http://www.nic.gov.lr>
Ministry of Commerce <http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
Public Procurement and Concessions Committee: <http://www.ppcc.gov.lr/index.php>

Telecommunications (TES)

Overview

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Most of Liberia's communications infrastructure was destroyed during the 1990-2003 civil war. Cell phones are ubiquitous but there are no land-line phones. Internet access is expensive and bandwidth is limited. There is some satellite TV, but the lack of electricity and low disposable income limits that market. Four mobile phone companies now provide service, and competition in the sector is high. The telecom sector has been characterized by arbitrary/heavy-handed regulation and by government support for reviving the state-owned telecommunications firm that may compete with private sector investors.

Best Prospects/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Opportunities in the cell phone market as the four existing private firms consolidate or expand;
- Liberian government and commercial offices require computer software, including virus protection programs.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

Opportunities exist in rural telephony and Internet communications as dozens of donors and international NGOs establish economic development programs. Government institutions covering areas such as petroleum, power generation, telecommunications, maritime, forestry, social security and finance will start investing heavily in ICT infrastructure and equipment as they gear up to monitor their various sectors.

Resources

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Liberia Telecommunications Authority
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce

<http://www.lta.org.lr> (under construction).
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Power generation (ELP)

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All electricity is privately generated except 10 MW in Monrovia that is provided by international donors. In January 2009, Liberia signed an agreement with Buchanan Renewable Power to construct a 35MW power plant, fueled by rubber wood chips, near Monrovia. Longer term, Liberia plans to rehabilitate its hydro-electric facility at Mt. Coffee. USTDA has funded a feasibility study on rehabilitation of the Mt. Coffee plant, and Chinese investors are planning to proceed with the project. International donors are funding rehabilitation of the transmission and distribution system and undertaking management support at the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC, the public utility). In addition to rehabilitation of the Mt. Coffee hydro-electric plant, there is a demand for small renewable energy projects throughout the country.

Best Prospects/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Demand for electricity, especially from hydro or other renewable sources;

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

Buchanan Renewable Power is beginning construction of a 35MW power plant, and Chinese investors have committed to rehabilitating the Mt. Coffee hydroelectric plant. The transmission and distribution grid needs to be repaired and expanded. Liberia aspires to participation in the regional West African power network.

Resources

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Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy
National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce

www.mlme.net
<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Petroleum (OGS)

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Liberia is attracting companies interested in deep-water oil exploration. Responsibility for oil exploration lies with a parastatal, the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL). Texas-based Anadarko Liberia Company and Hong Kong TongTai Hong Kong/Chinese Petroleum International Corporation won bids in 2008 on offshore blocks for petroleum exploration. Anadarko has already partnered with Repsol (Spain) and Woodside (Australia) to explore three other offshore blocks. Companies must drill at least one well within four years of initiating exploration. NOCAL expects to launch another round of bidding for the seven remaining offshore exploration blocks (out of 18 total) in 2009.

Best Prospects/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Exploration is not yet underway, but upstream and downstream products and services have potential;
- The need for storage tanks, additional tank farms and potential refinery capacity could provide build-operate-transfer opportunities.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

There is potential investment in several of the off-shore blocks. The state-owned Liberia Petroleum Refinery Corporation (the monopoly importer, which does not refine petroleum) is in need of major repairs and upgrading.

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Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy:

www.mlme.net

Financial Services (FNS)

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There are eight commercial banks with licenses or provisional licenses, but financial services remain very basic. As the Central Bank of Liberia increases capitalization requirements (from the current level of \$6 million to \$10 million in 2010) domestic banks may be open to partnering with foreign firms. As banks become stronger, they will compete on expanding services and locations, providing openings for financial service providers. The lack of electrical power or Internet bandwidth is a constraint. **Note: Liberia is not subject to UN sanctions and there are no U.S. government restrictions on transactions with Liberian financial institutions.**

Best Products/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Financial management software and services;
- Banking technology; financial intermediation advisory services;

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

Banks are expanding outside Monrovia, upgrading IT, and training new personnel. New entrants have put pressure on older banks to improve services.

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Ministry of Finance
Central Bank
LBDI
International Bank
Ecobank
Global Bank
First International Bank
United Bank for Africa
AccessBank Liberia

<http://www.mofliberia.org>,
<http://www.cbl.org.lr/>
<http://www.lbdi.net/>
www.ibliberia.com
www.ecobank.com
www.globalbankliberia.com
<http://www.fib-lib.com/>
www.ubagroup.com
(Website pending)

Travel/Tourism Overview (TRA)

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Liberia has beautiful beaches and the coastal waters provide good prospects for sport fishing. Sapo National Park provides an opportunity for ecotourism, and other ecotourism sites such as the Kpatawee Falls and Lake Piso areas are being considered around the country. There is a shortage of hotel rooms, although several hotel projects are in the works and investment continues. As the economy rebounds and the number of business and other visitors increase, there are across-the-board opportunities in the tourism sector in both infrastructure and services.

Best Products/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Hospitality sector supplies and services;
- Travel agencies, recreational equipment;
- Beach resorts and facilities;
- Water transportation services.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

There was a surge in hotel construction in 2008, including investment in eco-tourism outside Monrovia. Delta airlines has announced plans to commence service to Liberia in 2009.

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Web Resources:

Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism: <http://www.micat.gov.lr/>.

(Note: Although the "Tourism" segment of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism website is as yet unpopulated, we include it for possible future reference. End note.)

The Cape Hotel

The Kendeja Hotel

The Mamba Point Hotel

The Royal Hotel

www.thecapehotel.com

Kendejaresort@hotmail.com

reservations@mambapointhotel.biz

<http://royalhotelliberia.com/>

Food Processing Equipment (FPP)

Overview

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The government would like to encourage food processing to reduce food imports and to support potential agricultural exports - possibly chili peppers and seafood.

Best Products/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Investment in training, equipment and supply chain management will be necessary to bring Liberian products to international standards.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

International donors are funding agricultural cooperatives and many retailers are interested in expanding their offerings.

Forestry Sector (FOR)

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Of Liberia's 9.58 million hectares, 45% of the total (4.5 million hectares) is designated as multiple use forest land. Commercial-use forest is 2.3 million hectares, and 700,000 hectares is designated for community and other forest use. In 1997, timber production became an important source of revenue to finance conflict in the sub-region. Before sanctions were imposed in 2003 the industry provided up to 8,000 jobs, though many were informal and paid less than \$50 per month.

In February 2006, all timber concessions were voided as the government embarked on forestry sector reform. In September 2006, the UN Security Council lifted timber sanctions on round log exports. A Forest Law passed by the National Legislature in September 2006, along with associated regulations and a code of harvesting, meets international best practice and underscores transparency and accountability. The Liberia Forest Initiative, (a consortium of the Liberian and U.S. governments, the World Bank, international NGOs) is assisting Liberia's Forestry Development Agency with reform of its revenue collection and production monitoring procedures. In January 2008, the FDA pre-qualified 38 companies to participate in the tender for six small timber sale contracts (TSCs). Three have so far been awarded. Three larger forest management contracts (FMCs) of up to 119,000 ha have also been awarded and pre-felling activities are under way in some of them. Meanwhile, the FDA is preparing to open the bids on an additional four FMCs reaching 266,000 hectares.

(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- There is demand for timber harvesting and wood processing equipment, including plywood and high-quality veneer processing centers, as well as portable mills.
- Liberia lacks kilns or other methods to treat wood products for export.
- Growing opportunities in non-timber forest products such as bamboo, rattan, natural oils.

Opportunities**(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)**

Chain-of-custody procedures are in being put in place, and timber exports should resume in 2009. Capital-strapped local companies will likely seek partners for concession management and equipment procurement.

Agricultural Sectors

Agriculture is critical to economic revitalization and is the focus of the government's poverty reduction strategy. Agriculture and fisheries contributed 44.4% of Liberia's GDP in 2007. Total U.S. agricultural exports to Liberia were \$17.7 million in 2007, and total Liberian agricultural exports to U.S. (primarily rubber) came to \$114.5 million. Output and yields are low, and there is no significant food processing or value-added. Most rice, the staple food, is imported but the government is committed to increasing domestic food production. There is increasing investment in plantation crops: rubber, oil palm, and cocoa. The government is working to establish an SPS system for agricultural exports.

Agricultural services overview (AGS): There is potential in agro-processing, horticulture and plantation agriculture. Rubber exports through November 2008 came to \$206 million, but Liberia's share of the world rubber market has dropped as production has increased in Asia and other African countries, and fallen locally as most rubber trees pass their productive lifespan. Liberian rubber producers export raw latex and block rubber, though the government is encouraging the development of more value-added processing and manufacturing. In November 2008, the government announced a temporary ban on the export of unprocessed rubber. There is strong focus on increasing cocoa yields.

Best Products/Services**(Subsectors with best opportunities)**

- Wheat, consumer-ready food products, and poultry products;
- Agricultural equipment and machinery;
- Food processing equipment.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

There are opportunities in export crops such as rubber, oil palm, and cocoa.

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Ministry of Agriculture:

<http://www.moa.gov.lr/>

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Fisheries sector (CFE)

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Although there are probably hundreds of thousands of part-time fishers, processors and mongers in Liberia, almost all fishing is artisanal. The government does not have the capability of controlling its coastal waters and illegal fishing by foreign trawlers is rampant. Domestic production in 2005 was reported as 6,856.901 metric tons for both industrial and artisanal sectors. Fish imports for the same period were 11,071.743 metric tons. Though seriously under-reported, domestic production is estimated to account for about 38.25% of total fish supply.

Best Products/Services

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(Subsectors with best opportunities)

- Fishing vessels, equipment and inputs;
- Electronic navigation equipment;
- Fishing support services;
- Cold storage facilities.

Opportunities

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(Infrastructure projects, development-bank funded projects)

There are opportunities in cold storage facilities; cold chain equipment for export of seafood.

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Import Tariffs

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The Customs Revenue Code and the Harmonized Description and Coding System of the Customs Tariff Schedules of the Liberia Act of 2000 still provide the regulatory basis for customs duties and standards. Duties on imported goods range from 2.5% to 25%. A penalty of 20% is charged on imports that do not obtain pre-shipment inspection certification.

Trade Barriers

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Non-tariff barriers include the inefficient port, lack of roads and other transportation infrastructure (including electricity), and opaque administrative procedures that foster corruption. Import or export permits are required for all goods shipped to or from Liberia. The government has plans to harmonize tariffs with ECOWAS neighbors and a "one-stop shop" is being introduced at the port to streamline the customs process.

Import Requirements and Documentation

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The importer must write a letter (requesting permission to import a specific quantity and quality of commodity from a particular country or trading zone) to the Minister of Commerce via the Division of Foreign Trade. The letter is accompanied by the invoice and bill of lading. Once authorization to import is received, the importer may purchase the Import Permit Declaration (IPD) form from the Ministry of Finance. The importer proceeds to the pre-shipment inspection company (currently BIVAC) to arrange pre-shipment or destination inspection, at a cost of 1.5% of the shipment's value. (Note: there is a 20% fee for goods that arrive without pre-shipment inspection. End note.) When those steps are completed, the IPD is issued and the import is approved. On arrival, after clearing customs, the importer presents costing information to the Minister of Commerce for price approval. There are separate procedures for rice imports.

U.S. Export Controls

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Liberia is not subjected to U.S. export controls, although a UN arms embargo remains in effect.

Temporary Entry

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The Customs Revenue Code provides for temporary entry of personal effects and temporary importation of other goods. The government has reportedly been assessing GST of 7% on goods that are being trans-shipped through Liberia.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

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Product labels should show the net weight of the product, manufacture and expiration date, ingredients and origin. The labeling language should include English.

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

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Liberian law prohibits convict-made goods. Liberia recognizes international regulations on narcotics and other contraband.

Customs Regulations and Contact Information

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Customs regulations are administered by the Ministry of Finance.

Standards

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- [Testing](#)
- [Product Certification](#)
- [Trade Agreements](#)
- [Publication of Technical Regulations](#)
- [Labeling and Marking](#)
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Standards Organizations

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The Ministry of Commerce, through its Bureau of Standards, assesses the quality of goods but there is not currently a lab capable of quality testing. A number of ministries and agencies (including the Ministries of Agriculture; Health and Social Welfare; Public Works; Lands, Mines and Energy and Transport as well as the Liberia Telecommunications Authority, and Forestry Development Authority) issue technical regulations on products within their jurisdiction. There are currently no standards

organizations operating in Liberia. Liberia has adopted 220V, 50 cycles for electricity in order to harmonize with neighboring countries.

(Insert text here)

NIST Notify U.S. Service

Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries.

Notify U.S. is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets. Register online at Internet URL:

<http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/>

Testing

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There are no known laboratories to test products. The Ministry of Commerce intends to establish a product testing laboratory for its Standards Bureau, with a focus on testing pharmaceuticals and food products.

(Insert text here)

Product Certification

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There are no mutual recognition agreements with U.S. organizations.

Trade Agreements

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Liberia is AGOA-eligible and has signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the United States. Liberia has also signed an Open Skies agreement, and Delta Airlines is scheduled to begin service in 2009. Liberia is not yet a member of the WTO but has observer status.

Web Resources

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IFC "Doing Business" evaluation:

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=111>

National Investment Commission

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>

Ministry of Finance:

www.mof.gov.lr

Ministry of Commerce:

<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

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Chapter 6: Investment Climate

- [Openness to Foreign Investment](#)
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- [Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment](#)
- [Political Violence](#)
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- [Labor](#)
- [Foreign-Trade Zones/Free Ports](#)
- [Foreign Direct Investment Statistics](#)
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There is growing investor interest in Liberia, particularly in agriculture, construction, the extractive industries and tourism. UN sanctions on timber exports were lifted in 2006 and on diamonds in early 2007 as Liberia became compliant with the Kimberly Process. The removal of sanctions opens the way to renewed investment activity in those sectors. Liberia debuted on the International Finance Corporation (IFC) "Doing Business" ranking and the Transparency International corruption index in 2007, and improved sharply in 2008. The National Investment Commission announced \$132 million in new investment in 2008, and total business registrations in 2008 increased 12% from the previous year. (Note: All currency amounts are in U.S. dollars. End note.)

Five years of peace have helped Liberia recover from the ravages of civil war. Much of Liberia's infrastructure -- including roads, electrical grid, and communication systems -- remains in ruins but progress, supported by the substantial infusion of international development assistance, continues. Facilities for foreign visitors are adequate in the capital, Monrovia, but virtually non-existent in the rest of the country. There is a tremendous demand for jobs, with employment in the formal economy estimated at about 15% of the available labor force. Most labor is unskilled, and the illiteracy rate is estimated to be between 60% and 85%. While there are no landline phones, cell phone service is widely available and coverage is being extended into rural areas. Although Internet access is available, it remains relatively expensive, especially for high-speed connections. It is likely that major foreign investments will be expected to include support for schools, medical, and other social services as part of any concession agreement.

There are three serious challenges the Liberian government must address as it works to ensure equitable economic growth and reduce poverty: land tenure disputes, corruption, and the related factor of a dysfunctional judicial system. Expanded investment in promising sectors such as agriculture, forestry, mining, or tourism, and the ability to provide affordable housing for more Liberians, depends on rapid clarification of the tangled land tenure regimes and a significantly improved judicial system.

Openness to Foreign Investment

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The impact of years of violence and bad governance undermined rule of law and created unchecked opportunities for corruption. The government has benefited from the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), which seeks to institute accountability, responsibility, and transparency in the fiscal management of the government and key state-owned enterprises. GEMAP has had a positive effect in many areas that influence foreign investment decisions such as mining and forestry policies, and transparency in the procurement process. However, lack of training, inadequate salaries and a culture of corruption have created a judicial system that actively hampers investment.

Liberia improved by 13 ranks on the IFC's "Doing Business" ranking in 2008, reaching number 150 out of 181 countries. The Liberia Better Business Forum, a public-private initiative established in late 2007, is guiding proposals to further improve the business climate. However, the government continues to wrestle with finding the balance between an open, nationality-neutral investment climate that would encourage the energy, ideas, and capital that create jobs and provide lower prices and higher value for consumers, and "empowering" domestic businesses.

Seeking to empower Liberian businesses, the government in 1975 promulgated a "Liberianization Policy," an Act to amend the General Business Law. The Act set aside 12 business activities exclusively for Liberians. An amendment in 1998 increased the number of sectors reserved for Liberians to 26. These businesses include:

- Block making with cement, clay or like materials
- Supply of sand, stone and granite
- Operation of gas stations
- Peddling
- Ice cream manufacturing
- Commercial printing
- Travel agencies
- Advertising agencies
- Graphics and commercial arts
- Distribution in Liberia of locally manufactured products (this provision shall not prevent manufacturers or producers from transporting or otherwise distributing their products to Liberian citizens or qualified persons for resale)
- Cinemas
- Production of poultry products
- Importation or sale of second-hand or used clothing
- Retail sale of rice

- Ice making or sale of ice
- Operation of water purification or bottling plant valued at less than \$100,000 or the sale/distribution of water purified in Liberia
- Importation and sale of used cars
- Tire repair
- Auto repair shops with investments of less than \$50,000
- Entertainment centers not connected with established hotels
- Retail sale of animal and poultry food
- Taxi and trucking
- Shoe repair
- Retail sale of timber and planks
- Bakeries
- Retail sale of pharmaceuticals

(Note: The draft revision to the Investment Code opens 15 of the 26 reserved sectors to foreign investment over a threshold of \$500,000 and adds Video Clubs to the list of sectors reserved only for Liberian investors. End note.)

The Act is still in force but has not been effective in increasing Liberian participation in commercial industries, nor has enforcement been consistent. The Liberianization Act mandates that qualified Liberians be employed at all levels, including upper management of foreign-owned companies. Some businesses owned by non-Liberians operate in contravention of the law. Using the Liberianization law, the Ministry of Labor has delayed work permits for expatriates and intervened in negotiations between investors/management and their Liberian employees.

Conversion and Transfer Policies

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Both Liberian and U.S. dollars are legal tender. Most business and government transactions (such as taxes) are conducted in U.S. dollars; most street transactions are in Liberian ("Liberty") dollars. The Investment Code allows the transfer of funds associated with investments, including profits. There are no restrictions on converting or transferring investment funds. ATMs are not connected to global electronic banking networks and traveler's checks and credit/debit cards are rarely accepted.

The Central Bank of Liberia regulates foreign exchange transfers. Transfer of sums in excess of \$10,000 must be reported to the Central Bank of Liberia, and no more than \$7,500 in foreign currency banknotes can be moved out of the country at one time. Larger sums must be transferred via bank draft or other financial instruments. Persons without a Liberian bank account are limited to two outgoing \$5,000 over-the-counter cash wire transfers per month. (Regulation Concerning Transfer of Foreign Currency, CBL/SD/16/2001, located at: <http://www.cbl.org.lr/doc/others/otherreg2001/transferforeigncurrencynew.pdf>)

Expropriation and Compensation

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The Embassy is aware of one claim by a U.S. firm of expropriation (looting) by LURD rebels who attacked Monrovia in 2003, before the current government was elected. The claimant has not been in touch with the Embassy since 2004.

Dispute Settlement

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Liberia's legal system is similar to the criminal and civil law in the United States, but laws are not implemented consistently or predictably. Investors cannot rely on the court system as a fair arbiter of disputes. Judges and other judicial officers are poorly paid, courthouses are in disrepair, and administrative support is weak. Judgments can be purchased, and foreign firms tend to be at a disadvantage. In 2008 an unreasonable court finding caused a major foreign rubber company to cease operations, and frivolous suits have been used to harass other investors. Due to the backlog of cases, it can be years before a hearing takes place. The Sirleaf government is committed to judicial reform, and there are plans underway to expand Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, but reform will take time.

Performance Requirements and Incentives

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The Investment Incentive Code of the Republic of Liberia (the Code), adopted in 1966 and revised in 1973, prohibits nationalization of private enterprises and aims to attract foreign investment. The Government is revising the Code, but under the current Code, approved projects must ensure the employment of Liberians at all levels and expand employment and training activities as the enterprise grows. In addition, investors must permit Liberians to purchase shares or otherwise participate in the ownership of the enterprise, include a local value-added content of not less than 25% of the value of gross output, and utilize Liberian origin raw materials and other supplies. An approved investment should use imports only when local products are not available in sufficient quantity and/or its quality or price is not comparable to the intended import, as determined by the Government. Investment incentives may include exemption from customs duty and tax exemption on profits re-invested in fixed assets, with exemption of the remaining profits from 50% of the income tax that would be otherwise payable. There is also provision for loss carry-over and accelerated depreciation of fixed assets. The National Investment Commission of Liberia (NIC) implements the Code, and more details are available on the NIC website: <http://www.nic.gov.lr/>

Right to Private Ownership and Establishment

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Land ownership is restricted to Liberian citizens. Chapter III, Article 22 of Liberia's Constitution states:

Every person shall have the right to own property alone as well as in association with others, provided that only Liberian citizens shall have the right to own real property within the Republic. Private property rights, however, shall not extend to

any mineral resources on or beneath any land or to any lands under the seas and waterways of the Republic. All mineral resources in and under the seas and other waterways shall belong to the Republic. Non-citizen missionary, educational and other benevolent institutions shall have the right to own property, as long as that property is used for the purposes for which acquired; property no longer so used shall escheat to the Republic.

The 2006 Forestry Reform Law states that natural forests are owned by the Republic, with two exceptions (Chapter II, Section 2.1). Rights to land ownership and to use of resources such as minerals and timber are likely to evolve in coming years.

Many foreign businesses have entered into long-term leases, but disputes over land ownership and squatters' rights remain contentious, particularly for large concessions. Violence based on land disputes erupted in Nimba County in late 2008.

Protection of Property Rights

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Conflicts between customary and statutory land tenure systems have not been reconciled. The official archives, including property deeds and secured property interests, were looted during the war and disputes over real estate ownership are difficult to adjudicate. The lack of adequate facilities and salaries for judicial officers also degrades enforcement of property rights as judges sometimes decide cases in favor of the highest bidders. The Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, which is in charge of survey and validation of land claims, is planning to implement a national mining cadastre that could eventually incorporate land title registrations. There have been cases of fraud by government-licenses land surveyors.

Liberia is a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and a contracting party to international conventions and treaties on the protection of intellectual and industrial property rights, including the Berne, Paris, Lisbon, Vienna and Washington conventions and the Madrid Agreement. The Act adopting the New Copyright Law of Liberia, approved in July 1997, provides the legal and administrative framework for protection of intellectual and industrial property rights. The Copyright Office (CRO) and Industrial Property Office (IPO) manage these issues, but lack the capacity to function effectively.

As of January 10, 2008, all imports of intellectual property must be so identified on the import permit (rather than being identified as "general merchandise"). All businesses dealing in intellectual property must reflect that on their business registration form. Holders of intellectual property rights have access to judicial redress but enforcement is minimal. Infringement of intellectual and industrial property rights is prevalent. Movies and music are duplicated. Counterfeit drugs, apparel, cosmetics, and computer software and hardware are sold openly. Broadcasters do not tend to pay royalties for use of protected material.

Transparency of Regulatory System

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The Liberian government is committed to improving Liberia's ranking in the next "Doing Business" index by making regulations more transparent, accountable, and effective. One focus is completion of "one-stop shops" to facilitate imports and investment. The government's implementation of GEMAP and agreement with policy prescriptions advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are showing results. New regulations are improving the transparency of the government's Public Procurement and Concession Commission (PPCC). Harmonization of the regulatory environment across ministries and agencies with conflicting rules and regulations is ongoing. However, regulators can still be arbitrary or heavy-handed.

Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment

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The Liberian banking system provides basic banking services but there is no effective capital market or options for portfolio investment. Financial institutions are undercapitalized and unable to meet the credit demands of the business community. Total assets of the six commercial banks were approximately \$158 million in 2008. Minimum capital requirements were raised to \$6 million in 2008, and will be further increased to \$10 million in 2010. The minimum capital adequacy ratio was increased from 8% to 10% in 2008. Banks have continued to reduce the proportion of non-performing loans since 2003, but loan quality remains low.

The weak judicial system means financial institutions find it difficult to recover bad loans through the courts. In addition, there is no effective credit rating system, and many firms lack the business records necessary for credit approval. The obstacles to domestic travel and communication increase the risk in accepting collateral outside Monrovia and the lack of reliable land title hampers access to credit.

The United States has programs to support investment in small and medium Liberian companies, some of which provide services, such as lodging, communications, and construction, which improve the overall investment climate. In 2007, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation committed \$20 million to the Liberia Enterprise Development Finance Corporation (LEDFC) to support small and medium Liberian enterprises. LEDFC, which works closely with the commercial banks, is the first non-bank financial institution licensed by the Central Bank of Liberia. This program should strengthen the financial sector and improve access to capital by growing Liberian firms. The African Development Foundation has invested \$1.67 million in Liberian small and medium-sized enterprises, including farmer cooperatives, as of the end of 2008 and has about \$1 million in the pipeline for the first half of 2009. These projects provide sustainable jobs, technology transfer, financial and general management training

Political Violence

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There has been no significant political violence since the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003 and the deployment of 15,000 UN peacekeepers throughout Liberia. The former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was completely demobilized and with USG assistance a modern, professional force is being

trained. By the end of 2010, the AFL will reach initial operational capability, but will still rely on international support. The Liberian National Police is also being restructured and includes an Emergency Response Unit (ERU), which has the ability to respond rapidly and to address sudden tactical police emergencies. The UN troops are gradually being withdrawn as Liberia's security forces gain in strength and experience and now number under 12,000. Increasing freedom and transparency for the Liberian people has led to vigorous pursuit of perceived rights, which results in active, often acrimonious, but non-violent political debate. That said, access to land remains a volatile issue that has led to violent disputes on the local level.

Corruption

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The government is tackling corruption, but it remains systemic. In 2008, Transparency International rated Liberia 138th of 179 countries on its corruption perception index, up from 150th place the previous year. The Mo Ibrahim African governance index showed Liberia as "most improved" in 2008, and in the 2008 World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicator Liberia showed more improvement over the past two years in "control of corruption" than any other country in the world. Although corruption is being addressed, travelers may encounter officials who solicit bribes (often euphemistically referred to as "cold water" or "my Christmas").

There have been improvements in the transparency of government procurement, and the 40% increase in government revenues in FY2007-08, on top of the 75% increase FY2006-07, reflects progress in corralling revenue leaks. Since taking office, the Sirleaf administration has boosted civil service salaries over 150% and started paying salary arrears incurred by past governments. However, the starting government salary is still only \$70 per month and despite efforts at reform there are still delays in paying government employees. The Sirleaf administration is wrestling with how to maintain civil service parity while removing incentives to corruption in positions of traditionally high rent-seeking potential.

OPIC and Other Investment Insurance Programs

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OPIC provides coverage for investors in Liberia. GSP eligibility was restored in February 2006.

Labor

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The Liberian labor force is predominantly illiterate and unskilled, and most Liberians lack basic computer skills. The literacy rate is believed to be about 15% for those below age thirty-five. Many skilled professionals have emigrated. The employment rate in the formal sector is approximately 15%.

Employees enjoy freedom of association, they have the right to establish, and become members of organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization or coercion. In this regard, no employer shall discriminate against an employee because of membership in a labor organization. While labor laws and policies themselves do not distort or impede investment, labor disputes are subject to arbitrariness with Liberian employees favored in legal disputes with foreign investors, regardless of the merits of the case. Labor legislation was revised in 2007, repealing a decree that prohibited workers from striking and repealing section 1508 (3), which permitted employees to be dismissed without cause.

According to Liberian law, labor organizations and associations have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities, and to formulate their programs. The labor law specifies that no industrial labor union or organization shall exercise any privilege or function for agricultural workers and no agricultural labor union or organization shall exercise any privilege or function for industrial workers.

Foreign-Trade Zones/Free Ports

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In 1976, the government of Liberia created the Liberia Industrial Free Zone Authority (LIFZA) to promote industrial and corporate growth, but no FTZs are active now. Almost no manufacturing is done in Liberia.

Foreign Direct Investment Statistics

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Investment and commercial activity continue to increase. The National Investment Commission reported \$132 million in new investment in 2008, a 36% increase over 2007 and exceeding the target of \$100 million. Business registration data confirm the sharp increase in investment activity. According to statistics from the Bureau of Domestic Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, total businesses registrations in 2007 (foreign and domestic) increased 12% over the previous year, from 6,764 firms in 2006 to 7,569 firms in 2007. Of total business registrations in 2007, 564 were foreign firms. Partial-year figures for January-September 2008 show 860 foreign firms registered in Liberia. (Note: businesses must register annually. End note.) Although more detailed statistics are still not available, more data are being produced every year.

Web Resources

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Government of Liberia

National Investment Commission
Ministry of Commerce
Ministry of Finance

<http://www.nic.gov.lr>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>
<http://www.mof.gov.lr/>
<http://www.mofliberia.org/>

Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs <http://www.mopea.gov.lr/>
Embassy of Liberia in Washington <http://www.embassyofliberia.org/>
Consular (visa) information <http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

International Financial Institutions

IFC "Doing Business"

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=111> or
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness/Details.aspx?economyid=111>

U.S. Government

U.S. Embassy Monrovia Economic Section (includes list of lawyers, banks and business associations): <http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html>

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Chapter 7: Trade and Project Financing

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- [How Does the Banking System Operate](#)
- [Foreign-Exchange Controls](#)
- [U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks](#)
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How Do I Get Paid (Methods of Payment)

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Payment can be arranged through internationally accepted payment modes such as confirmed irrevocable letters of credit, bills for collection, open account. Some basic financial services, such as credit cards, are not offered in Liberia.

How Does the Banking System Operate

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New banks are entering the market, and existing banks are expanding their services and branch network. Banking regulations can be found on the Central Bank web site: <http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

There are seven commercial banks operating in Liberia: the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI); the International Bank (IB); ECOBANK; Global Bank, First International Bank, United Bank for Africa and AccessBank Liberia Ltd. The latter two were licensed in 2008 and January 2009 respectively. Guarantee Bank has been granted a provisional license. Both AccessBank and Guarantee Bank are microfinance institutions. Banking institutions operate essentially as repositories for funds and provide short-term trade financing and operating capital. Banks have no domestic instruments into which to place liquidity and the Central Bank imposes a 22% reserve requirement. The banks rely on fee income from fund transfers and on cost of transaction charges such as deposit/withdrawal, or cashing checks.

Foreign-Exchange Controls

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Liberian and U.S. dollars are both legal tender, with a floating exchange rate. The Central Bank of Liberia conducts foreign exchange auctions that provide access to foreign currency. Daily exchange rates are available at the CBL website at: <http://www.cbl.org.lr/>

U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks

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International Bank is partially U.S.-owned. United Bank for Africa (UBA, Nigerian) has a branch in New York.

Project Financing

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Financing for large projects is usually sourced from outside Liberia. Many reconstruction projects are funded by international donors -- primarily the United States, the World Bank and the European Commission.

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United States

OPIC:	http://www.opic.gov
U.S. Trade and Development Agency:	http://www.tda.gov/
SBA's Office of International Trade:	http://www.sba.gov/oit/
US\$A Commodity Credit Corporation:	www.fsa.usda.gov/ccp/default.htm
U.S. Agency for International Development:	http://www.usaid.gov
Export-Import Bank	http://www.exim.gov
Country Limitation Schedule:	http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html

Note: EXIM Bank is open in the short-term only in Liberia (360 days max on capital goods) for the public and private sectors.

Liberia

Central Bank of Liberia	http://www.cbl.org.lr/
LBDI	http://www.lbdi.net/
International Bank	www.ibliberia.com
ECOBANK	www.ecobank.com
Global Bank	www.globalbankliberia.com
First International Bank	http://www.fib-lib.com/
United Bank for Africa	www.ubagroup.com
AccessBank	(not yet available)

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Business Customs

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Business wear in Liberia tends to be formal (business suit and tie) although Liberians will wear a traditional cotton shirt on some occasions and more casual wear is appropriate for activities such as outdoor site visits. The usual greeting is a Liberian handshake (which ends with a snap), and it is polite to greet everyone individually when entering a room.

Visitors should arrive for appointments promptly, but it is not unusual for meetings to be delayed, or called/cancelled on very short notice. It is prudent to confirm appointments before setting out.

The postal system is rebuilding and, while effective for messages to major institutions within Monrovia, international couriers are advisable for important communications, especially from overseas. Include the recipient's telephone number on the envelope to facilitate delivery in the absence of standardized street addresses.

Liberia is a cash economy and credit cards are not accepted, including by major hotels. Traveler's checks can be cashed at an unfavorable rate at a few banks and hotels. U.S. and Liberian dollars are legal tender. Carry a supply of small-denomination U.S. currency for tips and incidental purchases.

Travel Advisory

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A visa and proof of vaccination against Yellow Fever are required for entry to Liberia. The Department of State advises American citizens to plan travel to Liberia carefully given the shortage of hotels and transportation challenges. There are no reliable taxis available at the airport, so transport to Monrovia should be arranged in advance. (See

following section on Transportation.) The most updated information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html.

Visa Requirements

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All arriving travelers must present a valid Liberian visa and immunization certificate with proof of a Yellow Fever vaccination. Airport visas are only issued in emergency cases and require approval of the Immigration Commissioner in advance. An airport fee is assessed for each passenger upon departure. Information on Liberia's visa requirements is available from the Liberian Embassy in the United States at: <http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>.

Information on visas for Liberians traveling to the United States is available at: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html> or <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security options are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Consular Section of the US Embassy in Liberia:
<http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/consular.html>

Telecommunications

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There is no functioning land-line communications system. Liberia operates on Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) technology, with four licensed providers. GSM phones and calling cards are readily available, including at the airport and hotels, and are activated upon purchase. The largest GSM service provider, owned by MTN Group SA, introduced limited GPRS access for "pull-email" in 2008 but there is no BlackBerry service.

Internet access is available at small "business centers" in Monrovia, and most of the major hotels provide wireless access, albeit slow. Bandwidth is low and Internet subscription fees are high, due in part to high overhead costs such as the need to self-generate power.

Transportation

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The airport is about 40 miles from Monrovia and there are no car rental agencies or reliable bus or taxi service on-site. Visitors should avoid the yellow taxis and arrange

transportation through a hotel or business contact. When traveling outside Monrovia, four-wheel drive vehicles are advised. Roads are in disrepair and during the rainy season many upcountry roads are impassable.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

Language

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English is the official language. There are 16 tribes, each with its own language.

Health

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There are few clinics and hospitals, and their quality is not up to U.S. standards. Travelers should purchase medical evacuation insurance.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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Liberia is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Business hours are normally from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Liberian annual holidays are as follows:

New Year's Day	January 1
Armed Forces Day	February 11
Decoration Day	2nd Wednesday in March
J.J. Robert's Birthday	March 16
Fast and Prayer Day	April 10
Unification Day	May 14
Independence Day	July 26
Flag Day	August 24
Thanksgiving	November 5
William Tubman's Birthday	November 30
Christmas	December 25

Temporary Entry of Materials and personal Belongings

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U.S. State Department travel information:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_950.html

U.S. visa information:

<http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html> or <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Liberian Embassy in the United States:

<http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html>

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Chapter 9: Contacts, Market Research, and Trade Events

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- [Market Research](#)
- [Trade Events](#)

Contacts

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National Investment Commission:
Ministry of Commerce and Industry:

<http://www.nic.gov.lr/>
<http://www.moci.gov.lr/>

Market Research

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To view market research reports produced by the U.S. Commercial Service, please go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov/marketresearch.html> and click on Country and Industry Market Reports.

Please note that these reports are only available to U.S. citizens and U.S. companies. Registration to the site is required, but free of charge.

Trade Events

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There are no trade events scheduled in Liberia for 2009.

Please click on the link below for information on upcoming trade events in the US.
<http://www.export.gov/tradeevents.html>

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Chapter 10: Guide to Our Services

The U.S. Commercial Service offers customized solutions to help your business enter and succeed in markets worldwide. Our global network of trade specialists will work one-on-one with you through every step of the exporting process, helping you to:

- Target the best markets with our world-class research
- Promote your products and services to qualified buyers
- Meet the best distributors and agents for your products and services
- Overcome potential challenges or trade barriers

For more information on the services the U.S. Commercial Service offers U.S. businesses, please click on the link below. <http://www.export.gov/buyingusproducts.html>

U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest Export Assistance Center or the U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center at (800) USA-TRADE, or go to the following website:

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, The Department of Commerce does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. The Department of Commerce can assist companies in these endeavors.

Web resources:

Government of Liberia

Executive Mansion	http://www.emansion.gov.lr/
Ministry of Finance	http://www.mofliberia.org
Ministry of Commerce	http://www.moci.gov.lr/
Ministry of Agriculture	http://www.moa.gov.lr/
Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy	www.mlme.net
Ministry of Public Works	http://www.mpw.gov.lr/
Ministry of Information	http://www.micat.gov.lr/
(Tourism segment not yet populated)	
National Investment Commission	http://www.nic.gov.lr/
Public Procurement & Concessions Commission	http://www.ppcc.gov.lr/index.php
Central Bank of Liberia	www.cbl.org.lr

Embassy of Liberia	http://www.embassyofliberia.org/
Consular (visa) information	http://www.embassyofliberia.org/consular/index.html

Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee
<http://www.emansion.gov.lr/content.php?sub=Background&related=LRDC>

Private sector/banks

LBDI	http://www.lbdi.net/
International Bank	www.ibliberia.com
Ecobank	www.ecobank.com
Global Bank	www.globalbankliberia.com
First International Bank	http://www.fib-lib.com/
United Bank for Africa	www.ubagroup.com
AccessBank Liberia	Website pending

International Financial Institutions

IFC "Doing Business"

<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=111> or
<http://www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreTopics/StartingBusiness/Details.aspx?economyid=111>

U.S. Government

U.S. Embassy Monrovia	http://www.state.gov/p/af/ci/li/
Economic Section	http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/econcom.html
Consular (visa) information	http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/consularoffice.html

Department of State Liberia Background Notes

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

OPIC	http://www.opic.gov
Trade and Development Agency	http://www.tda.gov/
SBA's Office of International Trade	http://www.sba.gov/oit/
US\$A Commodity Credit Corporation	http://www.fsa.US\$a.gov/cc/default.htm
U.S. Agency for International Development	http://www.usaid.gov
EXIM	http://www.exim.gov
EXIM Country Limitation Schedule	http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html
EXIM Bank is open in the short-term only in Liberia (360 days max on capital goods) for the public and private sectors.	

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ventures or other commercial arrangements. **The Department of Commerce** can assist companies in these endeavors.