

Liberia

KEY FACTS

Official name: Republic of Liberia

Head of State: President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (from 2005; re-elected 8 Nov 2011)

Head of government: President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Ruling party: Coalition led by the Unity Party (UP) (re-elected 11 Oct 2011)

Area: 111,370 square km

Population: 3.98 million (2012)*

Capital: Monrovia

Official language: English

Currency: Liberian dollar (L\$) = 100 cents

Exchange rate: L\$74.01 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$436 (2012)*

GDP real growth: 8.35% (2012)*

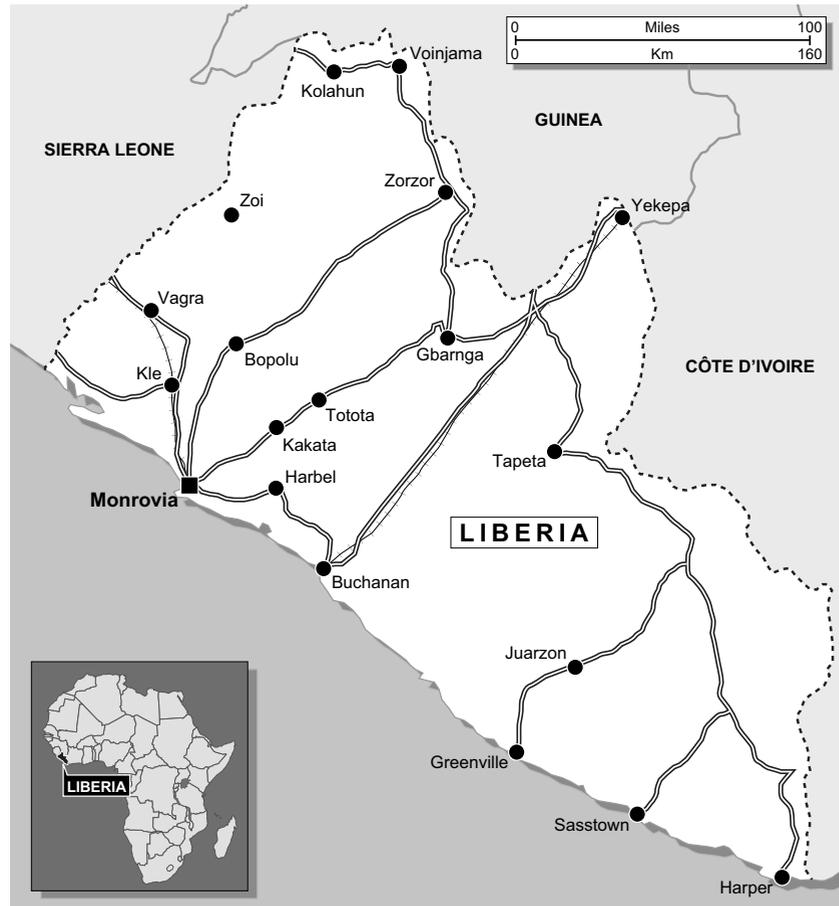
GDP: US\$1.74 billion (2012)*

Inflation: 6.84% (2012)*

Balance of trade: -US\$1.42 billion (2011)

Annual FDI: US\$1.31 billion (2011)

* estimated figure



In 1980, according to the *African Economic Outlook 2013* (AEO), published jointly by the African Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita had reached US\$1,765, nearing middle income status, with growth led by commodity exports from concessions, largely ore and rubber, and contributions from timber and palm oil. However, little of this led to development benefits for the general population and by the end of the civil war in 2003 GDP per capita had fallen to US\$120. Since the end of hostilities, the retail and services sectors have boomed, largely due to a sizeable donor presence. At the same time the concessions sector has been gradually picking up. Otherwise, much of the rest of the economy,

including manufacturing, has seen little growth. The Liberian economy has moved partially towards its pre-war state, with the economy of Monrovia tied very closely to government activities, and the rest of the economy dominated by enclave, largely capital-intensive industries and low-productivity agriculture.

Liberia has significant mineral wealth, with iron ore reserves estimated between 2–5 billion metric tonnes. The first post-war iron ore production was exported in late 2011. Three more mines are expected to come online by 2015, at which point, the sector should contribute up to 20 per cent of GDP and employ about 10,000 people. Rubber was still the largest export earner in 2012, led by a Firestone Rubber plantation that has been in operation for almost 90 years. Liberia has the

largest rainforest in West Africa, which supports significant logging. The government has also leased several offshore oil blocks, and a number of exploratory wells have found deposits that could be commercially viable. Smaller-scale operations in diamonds and gold could employ 30,000 to 45,000 workers. Agriculture includes food crops such as rice and cassava, as well as cash crops such as cocoa and coffee. Palm-oil investments with high employment potential will also gradually come online.

However, there are several constraints on Liberia's ability to take full advantage of its natural resources to enable structural change. Foremost amongst these is a substantial infrastructure deficit. Severely deficient roads, ports, and rails deprive Liberia of the ability to fully exploit its resources. While iron ore concessions have built or rehabilitated rail lines to facilitate their exports, less capital-intensive industries with higher employment potential, such as smallholder agriculture, timber and rubber, need appropriate infrastructure. Feeder and primary roads are essential for smallholders to access markets, trade across borders, and for value chains to develop. Drying, storage and processing infrastructure is also necessary. Timber exports will benefit from the Greenville port once it is fully operational. Finally, the high price of power, which costs over US\$0.54 per kWh — more than three times the African average — does not allow for product processing or the development of a manufacturing sector.

Some key institutional frameworks are already in place. They include a Minerals Management Law (2000) and a Public Procurement and Concessions Act (2006) that regulates the bidding process for concessions. Led by the National Investment Commission (NIC), concession contract negotiations have improved over time and now include stronger provisions for infrastructure development and local employment. Tax regimes, however, still need to be harmonised and made more progressive. Institutional and audit capacity also needs to be strengthened to ensure compliance with regulatory and fiscal regimes.

The Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (LEITI) was established in May 2008 to promote proper use of revenues from mining and forestry. LEITI published its third report in December 2011 and contracts are available online. The National Bureau of Concessions is intended to monitor concessionaires'

compliance with their fiscal and non-fiscal obligations and to encourage the development of linkages with the local economy. Part of this measure will focus on improving social development funds (SDFs), which are managed by local communities to fund development projects in affected areas but have suffered from mismanagement.

The government has launched its Agenda for Transformation (AfT), which plans to address road, port, and energy constraints, as well as improve youth employment and education. It has aligned its FY 2012/13 budget with AfT priorities, but will face substantial funding gaps to finance its desired infrastructure investments. Concessionaire investment plans will have to be fully leveraged to close the infrastructure gap. Mining companies are investing some US\$8 billion in Liberia, US\$5 billion of which are for power and transport infrastructure. Concession agreements promote third-party access for surplus power, roads, port, and rail facilities. Improved co-ordination will be critical to better leverage these resources.

Liberia's post-war economic growth was sustained in 2012, led by the first full year of iron ore exports, construction, and a strong performance in the service sector. Real GDP is estimated to have grown by 8.9 per cent in 2012, and is projected to expand by 7.7 per cent in 2013 and 5.4 per cent in 2014, supported by iron ore production and concession-related foreign direct investment (FDI). This outlook, however, remains vulnerable to commodity price fluctuations, particularly for iron ore and rubber, FDI, and overseas development assistance (ODA), including the

partial withdrawal of the substantial United Nations Mission in Liberia force (UNMIL). Disputes regarding concession agreements, particularly in the forestry, palm oil and oil sectors, also constitute substantial risks. Faster job creation will be necessary to ensure stability. Consumer price inflation moderated to 6.9 per cent in 2012, reflecting lower international food and fuel prices. Inflation is expected to slow down to 5.1 per cent in 2013.

Agriculture

Agriculture, fisheries, and forestry represented about 36 per cent of GDP in 2012, which should retreat slightly in the coming years as iron-ore production increases. Rubber production declined by more than 30 per cent in 2012, due to lower international prices and reduced output by a major producer. While round log production nearly doubled compared to 2011, sawn timber production fell about 25 per cent. Timber production is expected to decline in 2013, due to the moratorium on the Private Use Permits (PUPs), which cover an estimated 40 per cent of Liberia's rainforest and 23 per cent of its land area. The government is investigating fraud allegations in PUP contracts. If these issues are resolved, forestry activities could expand further once transportation links are improved and the Greenville port is fully operational. Palm oil concession investments have slowed due to disputes over land access, but the sector has a high potential for employment creation. The agriculture sector, while it is a large component of income and comprises about half of employment in Liberia, suffers

KEY INDICATORS

Liberia

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	3.45	3.62	*3.78	*3.88	*3.98
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	0.85	0.88	0.99	1.16	*1.74
GDP per capita	US\$	242	229	247	281	*436
GDP real growth	%	7.1	2.9	10.3	8.5	*8.3
Inflation	%	17.5	-1.2	6.4	9.9	*6.8
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	255.3	180.0	241.2	645.7	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	954.7	559.0	719.1	2,068.4	–
Balance of trade	US\$m	-699.4	-379.0	-477.9	-1,422.8	–
Current account	US\$m	1,451.2	-541.1	-736.9	-525.0	*-637.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	160.9	372.5	352.4	–	*497.2
Foreign exchange	US\$m	139.0	171.0	202.7	–	*255.2
Exchange rate	per US\$	63.20	71.55	72.50	72.20	*72.27
* estimated figure						

from low productivity and largely comprises subsistence agriculture.

The industrial and manufacturing sector expanded substantially in 2012, thanks to the first full year of iron ore production from the Yekepa mine run by Arcelor Mittal. The sector accounted for about 21 per cent of GDP in 2012, but only employed about 8 per cent of the labour force. This share could increase since investments in iron ore production from global companies like China Union and BHP Billiton are expected to come online by 2015. Further expansion, however, could be hampered by lower iron ore prices.

Oil exploration continues. One company, African Petroleum, is determining the commercial viability of discoveries made in February 2012. The awarding of additional offshore blocks has been suspended, however, while the petroleum policy is reviewed. Potential production would not commence for several years. Manufacturing – primarily of cement, beverages, woodwork, printing, and various consumer goods – will continue to have a limited impact on output and growth. The sector suffers from an insufficient and prohibitively expensive electricity supply, a shortage of skilled labour, the high cost of inputs, and a limited production capacity.

The services sector contributed around 43 per cent of GDP in 2012. Main activities include trade and hotels, government services, real estate, transport and communication, and construction. The sector is supported by one of the highest levels of per capita overseas development assistance in the world. Services are expected to grow steadily in 2013, although the phased partial withdrawal of the United Nations Mission (UNMIL) through 2015 may reduce demand.

The road network is in need of repair. Only about 45 per cent of households have access to an all-season road within 5 km and much of the country's interior is cut off from the capital during the rainy season. This reduces access to government services and to markets for agricultural production. Access to finance, particularly long term, is limited. Land rights remain problematic and unclear, and the judicial system is ineffective. Finally, both the public and private sectors suffer from severe capacity constraints.

Outlook

The country faces further challenges due to its susceptibility to external factors. Liberia's undiversified economy depends

heavily on exports such as iron ore, rubber, and timber, which are reliant on fluctuating international prices and demand. The major staple food, rice, is imported, increasing vulnerability to external prices. Overseas development assistance, which provides substantial support, will be susceptible to austerity measures in advanced economies.

The staged withdrawal from 8,000 UN troops to 4,000 by 2015 may pose security risks. It will also require the government to divert expenditure to the security sector, and will reduce consumption of local services. The security situation in neighbouring states could also pose a risk. In October 2012, the governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire had agreed to work together to promote peace and security along their common borders. After the 2011 election conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, more than 200,000 refugees fled to Liberia, and more than 60,000 remain as of January 2013.

Internal stability will depend on the ability to generate jobs to offset the 78 per cent of the labour force in vulnerable employment. The US\$16 billion worth of FDI commitments recorded since 2006 are expected to produce only 100,000 jobs over 10 years, although 50,000 youth join the labour force annually. However, notes the AEO much of this FDI has gone into concession agreements which have, in some cases, led to resentment that the government is auctioning off land to foreign companies, with limited local consultation and little benefit to Liberians.

Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Fair
Regional stability	Poor

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1822 Liberia was created by a number of US philanthropists with the idea that freed American and Caribbean slaves would be resettled in Africa. Many refused to go and those who did were met with hostility from the majority indigenous population. 1847 Liberia was established as an independent state with a constitution modelled on that of the United States.. The US did not formally recognise this status until 1862.

1944–71 Under President William Tubman of the True Whig party (which monopolised power from early in Liberia's existence), the country received massive foreign investment, but this only exacerbated tension between the descendants of the settlers and the indigenous people.

1963 The local people were enfranchised – around 97 per cent of the total population.

1971 Tubman was succeeded by William Tolbert.

1980 Following protests against the government the previous year, Tolbert's government was overthrown in a coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, who survived several coup attempts and won an 'election' held in 1985. His government proved widely unpopular.

1984 A new multi-party constitution was introduced.

1985 Samuel Doe was elected president. 1989 Charles Taylor led the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in an uprising.

1990 Opposition groups, led by Prince Johnson and Charles Taylor overran most of Liberia and captured Monrovia. With Johnson and Taylor both claiming the presidency, the West African peacekeeping force, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (Ecomog), installed Amos Sawyer as head of an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). The NPFL controlled around 90 per cent of Liberia; the remnants of Doe's supporters and Johnson's forces were both encamped within the capital. President Doe was executed by NPFL.

1993 After a period of heavy fighting, a UN-sponsored peace accord was signed, calling for the creation of a six-month transitional government representing the IGNU, the NPFL and Doe's supporters and the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (Ulimo).

1994–95 Several agreements were reached, none of which brought a final peace.

1996 An attempt to arrest one faction leader for breaking the truce led to two weeks of serious street fighting in Monrovia until Ecomog regained control. Following the renewed conflict, both the faction leaders and Ecomog agreed to hold elections in 1997.

1997 Charles Taylor and his NPFL won a landslide victory.

1999 The Ghanaian and Nigerian troops, who were part of Ecomog, withdrew from Liberia.

2000 President Charles Taylor announced that his government was forming a new army.

2001 There were rebel attacks on the border between Guinea and Liberia and Liberia closed its border with Sierra Leone.

2002 A state of emergency was declared after rebels (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)) attacked a town near the capital, Monrovia.

2003 The UN Security Council extended its arms embargo against Liberia for 12

months and added an export ban on raw timber. Foreign nationals were evacuated from Monrovia amid fighting by LURD rebels in their campaign against President Taylor, who initially refused to resign. President Taylor finally accepted Nigeria's asylum offer. West African peacekeepers entered Monrovia as President Taylor resigned and named Moses Blah as president. The government and two rebel groups selected Gyude Bryant, chairman of the Liberia Action Party (LAP), to head Liberia's interim post-war administration. 2004 International donors pledged more than US\$500 million in reconstruction aid. The UN Security Council voted to freeze the assets of former president, Charles Taylor.

2005 The first elections since the end of the civil war were held; in the presidential run-off Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (Unity Party) (UP) defeated George Weah (Liberal Party) (LP), becoming the first woman president in Africa. The UN Security Council extended its ban on arms sales to Liberia for a further 12 months and the sale of diamonds and timber for a further six months.

2006 Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office as president on 16 January. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission began work. Former president Charles Taylor was extradited from Nigeria into UN custody in Sierra Leone and indicted for war crimes before the UN-backed Special Court in The Hague (The Netherlands). The government concluded a mineral concession agreement with Indian-based, Mittal Steel.

2007 Personal banking arrived in the north-east border region of Ganta, with the opening of the first bank after 16 years of civil war, when most banks outside the capital region were looted and left defunct. Liberia inherited debts of US\$3.7 billion – an unsustainable amount the World Bank said was 30 times the country's annual export earnings and eight times greater than its GDP. The US granted US\$500 million in aid and agreed to cancel US\$391 million in debt, then pledged US\$200 million in further funds. The UN lifted a ban on the export of diamonds and the government lifted the moratorium on the mining, sale and export of diamonds. The vital Mano River Bridge, connecting Sierra Leone with Liberia, was officially re-opened.

2008 US President George W Bush became the first US president to visit in 30 years. The first census since 1984 was undertaken, which recorded a population of 3,489,072.

2009 A US court convicted Charles 'Chuckie' Taylor, son of former president Taylor, and sentenced him to 97 years in prison for torture and *ex officio* executions. Liberia reduced its foreign debt by a

significant amount when it bought back US\$1.2 billion in government debt at 97 per cent of its face value. The World Bank provided 50 per cent of the necessary payment and Germany, Norway, the UK and US provided the other 50 per cent between them. Former president, Charles Taylor, began his testimony in his trial, in The Hague, on charges of terrorism, murder, rape and torture. The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that a 30-year ban should be placed on President Johnson-Sirleaf, and many other senior politicians, for backing Charles Taylor when he overthrew the previous administration in 1989. President Johnson-Sirleaf apologised for her support of Charles Taylor in 1989. In August, the members of parliament (MPs) said they would take one year to consult their constituents' views of President Johnson-Sirleaf, before making a decision about her future.

2010 President Johnson-Sirleaf received a number of plaudits by leading international publications, claiming she was one of the best leaders in the world and the best in Africa. Opposition parties and candidates claim her progress had been too little and too slow.

2011 In January the controversial 30-year ban from politics imposed on President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and a number of politicians and individuals by the now dissolved Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), for their alleged roles in the country's war, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. President Johnson-Sirleaf said that she would stand for re-election in the coming presidential elections. In February, one of Charles Taylor's lawyers, Courtenay Griffiths, walked out of Taylor's war trial, after Griffiths' final written brief, submitted 20 days late, was rejected by the judges. However in March the decision was reversed and the defence argument was completed. Two Liberians, found guilty of defrauding World Vision (funded by USAid) of food and construction materials for Liberia, valued at US\$2 million, were jailed in the US for over 11 years. The first official rate of GDP since 1987 was published in August. President Johnson-Sirleaf and Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee were two of the three women (the third was Tawakkul Karman from the Yemen) to win the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize in October. The three women were honoured for 'their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work'. Parliamentary elections were held in October, all seats in the lower house were in contention and half the seats in the Senate. The UP won most seats in the lower house, with a return of 24 candidates.

The opposition CDC won 11 seats. Presidential elections were also held in October in which 16 candidates took part. Incumbent Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (UP) won 43.9 per cent of the vote and her closest opponent, Winston Tubman (CDC) won 32.7 per cent. Winston Tubman withdrew from the runoff elections, alleging fraud; he called on his supporters to boycott the election. President Johnson-Sirleaf accused Tubman of violating the constitution by urging Liberians not to take part in the elections and advised all to participate. A runoff election took place in November between these two candidates and despite the appeal by the president for voters not to boycott the election, turnout was only 33 per cent; Johnson-Sirleaf won 90 per cent and Tubman around 9 per cent.

2012 On 31 March, former warlord George Boley was deported from the US to stand trial for human rights abuses during the civil war. On 26 April, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) found former president Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes perpetrated during the civil war in Sierra Leone. On 30 May the SCSL sentenced Charles Taylor to 50 years in jail, to be served in the UK. The senior judge said Taylor 'aided and abetted' RUF rebels in prolonging a conflict where 'the lives of many more innocent civilians in Sierra Leone were lost or destroyed as a direct result of his actions.' Nobel Laureate, Leymah Gbowee, resigned as head of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in October. She was replaced by George Weah, the popular ex-footballer and the opposition's Vice Presidential candidate in 2011, in December.

2013 Exam results showed that not one of the almost 25,000 students who sat exams for entrance to the University of Liberia passed. President Johnson-Sirleaf had already said that education in Liberia was 'in a mess'. After discussions with the university, the President said the university would nevertheless take on 1,800 students. Former president Taylor's appeal against his conviction for war crimes was rejected by the SCSL on 25 September. He is set to serve his term in a British prison, although on 14 October he requested he serve his term in Rwanda rather than the UK. He arrived in the UK on 15 October.

Political structure

Constitution

The multi-party 1984 constitution, approved by referendum, replaced the 1847 constitution which was suspended in April 1980.

The executive

Executive power rests with the president, elected by universal adult suffrage for a term of six years; the maximum number of terms is two. The president is head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president must be a natural-born Liberian citizen of not less than 35 years of age, the owner of unencumbered property valued at not less than US\$25,000 and resident in Liberia 10 years prior to the elections.

National legislature

The bicameral Legislature of Liberia consists of the House of Representatives (lower house) with 64 members directly elected by popular vote for six-year terms, and the Senate (upper house) with 30 members; each county (constituency) returns two candidates each (the winner is the senior senator and second placed is the junior senator). Senior senators serve for nine-year terms and junior senators for six-year terms.

Legal system

Liberia has a dual system of statutory law based on Anglo-American common law for the modern sector and customary law based on unwritten tribal practices for the indigenous sector.

Last elections

11 October and 8 November 2011 (parliamentary, presidential and runoff)

Results: Parliamentary (lower house): Unity Party (UP) won 24 seats (out of 73), Congress of Democratic Change (CDC) 11, Liberty Party (LP) seven, National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP) six, National Democratic Coalition (NDC) five, National Patriotic Party (NPP) three, Alliance for Peace and Democracy (APD) three, Movement for Progressive Change (MPC) two, independents nine; three other political parties each won one seat. Senate (50 per cent of membership): UP four (out of 15), NPP four, CDC two, four other parties and one independent each won one seat.

Presidential: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (UP) won 43.9 per cent of the vote, Winston Tubman (CDC) 32.7 per cent, Prince Yormie Johnson (NUDP) 11.6 per cent, Charles Brumskine (LP) 5.5 per cent; 12 other candidates each won less than 1.5 per cent. Turnout was 71.64 per cent. Runoff: Sirleaf won 90 per cent, Tubman (boycotting runoff) around 9 per cent. Turnout was 33 per cent.

Next elections

2017 (presidential and House of Representatives); 2014 (Senate)

Political parties

Ruling party

Coalition led by the Unity Party (UP) (re-elected 11 Oct 2011)

Main opposition party

Congress of Democratic Change (CDC)

Population

3.98 million (2012)*

Approximately 46 per cent of the total population are under 15 years.

Last census: 21 March 2008: 3,476,608

Population density: 32 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 48 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 3.2 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) 500,000 (UNHCR 2004)

Ethnic make-up

Indigenous tribes (95 per cent), Americo-Liberians (5 per cent).

Religions

Christianity (68 per cent), traditional beliefs (18 per cent), Muslim (14 per cent).

Education

Primary education lasts for six years ending at age 12. Junior secondary school last for three years before successful students can progress onto senior secondary school for a further three years.

Higher education is provided principally by the University of Liberia in Monrovia, the African Methodist Episcopal University and Cuttington University College.

Not one of the almost 25,000 students who sat exams for entrance to the University of Liberia passed in 2013. President Johnson-Sirleaf had already said that education in Liberia was 'in a mess'. After discussions with the university, the President said the university would nevertheless take on 1,800 students.

Literacy rate: 56 per cent adult rate; 71 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

Compulsory years: Six to 16.

Health

In 2007, the health minister estimated that the country had only one-tenth of the doctors needed for its post-conflict society. Of the 120 doctors in post, 70 were foreign doctors serving with international medical organisations and charities.

Other healthcare professionals needed included nurses, midwives and laboratory technicians. Under-funding and lack of opportunity has led most trained healthcare workers to emigrate and many doctors resident in Liberia prefer to live in the coastal region leaving rural areas without medical cover. The government has offered a gratuity of US\$1,000 (five times the current average salary) for any doctor who accepts assignments inland.

HIV/Aids

Altogether there were 96,000 adults, of which 54,000 women, and 8,000 children under the age of 15, living with HIV/Aids in 2003. Deaths from Aids

totalled 7,200 and there were 36,000 orphans aged 0–17 created in 2003 (UCSF).

HIV prevalence: 5.9 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

Life expectancy: 42 years, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 5.2 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef)

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 75 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Head of population per physician: 0.03 physicians per 1,000 people, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Main cities

Monrovia (capital, estimated population 1.1 million in 2012), Ganta (42,786), Buchanan (35,411), Kakata (34,749), Gbarnga (34,571), Voinjama (27,329).

Languages spoken

English is the business language. There are three main Liberian dialects – Golla, Bassa, Kpelle, Kru and Vai.

Official language/s

English

Media

The state of media in Liberia is still struggling to repair not only the damaged technology but also the proficiency and of the profession. Installations were either destroyed or looted during the civil war and the professionalism of journalists was corrupted as patronage was bestowed on only those that supported the former regime of Charles Taylor.

Press

Since the former president Taylor's departure, several independent newspapers have started publication.

Dailies: In English *The Inquirer* (www.theinquirer.com.lr), *The News* (www.thenews.com.lr), *The Analyst* (www.analystliberia.com), *Daily Observer* (www.liberianobserver.com) and *Poll Watch* are all published in Monrovia.

Weeklies: The private publication, *The Heritage*, is published in Monrovia.

Broadcasting

State-owned TV and radio suffered particularly from looting in the civil war and lost its TV and FM radio transmitters in 1991.

The Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) has one FM small transmitter that can reach only Monrovia, and no television.

The LCN controls a TV and radio network which uses the frequency 89FM, previously used by LBS, and which, by law, belongs to the state.

Radio: The public, Liberia Broadcasting System (ELBS) (www.liberiabroadcastingsystem.com) has a limited service but provides programmes in local languages, English and French. Others radio services include

Star Radio (www.starradio.org.lr), Unmil Radio (<http://unmil.org>) operated by the United Nations mission, Sky FM and two Christian stations. Community radio services are operated, supported by international entities.

Television: There are three, private TV stations, Clar TV, Power TV and Real TV.

Other news agencies: APA:

www.apanews.net

Panapress: www.panapress.com

Economy

Liberia has a number of marketable natural resources including iron ore, gold, diamonds, rubber, timber and recently discovered oil off its Atlantic coastline. It also has the world's second largest registered fleet (after Panama), licensing over 1,700 maritime vessels, including 35 per cent of the global tanker fleet. This has the potential to provide a reasonable standard of living for its people. Nevertheless, in 2011 the UN Human Development Index (HDI), ranked Liberia 182 out of 187 for national development in health, education and income. Since 2006, Liberia's economy has improved, but this progress has not matched the improvement of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010, 57.7 per cent of the population experienced at least one indicator of poverty, while 83.7 per cent lived on less than the equivalent of US\$1.25 per day; the headcount poverty rate was 83.9 per cent of the population (2000–10).

Many years of mismanagement, before the end of the civil war in 2003, left Liberia with unsustainable debt of around US\$3.7 billion, or 800 per cent of GDP, or 3,000 per cent of total export earnings. Under the Paris Club's April 2008 agreement Liberia had been granted debt relief to clear US\$1.5 billion. As it complies with economic reforms to attract investment it also aims at further debt relief through the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative. In 2009 a British court ordered Liberia to pay US\$20 million to two investment funds based in Caribbean tax-havens for debts dating back to 1978, an amount equivalent to 5 per cent of the government's 2009 budget. Liberia referred to these as 'vulture funds' (finance companies that buy up defaulted debts of poor countries and either harass the country or any entity trading with, or investing in, the country, demanding prompt repayment or risk seizure of monies through legal channels) and declared it had no money to pay the debt.

In September 2010 the 19-nation Paris Club of creditors wrote-off a further US\$1.2 billion in Liberian debt, a sum that had until then accounted for most of debt servicing within the national budget.

In November the government came to an agreement with two 'vulture funds', to repay 3 per cent of US\$43 million, to clear the debt. This follows rulings in the US and UK court rulings, both of which said Liberia must repay the debt. The finance minister said that since 2006 the government had 'not borrowed a dime from any country'.

Liberia is a large recipient of international aid, used to fund both public spending and social projects. GDP growth since 2006 has been consistently high at 8.9 per cent, rising to 9.1 per cent in 2007. Despite a downturn in the global economy real growth was still buoyant at 7.1 per cent in 2008, slowing to 2.9 per cent in 2009 as world trade and investment was cut. In 2010, GDP growth picked up to an estimated 5 per cent, with an estimated growth of 6.9 per cent in 2011. As Liberia tried to rebuild, the cost of imports far outstripped exports, resulting in annual trade deficits of -US\$379 million in 2009 and -US\$459 million in 2010 (and forecast at -US\$592 million in 2011) of which the largest components were imported oil and rice. Rubber accounted for over US\$200 million in export revenue in 2008, falling to US\$93 million in 2009 before returning to earlier levels, with exports of US\$156 million in 2010 and a forecast US\$258 million in 2011. Unemployment is estimated to be over 50 per cent. An IMF programme in 2011 included plans to improve broad-based employment, although Liberia suffers from a lack of educated and trained workers, many of whom left the country during the civil war. Remittances from migrant workers amounted to US\$31 million (28.6 per cent of GDP) in 2010 and were estimated to have reached US\$33 million in 2011.

External trade

Liberia is a member of the Economic Community of Western African States (Ecowas), which was set up to promote economic integration among members. It has expressed an interest in joining four other Anglophone-members in setting up a single currency, which will eventually be merged with the Francophone-members' currency to produce a single currency (the eco) for the region.

The government has encouraged foreign direct investment (FDI) in mining with a US\$1 billion deal negotiated with Arcelor Mittal Steel in 2007. Natural rubber is the largest export product.

Imports

Principal imports include petroleum, rice and other foodstuffs, medicines and pharmaceuticals, machinery and transport equipment and manufactured goods.

Main sources: South Korea (typically 35 per cent of total), Japan (20 per cent), Singapore (15 per cent)

Exports

Principal exports rubber, timber, iron, diamonds, cocoa and coffee.

Main destinations: Germany (typically 40 per cent of total), Poland (10 per cent), US (10 per cent).

Agriculture

Hit by hostilities and migration from rural areas, production has been reduced from pre-war levels. Agriculture is still the most important sector of the economy, contributing approximately 35 per cent to GDP and employing 55 per cent of the workforce.

One of the country's principal cash crops is rubber, which provides a large proportion of exports. Although mostly grown in foreign-owned plantations, smallholders are responsible for over half the total acreage planted.

Coffee, cocoa and timber are also grown for export, but, as with rubber, earnings have been reduced due to falling world prices. The main food crops are rice, cassava and sweet potatoes, followed by eddoes and yams. The government has attempted to improve production to reduce the need for imports of rice which have become necessary to meet domestic demand.

Palm oil has been produced mostly for the domestic market, but since 2009 a number of Asian companies have shown an interest in investing in the industry. Sime Derby (Malaysia) was granted a 220,000 hectare (ha) concession in 2009, Equatorial Palm Oil (UK) have a 169,000ha development and in 2010 Golden Agri Resources (Singapore) were 'actively evaluating' investing in another 220,000ha project. These three developments alone would significantly contribute to Liberia's exports.

A national emergency was declared in January 2009 following an infestation of the caterpillar of the *Achaea catocaloides* moth, which consumed crops and spoiled drinking water; 20,000 families were evacuated from the overrun regions. Commercial ocean fishing is a growing activity, particularly fishing for shrimps. Despite international sanction prohibiting timber exports, imposed in 2001, revenue from the trade in timber played a vital role in providing funding to ex-president Charles Taylor, for illicit arms imports during the civil war. Following his defeat, all sanctions were lifted in 2006; at which time steps were undertaken to control the exploitation of forest resources, including the cancellation of all previous logging concessions. The Forestry Development Authority began by introducing new,

transparent contracts and a forestry reform programme.

Industry and manufacturing

The small industrial sector contributes 4.9 per cent to GDP. The manufacturing sector is relatively underdeveloped, contributing 4 per cent to GDP. Activity is mainly confined to textiles, food and rubber processing, wood products, cement and chemicals.

The sector has been weakened by the country's upheavals, which damaged infrastructure and deterred investment.

Growth in the sector is in any case constrained by the small size of the domestic market, the need to import practically all raw materials, shortage of skilled labour and financial problems.

Tourism

The tourist industry is slowly recovering from the country's civil war. The Robertsport-Madina road was refurbished by the end of 2009 and gives access to the beautiful scenery lying between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Piso (a proposed wildlife sanctuary), an area which has the greatest potential for tourist development. There are ancient natural rock formations of interest, the Sapo National Park, containing up to 40 per cent of West Africa's rainforest, and African culture to view. International travellers to Liberia must be hardy and prepared as facilities which could be expected in other more settled West African countries are missing in Liberia. Public transport and taxis from the Monrovia-Roberts International airport into Monrovia are absent and transfers must be arranged before arrival. Although Liberia requested that two Liberian sites, Sapo National Park and Providence Island be added to Unesco's World Heritage List, by January 2012 no decision had been made.

Environment

Liberia is involved in the Great Apes Survival Project (Grasp), in concert with Unesco, in the first concerted programme developed to counter a major extinction crisis of great apes. Liberia requested the UN Scientific and Cultural Organisation to add two Liberian sites, Sapo National Park and Providence Island, to the World's Cultural Heritage.

Mining

Prior to the civil war, Liberia was one of the world's major producers of iron ore (mainly extracted from mines at Mount Nimba, Mano River and Bong), which accounted for around 30 per cent of GDP. Production ceased completely as a result of the war. Efforts are being made to revive the sector. In August 2005, an agreement was entered into with the Mittal Steel

Company to develop reserves and associated infrastructure in western Liberia.

Diamonds are mined, previously earning Liberia an estimated US\$300 million annually. During the war, factions exploited production. Current production figures are hard to gauge due to the allegations of diamond smuggling with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Liberia's diamond exports, along with timber, have been subject to UN economic sanctions since 2001, because of misuse of the revenues. Foreign investors, anticipating future stability, are showing interest in the sector.

A deal between the Israeli Diamond Institute (IDI) and the government was signed, whereby diamond experts from IDI will help in the search for local diamonds. The agreement was the first since a moratorium on mining, sales and export of Liberian diamonds was lifted by the UN, imposed in 2001 in an effort to halt the trade in 'blood diamonds' used to fund the civil war.

Hydrocarbons

There are no known oil or gas reserves in Liberia although there is potential in the territorial waters in the Gulf of Guinea. Investigations are at an early stage, in a second round of offshore exploration bids, opened in July 2008. The National Oil Company of Liberia is responsible for the oil industry.

Oil consumption remained fairly constant at between 3.5–4.0 million barrels per day over the period 2004–07, but is likely to increase as development picks up since the end of the civil war.

Any uses of natural gas and coal imports are commercially insignificant.

Energy

The electricity generation and supply infrastructure was wrecked early in the civil war. Total installed generating capacity in 2006, by the state-owned Liberian Electricity Corporation (LEC) was 2MW. In 2007 the emergency power program (EPP), in partnership with international donors, supplied emergency generators for use in Monrovia. Funds for development will add 7MW to Monrovia's power supply by 2009; neighbourhood deliveries will be provided via pre-pay meters and rural electricity will be provided by solar panels and other renewable sources.

A technical study was undertaken to determine sites for seven hydroelectricity plants, plus the development of a new 100MW facility at the existing Mount Coffee hydro location. Mini-hydro power plants are also being considered, throughout the country. When completed the country's generating capacity should be around 1.2 gigawatts.

Banking and insurance

The civil war has led to a virtual collapse of the banking system and lending services have declined dramatically. The country's five commercial banks have found it hard to attract capital savings, as the public and businesses have tended to hoard money rather than put it in banks due to a general crisis of confidence in the banking system. The subsequent lack of liquidity in the banking sector has led to a wide spread between the average deposit and lending rates. Lack of affordable bank credit has hampered growth across the economy, particularly the agricultural sector. Unless the government can ensure political stability and security and a policy is instituted to increase bank savings, Liberia's banking sector will remain in the doldrums.

Central bank

In October 1999 the National Legislature enacted a law creating the Central Bank of Liberia, which replaced the National Bank of Liberia. Monetary authority functions are undertaken by the central government.

Main financial centre

Monrovia

Time

GMT

Geography

Liberia lies on the west coast of Africa, with Sierra Leone and Guinea to the north and Côte d'Ivoire to the east.

Liberia's coastline extends for about 580km, over half of which comprises sandy beaches. The terrain is generally low-lying. Lagoons, creeks and mangrove swamps punctuate the low coastal plain, behind which the land rises to a gently rolling, grassy plateau. Further inland, in the north-east, is mountainous, where the highest point in the country at 1,380m is Mount Wuwve. The plateau and mountain regions are home to approximately 40 per cent of Africa's rainforest.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

Hot and tropical with high levels of humidity (85–90 per cent) and there is little temperature variation throughout the year. Average temperatures range between 20–22 degrees Celsius (C) at night and 28–32 degrees C during the day. Wet season lasts from May–October with especially heavy rain June–July.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all, valid for six months from date of entry.

Visa

Required by all, except nationals of Ecowas countries, Israel, South Korea and Thailand.

Currency advice/regulations

There are no restrictions on import and export of local or foreign currencies. US dollars are legal tender.

Health (for visitors)**Mandatory precautions**

Yellow fever vaccination certificate is required.

Advisable precautions

Typhoid, hepatitis A, tetanus and polio vaccinations are recommended. Malaria prophylaxis should be taken as risk exists throughout the country. There is a rabies risk. Drinking water should be boiled and filtered.

Hotels

The airport hotel and other major hotels in Monrovia should be booked in advance. Rates are expensive and tipping is optional.

Credit cards

There is limited acceptance of credit cards.

Public holidays (national)**Fixed dates**

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 11 Feb (Armed Forces Day), 15 Mar (J J Roberts' Birthday), 12 Apr (National Redemption Day), 14 Apr (Fast and Prayer Day), 14 May (National Unification Day), 26 Jul (Independence Day), 24 Aug (Flag Day), 29 Nov (President Tubman's Birthday), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

Variable dates

Decoration Day (Mar), Fast and Prayer Day (Apr), Thanksgiving Day (Nov)

Working hours**Banking**

Mon–Thu: 0900–1200; Fri: 0800–1400.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0800–1200, 1400–1600.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0800–1200, 1300–1600.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0800–1300, 1500–1800.

Telecommunications**Telephone/fax**

The service is 100 per cent automatic but very limited outside Monrovia.

Mobile/cell phones

Cell phone numbers (seven plus seven digits, six plus five digits) are working.

Weights and measures

Imperial system

Security

Crime is high in the capital, Monrovia, with theft and assault prevalent, particularly at night.

Getting there**Air**

International airport/s: Monrovia-Roberts International (ROB), 60km from city; duty-free shop, bar, restaurant, buffet, post office, shops.

Airport tax: US\$25

Surface

Road: The vital Mano River bridge connecting Sierra Leone with Liberia was officially reopened in June 2007.

Getting about**National transport**

Air: Air taxi companies charter planes between Monrovia and airfields throughout the country.

Road: A network of 10,000km covers most areas, although many roads are un-tarred. Main highways are: Monrovia-Sanniquellie (with a branch Ganta-Harper) and Monrovia-Buchanan.

Rail: There are no passenger railways.

Water: Freight/passenger services between Monrovia and Buchanan.

City transport

Taxis: Zoning system in operation. Negotiate fares in advance for long-distance journeys. Tipping is not usual.

Car hire

Chauffeur-driven or self-drive cars are available in Monrovia. International driving licence or national driving licence with permit (valid for up to 30 days) accepted. Traffic drives on the right. Self-drive cars are not generally recommended.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international dialling code (IDD) for Liberia is +231, followed by subscriber's number.

In late-2006 land-line telephone numbers (6 digits beginning with a 2) were still not functioning. Cell phone numbers (7 + 7 digits and 6 + 5 digits) were working.

Chambers of Commerce

Liberia Chamber of Commerce, Capitol Hill, PO Box 92, Monrovia (tel: 223-738).

Banking

Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI), Corner of Randall and Ashmun Streets, PO Box 547, Monrovia (tel: 227-140; fax: 226-939).

International Bank (Liberia) Limited; 64 Broad Street, Monrovia (tel: 227-438; fax: 226-092/3).

Liberian Trading and Development Bank Ltd, PO Box 293, Tradevco Building, Ashmun Street, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-072, 226-074; fax: 226-471).

Central bank

Central Bank of Liberia: PO Box 2048, Warren and Carey Streets, Monrovia (tel: 226-991; fax: 226-144).

Travel information**Ministry of tourism**

Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, United Nations Drive, Capitol Hill, PO Box 10-9021, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-269; fax: 226-069; e-mail: webmaster@liberia.net).

Ministries

Ministry of Commerce, Industry, PO Box 10-9041, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-283).

Ministry of Finance, Bureau of Customs and Excise, PO Box 10-9013, 1000 Monrovia 10.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PO Box 10-9002, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-763, 221-029, 221-751).

Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, PO Box 10-9021, Capitol Hill, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-045, 226-269, 227-349; fax: 226-045).

Ministry of Justice, Bureau of Immigration, PO Box 10-9006, Broad Street, 1000 Monrovia 10.

Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, PO Box 10-9024, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-281, 221-580, 221-488, 221-460).

Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, PO Box 10-9016, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-962, 227-987, 222-121, 222-331, 223-208, 221-971).

Other useful addresses

Liberian Development Corporation, PO Box 9043, Monrovia.

Liberian Embassy (USA), 5201 16th Street, NW, Washington DC 20011 (tel: (+1-202)-723-0437; fax: (+1-202)-723-0436; e-mail: info@liberiaemb.org).

Liberian News Agency (LINA), Ministry of Information, PO Box 9021, Capitol Hill, Monrovia (tel: 222-229).

National Investment Commission, PO Box 10-9043, 1000 Monrovia 10 (tel: 226-685, 226-575).

National Ports Authority, PO Box 14, Monrovia.

Statistics Bureau, PO Box 9016, Monrovia (tel: 222-622).