

Field trip report from Grand Gedeh

Introduction

The Liberia Forest Media Watch (LFMW), with support from the EU through the French Development Agency (AFD) has undertaken a field visit to Grand Gedeh County. The field visit was undertaken on 27th July 2025. Team Leader Paul M. Kanneh led a team of LFMW staff. The three days field trip was about assessing [reports](#) of the migration of cocoa farmers from Ivory Coast to Liberia via Grand Gedeh County, where they are allegedly involved in widespread deforestation for cocoa farming.

The team did not organize the usual town hall meeting as part of security measures to avoid potential harm given the sensitive nature of the situation, in which lives have been [lost](#), forest rangers held [hostage](#) and anti-deforestation campaigners [threatened](#) by local officials. The team, instead, had one-on-one interview with interested individuals and stakeholders willing to speak on the matter. The team used the trip to obtain valuable insights of the situation, including photos of deforestation and arrested foreign nationals believed to be Bourkinabes.

This report has been prepared to aid research groups or civil society organizations that maybe interested in making a detailed follow up. The accounts contained in this report have not been verified through any acceptable fact-findings means. The comments/statements are drawn from individuals who spoke on forest hour or through telephone conversations or face-face to conversation with LFMW during field trip.

It also contained summary information of a report [published](#) by a sub-regional civil society organization based in Ivory Coast, IDEF on cocoa farming in Liberia. Quite some time now the Liberia Forest Media Watch has been following reports of the influx of foreign nations in Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties, and thought to put together this report for a possible detailed/scientific Independent Forest Monitoring mission to ascertain the level of forest destruction.



A photo of trees being destroyed by setting up fire at their bottoms

IDEF account

In April 2024, IDEF published an Independent Cocoa Observer Report, title “ALERT ON THE SUPPLY OF CACOA FROM LIBERIA”. In that report, IDEF said since 2020, a village in Liberia has welcomed and provided forest plots to 48 people from Ivory Coast. In total, the IDEF report said 3 Liberian villages- Yargbeken, Touwloken, and Partaken accounted for 183 foreign cocoa smallholders, including around 60 for the period from December 2023 to January 2024 alone. The IDEF report spoke about the deforestation of primary forests to grow cocoa. IDEF said it documented the existence of cocoa plantations in Liberia and new clearings of primary forest, which were established in 2005. In short, the encroachment on the forest by foreign nationals began as early as 2005. In a single village called Yargbeken, IDEF said it identified a total of 36 plantations and 12 newly-cleared plots in the eastern and southern parts of the village. Below is the breakdown of hectares of land already cultivated, according to IDEF:

- ✓ 13 cocoa plantations with an average size of 7.3 hectares, created in 2018 that are producing:
- ✓ 18 cocoa plantations of 6 to 8 hectares created in 2021;
- ✓ 5 cocoa plantations being created (young cocoa plants visible) whose surface areas could not be estimated due to the absence of the landowners and producers
- ✓ 12 recently cleared forest plots with no cocoa plants present at the time of the field mission.

Revelations on Forest Hour by various stakeholders

Four forest hour editions, 13 July 2023, 25 April 2024, 2 May 2024, 27 March 2025 discussed the issues of Bourkinabes encroachment on forest land in Liberia. All guests/callers accused community officials, including landowners, town chiefs and influential farmers of harboring the Bourkinabes presence, most of whom used the Bourkinabes to cultivate their farms.

Statement by Madam Nora G. Bowier, FDA’s Deputy Managing Director for Communities, Conservation and Carbon, Nora Bowier

In an April 25, 2024 edition of forest hour, Nora acknowledged the presence of the Bourkinabes in the Liberian forests through Nimba and Grand Gedeh. She is quoted below as saying:

“This phenomenon about the coming of migrants from Ivory Coast is not new. It started about 2 or 3 years back, it was emerging at the time but it has now has become a big problem. Our latest trip to the counties recently, it was confirmed again that the encroachment of illegal migrants from the Ivory Coast into our forest areas is becoming a challenge because they are entering forest areas and cutting down the forest planting cocoa farms. Within Sapo National Park, we also confirmed that this is happening, and to be frank, we really have to pay attention to this issue to ensure that we do not cause huge amount of deforestation, as a result of this problem.

On the same 25 edition of the Forest Hour, Head of Forest Governance Program of the Sustainable Development Institute, Jonathan Yiah said he has taken key interest in the IDEF report. He was key on why Liberian CSOs did not flag the Bourkinabes issue before the publication by the Ivorian NGO.

“My attention was to the point that civil society organizations working in Liberia, would have in fact flagged this out before it would have been a report coming out of Ivory coast because this has been an issue that we have discussed at our different forums, at our civil society forums, and also at the FDA multi-stakeholder meeting. It appears as though, the immediate past government has developed less interest in this particular subject, and so, the situation has existed up to this moment”.

Jonathan suggested that policy makers have to take interest in the issue and design means to address the situation. He stressed on the level of deforestation that was happening as a result of the forest cultivation for cocoa farming. “Like you read from the report, people are coming from Ivory Coast, and you explained the situation about the deforestation, alarming deforestation rate as a result of clearing forest and planting cocoa, which has made ivory coast the highest cocoa producer in the world, and they are trying to green wash, they don’t have space to grow more cocoa to continue to be the highest cocoa producer in the world. Now they are coming to Liberia, where they have made inroads to Liberia, they’re unable to have real comprehensive market chain to the point where even the government of Liberia can generate revenue, this is not happening”, said Jonathan.

Statement by Emmanue Boah

Emmanuel is the Chief Officer of the Kparblee Community Forest. He reported that the Borukinabes has encroached on the community forest, where they are cutting down trees by using chemicals and fire. The Kparblee Community Forest is located in electoral district #6 in Nimba County. Mr. Boah described how the settlers are brought in by locals for labor purposes and are given land to cultivate, which is he said is illegal under community right law of 2009 with regard to forest lands. “They are destroying the forest with chemicals and planting cash crops, which is causing environmental harm”, said Emmanuel. He expressed concern about the settlers' brazen behavior and the potential for community backlash, referencing a previous riot on November 16 2023. He disclosed that the settlers, despite being strangers in a foreign environment, appeared unfriendly, which threatens local community members who own the forests.



Photos of tress being set ablaze



Photo of the remains of Bourkiabes allegedly killed by fallen trees

Recommendations from Emmanuel

- Investigate the illegal occupation of the community forest by the Burkinabe people and take appropriate action.
- Follow up on the November 16th riot and ensure that justice is served for the affected community.
- Engage with the community to understand their concerns and develop a plan to address the illegal occupation and protect the community forest.

Recommendations from the public

- The government should investigate the illegal activities in the forests and take appropriate action to address the issue.
- The government should strengthen the security presence and border controls to prevent further encroachment and illegal activities.
- The government should engage with local communities and empower them to participate in the protection and management of the forests.
- The government should work with relevant stakeholders, including NGOs and civil society organizations, to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for forest conservation and protection.

Statement by Abraham Dorley, Spokesperson of the Liberia Immigration Service

Abraham Dorley spoke about the threat to national security issues with the influx of migrants from Ivory Coast. Like many speakers, Dorley believed then that some local authorities may be granting permission to strangers to live in certain areas without proper security checks. He clarified that these individuals are allowed to reside and work in conformity with local leaders and within the framework of the law. He confirmed the presence of Burkinabes living in Nimba County, with some residing in the forest, many in rural towns. He emphasized the importance of adhering to constitutional measures and ensuring that all individuals reside within the law.

Recommendations from Abraham Dorley

- Investigate the total number of Burkinabe residing in the Nimba region and the surrounding forest areas.

- Ensure that all individuals residing in the region have proper authorization and are in compliance with local laws and regulations.
- Implement measures to monitor and control the movement and settlement of individuals in the region, in coordination with local authorities.

Statement by Eric Duaty, General Secretary, Community Forestry Development Committee (CFDC), FMC Area–K, Grand Gedeh

Secretary General of the CFDC, Eric controls about 24 adjacent communities where ITC holds a logging concession. Like many speakers before him, he expressed disappointment in the lack of action by national stakeholders on the influx of Bourkinabes. He reported that the Bourkinabes issues in his community started over a year ago. He attributed the growing number of Bourkinabes in the community to desire of some community members in cocoa farming.

"I'm speaking from Gbo-Sammie Town, where I oversee 24 communities within the CFDC area-K. The issue of the Burkinabes began over a year ago, where community members around here, along with the authorities, expressed interest in cocoa farming", Eric disclosed.

Eric said some community members also developed interest in cocoa farming when they realized that the logging company was not performing to expectation. *The company was accused of not fulfilling its obligations, leading to the decision to bring in Burkinabes. Initially, the arrival of the Burkinabes was not to the knowledge of the local authorities such as the Superintendent, district superintendent, commissioner, and CFDC members. It was after sometimes that some community and local authorities became involved because they must be informed about any activities in the community",* Eric further explained.

The situation, according to Eric has now escalated, noting that within two months, the Burkinabes began clearing forest demarcations/boundaries and engaging in cocoa farming. He said the Burkinabes have also expanded their activities to other areas in the Chiefdom where they are dividing the forest land. While some community members oppose their presence, Eric said others seem indifferent. "This has led to misunderstandings and conflicts within families and communities".

Recently, Eric said tensions escalated when a young man advocating for the removal of Burkinabes from the forest land was killed near the Liberia-Ivory Coast border. This incident as observed highlights the growing confusion and challenges in managing land use and community relations. *"As the Secretary General for the CFDC, I interact with community members and landowners to address these issues. Leadership faces difficulties in preventing land allocation to external parties, which poses threats to the community. Despite efforts, corruption and other challenges persist, making it hard to find solutions."*

Statement by Arthur Bajolo, Court Administrator of the Teah Town Magisterial Court in Grand Gedeh

On 27 March 2025, Court Administrator, Arthur Bajolo, as guest of Forest Hour, raised concerns about the environmental impact, legal disputes, and tensions between Liberians and Burkinabes. Arthur reported that over the years the court has handled cases of land dispute. Paramount among the cases is "criminal trespassing. Arthur confirmed reports of the

destruction of forest lands and an unauthorized occupation of land, instigated by locals who bring in the Bourkinabe to cultivate their cocoa farms. He said disputes often arise between Liberians and Burkinabes regarding land ownership and unauthorized activities.

Legal Challenges and Court Cases

Arthur disclosed that many cases involving Burkinabes are brought to court. But the dominant issue is criminal trespass and criminal mischief, stating that criminal mischief cases often involve Burkinabes cultivating land without permission or cutting down trees on land owned by Liberians. For criminal trespassing, he averred, are cases typically involving Burkinabes entering and using land without consent from the rightful owners. These disputes frequently reach the courts, where they are difficult to resolve due to the complexity of land ownership claims.

Courtroom behaviors and reactions

During the time of court, Arthur explained that Burkinabes often display anger when brought to court. Some refuse to acknowledge land ownership claims made against them, leading to further tensions. He cited instances where Burkinabes have shown hostility towards complainants in court.



Photo of deforestation activities by Bourkinabes



Some Bourkinabes arrested and turned over to county authority

Escalation of Conflicts

As a court administrator, Arthur said he has not personally witnessed direct violent clashes, but said reports indicate how tension often escalates into violence. “It is either a Burkinabe is attacking a Liberian in a forested area, or a Liberian is leading efforts to push the Bourkinabe from their farm lands or forest, which leads to the increase in fear in affected areas due to the unpredictable actions of Burkinabes”, said court administrator.

Concerns Over Population Growth and Government Response

Arthur also expressed concerned over population growth as a result of the illegal migration into Liberia. “The number of Burkinabes in Liberia is unknown, as there is no proper government record-keeping to trace the number of Bourkinabes that have entered the country for farming purposes”, said Arthur. He reported that many of the Bourkinabes reside in temporary structures and only come to the towns/villages to get food and other household supplies, making it difficult to track their presence. He raises concerns about their rapid expansion into different districts which is leading to widespread deforestation activities. Like many concerned citizens, Arthur accused central government of failing to act swiftly.

Arthur recommended the below solutions

- ✓ The government must take a definitive stance on Burkinabe immigration and land use.
- ✓ Authorities should implement proper regulations and monitoring to track Burkinabes settlements.
- ✓ If Burkinabes are allowed to cultivate land, clear policies should be established to prevent disputes.
- ✓ If their presence is deemed unlawful, steps should be taken to return them to their country.



A victim (Liberian) of violence clash between Liberians and Bourkinabes being interview from his hospital bed

Journalists accounts

On March 7, 2025, LFMW’s journalist [reported](#) tension between traditional people and FDA’s Rangers. The report, title “One FDA Agent Escapes Traditional Arrest, Another Held Hostage” highlighted the growing interests in cocoa farming by some local residents around the Grebo-Krahn National Park. Residents of the Park communities are reportedly intimidating FDA staff

who are engaged in conservation awareness. Selma Kolako and Oliver Jelleh are the two FDA's staff who are victims of the intimidation from the traditional people. The two FDA's officials have said that they can no longer accept assignment in Grand Gedeh County due to escalating tension arising for control of land for cocoa farming. The journalists report corroborated claims made by all the previous speakers.



Photo of Selma Kolako/FDA Ranger & sign board of Greebo-Krahn Park

Follow up by LFMW

On July 27th 2025, a team of LFMW staff visited Grand Gedeh, specifically Zwedru to confirm the above information and gather new evidence. Scores of people we spoke to concord with previous speakers about the devastating effect of the presence of Borkinabes on the forest and land.

Farmers in Grand Gedeh and River Gee alarmed over the influx of thousands of Bourkinabes from neighboring Cote d' Ivoire into Liberian forests. They reported that the migrants are involved in illegal farming activities and occupation through the facilitation of some local community officials.

They said the illegal migrants are encroaching on farm lands and forests in the Bhai-Duogee Forest of Grand Gedeh and the G-2 region of River Gee electoral district #3, near the Cavalla River.

Many of them confirmed earlier report that most bordering towns with Côte d'Ivoire in the region are hosting illegal migrants, especially Burkinabe who are into cocoa farming and other cash crops productions. It is reported that Liberians who are bringing in the Bourkinabes are doing so with a promise to offer them farm land.

Some local farmers both in Grand Gedeh and River Gee Counties have expressed fears that if nothing is done urgently, Liberia stands the risk of losing some of its land space to its neighbors as a result of the illegal land grab by people believed to be from Burkina-Faso and other foreign nationals.

A local male farmer who feared to be named said the Burkinabees have taken over major farmland in Klibo, Kaibo and in some parts of the Deabo, known as the G-2 region along the Liberian, Ivorian border in River Gee County.

"Those guys are all into our bushes, depleting our farmland through producing cocoa, peppers, yam, eddoes, and also fishing into all of our surrounding creeks and hunting in our forest", the local farmers divulged.



Community members staged protest to remove Bourkinabes from their forest

The locals reported that all of the produce are being sold in Ivory coast instead of Liberia or to the citizens in the area. *"If we ask them why they are not selling the produce to us, they will tell us, we met you on your own land, go and make your own farms and feed yourself or sell to your people too".*

The farmer emphasized that almost all of the illegal migrants are being supported and brought in by Liberians who have lived in Côte d'Ivoire for years and came back home claiming that Burkinabes are people of developmental minds without taking into consideration the future embarrassment the land grab would cause the younger generation.

In Grand Gedeh County, Burkinabees have occupied a large portion of land near the Bhai Neko border, which is closed to the checkpoint of the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) assigned at the Liberia Toe Town border.

Although the illegal migration for farm land began in 2005 as reported by an Ivorian CSO, IDEF, the number actually began to rise in early 2016, when citizens of Grand Gedeh and other parts of the Southeast begun to experience the entry of illegal migrants mainly Burkinabees into their forest. Districts/locations where Bourkinabes are presently residing in Grand Gedeh are: Gboe/Pole, Bhai, Neko, Karneh Clan, Konobo, Glio, Twarbo and Putu, etc. In River Gee, they can be found in Potupo district, specifically in the town of Jayblokon and River Gee's Capital, Fishtown.

Meeting with immigration and police

Our local journalist set up a meeting with some officers of the immigration services and the police. The officers, who begged not to be named in our report, confirmed the presence of foreign nationals in the forest and expressed concerned over national security issues. *"Just the other day, the security from Ivory Coast shot and killed two persons from the Liberian side of the border, who they claimed were engaged in gold mining on the Cavalla River.* The officers' claims [confirmed](#) media reports of the killing which occurred on July 11, 2025 in Electoral District #3, Cavalla Administrative District.



One of the victims found floating in the water

In July 2024, the Liberian government through the Liberia Refugee, Repatriation, and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) registered nearly 7,000 Burkinabe migrants and asylum seekers in Maryland, River Gee, and Grand Gedeh Counties. It is believed that some of the illegal migrants took advantage of the official registration process to register as refugees, giving them the right under the ECOWAS and UN charters for refugees. Immigration officers revealed that over 40,000 Bourkinabes have been officially registered by the Liberian Government, confirming media [reports](#) of the number of Bourkinabes that have been registered so far.



Scores of Bourkinabes rounded up during one of the raids

Legislative intervention

In July 2024, the House of Representatives mandated its joint committee on National Security, Internal Affairs, and Judiciary to investigate the influx of Burkinabe nationals into the Liberian forests in counties bordering Ivory Coast. The counties include Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland.

The action came after a communication was brought to the House's attention, highlighting potential threats to national security and social instability by Anthony F. Williams, chairperson of the House's Committee on Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Environment, who Represents Pleebo Sodoken, Electoral District #2 in the national legislature.

Representative's Williams' communication stated that the immigrants have reportedly been engaging in various activities, such as farming, mining, hunting, and pit sawing without proper documentation, raising alarms about potential security and social issues.

Conversation with community forest official

The Chief Officer of the Bloquiah Authorized Community Forest in Gbazon accused some county officials, led by Superintendent Alex J. Grant, a former Representative of attempting to silence him for his stance on the illegal activities of the Bourknabes. Sampson Zamie is a prominent anti-deforestation campaigner in Liberia, particularly known for his work in Grand Gedeh County. He has been actively documenting and reporting illegal logging activities, the intrusion of foreign nationals into protected forest zones, including Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA) areas and the Forest Management Contract-K (FMC-K) region.

Sampson revealed to the team of the arrest of some foreign nationals believed to be Borukinabs in the forest by him and his team of dedicated community members. According to Sampson, he turned those arrested over to the county authorities. Sampson said it appeared his action did not please the Superintendent, who, he said, ordered his arrest. He feared being silenced if action is not taken to deter the Superintendent, who is also accused of aiding and abetting the foreign nationals most of whom are reportedly hired to work his farms.



Photo of the Borukinabs arrested by Sampson Zamie and his team

Conflict between two villages

On the morning of our departure, on July 29, 2025, rumors of tension between two communities, Juluzon and Jarwondee, over the activities of Bourkinabes reached us. A day after our departure on July 30, 2025, conflict broke out between the two communities leading to human injuries and destruction of properties. The only network receiver in one of the

communities was destroyed along with a motorcycle due to the fighting. Below are images from the conflict scene: an injured lady, damaged receiver and motorcycle.



Judge Wesseh A. Wesseh of Criminal Court “B” wrote to LFMW and said the below about the Bourkinabes activities in River Gee County

“Since 2010, there has been a steady influx of Burkinabes into Liberia from the Ivory Coast to engage mainly in cocoa farming, according to recent news reports. These nationals are attracted, in part, by Liberia's vast rainforests, high cocoa prices, and limited government monitoring. According to reports, since 2010, there have been more than forty thousand (40,000) of these Burkinabes crossing into Liberia.

Bearing the brunt of this influx are counties sharing borders with the Ivory Coast. One of these counties is River Gee and a district where the presence of the Burkinabes has successfully been repelled is Potupo, specifically in the town of Jayblokon. Jayblokon and River Gee's Capital, Fishtown.

Jayblokon-Burkinabes story started sometimes in January, 2024 when one Mr Allison, an In-law to the people of Jayblokon, who resides in Abijan (Ivory Coast) visited Jayblokon, Potupo District, River Gee County, (his wife home) and told the community that he was interested in developing a cocoa farm. The community granted his request, little did they realize that Mr. Allison was linked to a wider syndicate of Burkinabes humans' traffickers who are engaged into cross-border movements of huge Burkinabes migrants into Liberia to grab Land for cocoa plantation. Mr Alison, haven had the approval of the community, started bringing in Burkinabes incrementally, before the community could realize, he had brought in 25 strong-men.

Allison and his men sit with the Jayblokon people and requested 500 Acres of Land to plant coco. They also struck a deal with the Community that they could help community members develop their farms at the ratio of 60-40%. Meaning, if a community member owned 100 Acres of land, they will develop it and take 60% while the land owner takes 40%. Some local government officials became interested and prevailed on the community to accept the deal; they even went ahead to allot the initial 100 Acres of Land to the Burkinabes.

Jayblokon Development Association, Inc. a citizens-based Organization both in Monrovia and the USA heard of this Bugus deal, overwhelmingly expressed our total disapproval, and immediately engage the other citizens back home sometimes in March, 2025.

After series of meetings with our brothers and sisters in the county, it was very clear that some citizens back home, especially those brainwashed by some local leaders were not willing to abandon the devilish deal but give up the land to the Burkinabes. That's how the JDA, through its collective leadership elevated the debate by communicating with the office of the county Superintendent and the County legislative caucus. That's how the local authorities got involved to begin the process of evicting the Burkinabes from Jayblokon.

Even with the involvement of the County Administration, there was still some resistance from few community dwellers who had the support of local government officials, insisted on harboring the Burkinabes until government have to affect the arrest of the few stubborn local officials.

As we speak, the encroaching and land-grabbing Burkinabes are out of the Jayblokon forest and are now in the Fish Town, the county capitol, under the surveillance of National Police and Liberia Immigration Services awaiting the next action of the County Administration".

On August 3, 2025, fighting erupted between two groups of Burkinabes over forest land. The fighting took place in the Niko Forest, B'hai Chiefdom. The groups are led by Barkpin Noufou from the Gussie tribe and Isiaka Sawadogo from the Mossi tribe, both of whom believed to be investors in the cocoa business.

On August 19, 2025, the Liberia National Police (LNP) in Grand Gedeh County charged and forwarded to the Zwedru City Magisterial Court those Burkinabee nationals involved in the conflict. They were charged for multiple crimes, including criminal attempt to commit murder, aggravated assault, criminal conspiracy, and criminal facilitation. Below are gruesome images of the conflict (viewers discretion are urged)

