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MAXIMIZING HUMAN RESOURCES IN A FINITE LABOR SITUATION:
LABOR ECONOMICS OF THE GBANNAH MAH*

by

James C. Riddell**

*A shorter version of this paper will appear as a chapter in V. R. Dorjahn and B. L. Isaac, The Economic Anthropology of Sierra Leone and Liberia (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press and the Liberian Studies Association Monograph Series).

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MAXIMIZING HUMAN RESOURCES IN A FINITE LABOR SITUATION:
LABOR ECONOMICS OF THE GBANNAH MAH*

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James C. Riddell**

The agricultural economy of the Gbannah Mah, tropical forest farmers of north central Liberia, is organized around the primary subsistence crop of up-land rice, which is intercropped with cassava (genus *Manihot*), maize, and sorghum. In the northern portion of Gbannah there are plentiful low lying areas and swamp rice is very important. The technology consists primarily of the short handled hoe, machete, axe, mortar-pestle and is based only on human energy as no domesticated animals or power machinery are utilized.

Until 1914, Gbannah was a set of 13 historically related but independent, tribally organized towns. The headman of each community was, and still is, called the pledomi (= town headman). Although this person has been given administrative authority by the Liberian government, he was traditionally town

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I should like to express my appreciation to Barry Isaac for his comments on another paper. Many of his suggestions and leads have been followed in the present work. The present study analyzes data collected in Gbannah during 14 months from September 1967 through December 1968. While the data refer specifically to Gbannah, they are generally applicable to the Central Mah. The Northern and Southern Mah, though similar, have some important differences. The research for this paper was financed by a grant from N.I.H.

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spokesman and led by example and diplomacy. The ultimate allocation of authority and force was vested in the kin groups and the secret societies, principally Poro (Gebon) and Sande (Luobon). Unless there is direct interference from the Liberian government's administrative personnel, traditional political ideology still characterizes the day-to-day operation of the towns off the motor road.

The domestic economy of the Mah in general and the Gbannah Mah in particular is a collection of socio-technical processes each of which is the product of a series of adjustments to a changing cultural-ecological situation. Neither economic change nor experimentation is a new phenomenon. For example, seeds from an unfamiliar food plant are grown on a trial basis in a household garden. This experimentation is not haphazard as there is an intimate and sophisticated knowledge of plants and their characteristics and every attempt is made to duplicate soil, shade, moisture, etc., characteristics thought to be typical of the native area. All of the cash crops discussed below entered the Gbannah agricultural scene in this manner. That is, they were being grown before there was a market for them. In order to understand this dynamic aspect underlying the economic organization of the Mah, a brief synopsis of recent major changes in the cultural-ecological setting is in order.

Prior to the political and economic dislocations that accompanied the collapse of Mali in the sixteenth century, the Mah were living to the south and east of Beyla (Rep. de Guinee) and north of the Nimba Mountains and the tropical forest (Person 1961). The modes of production were based on savannah agricultural practices. According to Mah tradition, the principal crops were sorghum and millet. In addition, red rice (*Oryza glaberima*) was an important supplementary staple.

Following the breakup of Mali, Islamic Northern Mande speakers (Mande Tan) occupied the territory south of Kankan and most of the area around Beyla (Niane and Suret-Canale 1961; Willis 1971; Person 1961). This resulted in the dislocation of the non-Islamic Mah, along with their neighbors the Kpelle, Dã, etc., south into the tropical forest.

The move to the tropical forest required drastic changes in the Mah modes of production over the next two and a half centuries; land clearing techniques had to be developed and new crops more compatible with a tropical forest biome had to be adopted. In addition to the indigenous red rice (*O. glaberima*) (V. Porteres 1950), Asian rices (*O. sativa*) were added, along with swamp rice horticulture. The new world staples of maize and cassava were easily adapted to tropical forest agriculture; corn (maize) because it does well in the slightly acidic soils of Gbannah and the Northern Mah area, while cassava, a tropical domesticate, fits in well with the Gbannah practice of intercropping all staples in a single field (Reed 1951:31 et passim). Cassava roots utilize soil nutrients at a different level than the grains and mature in the second season (Johnston 1958:129). Also cassava is a good insurance crop. Periodically elephants get into the fields where they will eat or trample all the rice, corn, or sorghum in a day.

The migration into the forest ensured the autonomy of Mah communities from political domination by savannah states. According to Person (1961) Poro and Sande were developed at this time as a special elaboration of existing secret societies to institutionalize a pro-forest ideology. The partition of West Africa by the European powers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century sounded the death knell for the independence of tribal and state polities alike. By 1914, except for pockets of sporadic resistance, the Mah were incorporated either into the Republic of Liberia or into colonial French Guinea.

The Mah area, however, was not connected by motor road with the rest of Liberia until 1948. Administration of the area, though often very arbitrary, was haphazard and sporadic. After Firestone began hiring in 1927 for its rubber plantation on the coast, wage labor and labor migration became options open to any male willing to make the journey. In fact, most young males did so as a kind of "Rite of Passage" to full adulthood.

In 1948 the bridge across the St. John River was completed and a motor road was built to eastern Liberia which passed right through the center of Gbannah. Almost overnight Gbannah changed from a group of relatively isolated farming villages to a rural component of a national economy.

In the analysis that follows the economic strategies developed by the Mah in response to their move into the tropical forest and the social relations created to carry out these strategies will be referred to as the traditional economic system. This traditional system, though general to all Gbannah villages, was independently organized by each community without overt regard to what their neighboring towns were doing.

Membership in a Mah community is based upon a person being able to demonstrate, through patrilineal descent, membership in one of the resident lineages. These lineages form the constituent parts of the minimal sib (gbein), which are the corporate kinship units of the town.

Sibs are the most important kinship units in daily life while the lineages tend to be weakly organized. Membership in a sib is based upon shared food taboos. Each sib has its own food prohibitions and having these in common with any other person establishes a putative kinship bond. A woman keeps her natal prohibitions after marriage and cannot cook for her husband any food that is taboo for her.

Sibs have different characteristics, however, when analyzed at the minimal (local) or maximal (Pan-Mah) levels. The minimal sib (gbein) is a local segment of a maximal sib. At this level, it is organized, egalitarian, non-hierarchically ordered, and exogamous. It forms the patrilineal core of the residential neighborhoods of a town (Murdock's clan barrio). The term gbein therefore can be used to designate either a kinship unit or a residential unit of a community. In contrast to the gbein the maximal sib is unorganized and agamous.

Since unilineal descent fixes in absolute numbers those people who make up the social structure of a Mah community, the labor that can be applied to the land at any given moment is strictly finite. Therefore, the supply of labor will remain inelastic regardless of demand. The Gbannah Mah have organized the agricultural round to maximize the labor available in any given season, and the individual farmer must plan his or her activities so that they do not conflict (in time) with others.

Although the labor pool of a town is fixed by descent principles, the population does not distribute itself equally to all kin groups. Also, the different phases of the production cycle require variable labor input that at one time maximizes male and at another period female labor power.

Organizational structures have developed that transcend or cross-cut lineage and sib membership so that the fixed labor pool of a town can be organized into units of optimal size. Therefore, the two principal social units of production in Gbannah are the domestic groups and the reciprocal labor cooperatives rather than lineages or sibs.

The domestic group ". . ." is essentially a householding and housekeeping unit organized to provide the material and cultural resources needed to maintain and bring up its members" (Fortes 1958:8). There is no standard type of

Gbannah household but rather stages of combining and exchanging members with other domestic groups as a cyclic process. Merely looking at village census data might lead one to conclude that the majority of households are made up of patrilocal extended families. Many of these units are in fact filiocal groups organized around an elder son. Table 1 gives the breakdown of the phases of domestic group sponsorship for the town of Gipo.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Domestic Groups in
Four Phases of Gbannah Mah Domestic Group Cycle:
Town of Gipo

Phase of Sponsorship	Sponsors ^a
I. Younger males are attaining jural adulthood	37
II. Younger males are incorporating their nuclear families into the domestic groups of their father or "father"	14
III. Father and son have formed separate domestic groups ^b	14
IV. Father has joined the domestic group of his son or "son"	5

SOURCE: Author's census of Gipo, 1968.

^aDouble counting is possible as a domestic group sponsor may be associated with two or more phases simultaneously.

^bOnly fathers are counted.

Each domestic group has a head who may be either male or female, but is most often male. The head is a person who determines who can and who cannot share in the pooled resources of the unit. Principles of recruitment in addition to agnation and affinity are utilized. The most important of these are

clientship and pawnship. Pawnship (toloomaa) refers to individuals who, because of debt or serious transgression of their own or of an elder kinsman, are forced to leave their natal kingroup and become for a time de facto and de jure members of another group. These transfers are always across sib boundaries and it was stated that important elders in the past were known to have had upward of 10 toloomaamia in their domestic group. Once a pawn was accepted into another sib's domestic group, he took on all the appropriate address and reference terms and was considered a "real" kinsman. When the debt was considered paid a pawn could return home. If a pawn was mistreated his natal kinsmen would take the matter to a town moot. Also, if a man wanted to marry a female toloomaa he had to pay the regular bride wealth to her natal group.

The institution of clientship (waakei or gbEkei) has largely been eliminated by the availability of wage labor. A young man unable to meet bride wealth requirements on his own, or who is seeking a new village in which to reside, will attach himself to a wealthy domestic group head by becoming a lover to one of his wives. This is done with the consent of the husband. Although the relationship is one of ambivalence, to say the least, it is also one of the easiest ways to build up the size of a domestic group. I have observed an important man pay the bride wealth for a particular woman in order to attract a prospective client.¹

1. Pawnship and clientship should not be confused with slavery. Three forms of complete bondage existed in Mah society. The word luo refers to a person purchased from a Mandingo (meimia) slave trader. When one refers to a war captive the term gili kun is used. Finally there was another form that probably happened more in threat than in actuality called gbin bui luo (frog slave). This was said to be an undesirable wife who, with her children, was taken to another town. She was made to lie face down and her children were placed on her back. The husband then placed his foot on the pile and declared them for sale.

Therefore, the domestic group is not a fixed membership unit. There is, however, a fairly stable corpus of individuals who regularly eat together from pooled resources. In this sense, the domestic group resembles our theoretical constructs of the household.

Even though the productive resources of manpower and equipment are pooled by the domestic group, access to these resources extends over the lineage on the basis of balanced reciprocity. The domestic groups of a lineage form definite domestic clusters within which generalized reciprocity exists. Within each domestic cluster almost all items can be borrowed freely except for two very important exceptions: rice and the personal belongings of a wife. Both these items are under the direct control of wives, and since they have married in from another patrilineal group, their permission must be sought beforehand.

The domestic group head is responsible for maximizing the management of land, labor, and the timing of the farming activities. In January, he must select the section of sib land that will be cleared for that year's farm. This he does annually as the Gbannah Mah make a new intercropped upland rice farm each year. The factors taken into account are the "feel of the soil," the kinds of undergrowth present, and other edaphic features.

The domestic units are most directly responsible for production and allocation of goods and services while the labor cooperatives are the traditional voluntary associations that do almost all the heavy tasks in the village. There are both male and female cooperatives organized by a senior man or woman of a minimal sib and all mature adults are expected to join at least one.

The labor cooperatives meet in March and decide the order in which they will work on farms. The most important men declare the approximate date of their turn. The other men will then attempt to arrange their affairs so that

no one else in their domestic cluster, lineage, or sib takes a farm on the same day.

Table 2 summarizes the labor units needed for the five major activity clusters of the production cycle in traditional Gbannah agriculture. The size of a farm is determined by how much land a labor cooperative can clear in one day, usually about an hectare. Each member of a labor cooperative must undertake all secondary clearing and preparation activities on his own farm in addition to working on each other member's farm in turn. The forest cover must

Table 2
Major Activity Clusters in the Agricultural Production
of the Gbannah Mah

Phase	Dominant Labor Input Unit	Season
1. Land preparation	Male labor cooperatives	February-May
2. Crop preparation	Female labor cooperatives	April-May
3. Crop maintenance	Domestic group	June-September
4. Harvesting	Domestic group and female labor cooperatives	October-December
5. Storage	Domestic group males	Following the harvest

be cut, cleared, and burned before the rainy season begins in May. If the land is prepared too far in advance of planting, the undergrowth will reassert itself. On the other hand, if one delays too long the cuttings will not dry sufficiently for burning before the rains come. With the amount of work to be done on many farms within the same space of time, it is not surprising that labor cooperatives seldom number more than thirty.

The second major phase--planting--is done by the women's labor cooperatives which, like the men's groups, work on each member's farm for one day. If the field is not completely planted in a single day, the domestic group will have to finish the job itself. Timing in this phase is even more critical than in land preparation. If planting takes place too soon before the rainy season, the young shoots wither, and if held off too long, the resurgent undergrowth cannot be uprooted.

Crop maintenance is one of the most critical phases in the agricultural round for determining the ultimate production level of a Gbannah farm. From planting till the last intercropped staple is harvested, all members of the domestic group are engaged in a series of important tasks. Weeding is done early in the growing season and a small fence is constructed around the fields to keep out large rodents, especially *Thryonomys swinderianus*. As the crop matures, continuous watch must be kept to scare away birds and forest herbivores.

Each farm has a small habitation site where some members of the domestic group will reside throughout this period. The multiple residency creates no great hardship as farms in Gbannah are seldom more than an hour's walk from town. The placement of farms is determined more by the foraging range of the town's goat and cow population than by the scarcity of land.

Each domestic group selects seed types at planting time so that there will be early maturing varieties as well as late. The first crops to be harvested are corn and early maturing varieties of rice. These are followed by sorghum. All these are harvested by the domestic group members.

Women's labor cooperatives take over when the main rice crop matures. Over 15 varieties of upland rice (and several of swamp rice) are planted. In addition to normal edaphic conditions, seed selection for the main crop will be determined by personal preference and a non-conflicting harvest date. This

allows a longer time-frame for the women's labor cooperatives to harvest each member's fields.

During harvesting, the head of rice is gathered (usually) in the left hand and cut off at the stem with a small knife made by the local blacksmith just for this purpose. When a bundle reaches the point where it is hard to handle it is bound with straw and placed upside down on a cassava stem. These bundles (kEke) are then gathered by the domestic group males and placed on a drying platform. Here the rice dries quickly under the warm dry harmattan winds.

Storage facilities are constructed at each farm site. They are elevated platforms with thatched roofs that allow air to circulate around the rice while keeping out rain and pests.

Cassava matures in the second year and is dug up as needed. Therefore, although the Mah make a new farm every year, it continues in reduced production for 2 to 3 seasons even though no further work is done on it. When a farmer speaks of his farm, he uses the referent Yining and means a field which contains rice. After the rice has been harvested, the same field is referred to as suo if it has unharvested cassava.

The production of animal protein is secondary in importance to horticulture. One or two men from each Gbannah village hunt on a relatively full-time basis and trade meat for farm produce. Most men will hunt from time to time for sport and to supplement the diet.

Domesticated animals in order of prestige are cow, pig, sheep, goat, and fowl (chickens, ducks, and guinea hens). The care taken of animals is haphazard at best and they are allowed to roam freely about the town. Fences are made to keep animals out of house gardens, etc., and occasionally short fences

and stiles are built on the main paths to keep the goats from wandering into the farming area.

The right of distribution of both crops and animals is under the control of the domestic group. Animals are important in exchange relationships and are under the control of the domestic head unless they are "owned" by some other individual. As stated above, the wife determines the allocation of the major crop staples and it is her responsibility to see that the crop lasts the year and that there is enough seed rice. Upon divorce, however, the crop stays with the husband and the ultimate control of staples remains within the patrikin group.

Consumption of food staples and exchange are inexorably intertwined. The domestic group consumes pooled resources but hardly a meal takes place without one or more guests being invited. Eating alone is considered impolite and food sharing between friends and neighbors forms the backbone of the system of reciprocity that is so important to Gbannah village social life.

The ability to feed others and prestige go hand in hand. Both Poro and Sande play an important part in this regard. As one elder put it, "Poro business is eating business." Poro and Sande feasts are most frequent during the relatively lean times ("hungry season") between planting and the harvesting of early rice. Each member is assessed a certain amount of food depending on the ability to give and the higher orders or levels of the secret societies are reserved for those who can allocate the necessary labor and other resources in order to meet the demands of the required generosity.

Feasting is associated with other intra-town exchanges. For instance, when the blacksmith, leather worker, or other craft specialist agrees to make an item he must be provided with an abundant meal while he is working on this particular project. This takes place in addition to any other compensation

that might have been agreed upon. When a town's blacksmith is working, there will always be a fair sized group in attendance, the elder members of which will join the smiths in their meals.

A proper feast is also an essential ingredient in maintaining a successful relationship with one's own labor cooperative. A labor cooperative begins work at sunrise. Around 10:00 a.m., a break is called for a round of palm wine or other drink and a small snack. At this time, the person for whom the cooperative is working presents all the supplies that will go into that day's feast. If someone does not feel they are adequate, he or she will say so; perhaps there is not enough meat and a goat should be killed, or there is too much cassava and not enough rice, etc. Considerable negotiation and comment can take place at this time and the group will not return to work until they are collectively satisfied. I have witnessed an instance where a cooperative went home because there was not enough meat and alcoholic beverage. On the other hand, everyone is enthusiastic about working on an important elder's farm because of the assured abundance.

The feasts for the labor cooperatives are important from another angle. Some domestic groups are large enough to have access to more labor cooperatives than they can use in an agricultural round. For instance, a small domestic group of a man, his wife, and immature child will be hard pressed to get even one farm into production with all members belonging to cooperatives. The head of a very large domestic group of 30 or more people will be able to defer his turn to one or more of his members' cooperatives until the season just before harvesting. This is the time when a feast is most appreciated and when a domestic group head is able to establish himself as an important elder through his generosity.

Feasts for labor cooperatives like those for secret societies serve exchange functions in two dimensions. First they establish an hierarchy of prestige based on the ability to feed others, and second they transfer food from the most successful units to members of the least efficient in times of greatest need.

These same factors were of importance in external exchange as well. The Gbannah traded forest products and local manufactures to the Savannah polities for salt and trade items. A few of the oldest men had been involved in this trade before the coming of either the French or the Liberian forces. Its organization was described to me this way: the most important men of all the central Mah villages joined the Leopard and/or the Crocodile societies through which they carried on trade. The stated fee for joining these societies was the sacrifice of a member of one's own domestic group in a cannibalistic feast such as those described in such detail in Harley's work on the Poro (1941 and 1950). While there is no way to verify this fact, I did talk to several old men who had the reputation for having been members of either of these societies many years before. All of them verified that the statements were true. This does not mean that they were true, however, only that both initiated and non-initiated alike kept alive the same account just as many of the gory myths of Poro are kept alive in order to maximize the effects of their spectacular theatrics on others. This cannibalistic feast was supposed to guarantee that the new member had access to more than enough labor. These men then served as loci for bulking local trade goods. Large parties of young men were organized to carry the goods. It seems that there was considerable vying for the privilege as it was counted a great adventure and well worth the risk. As this large group traveled, they would call out the name of the man who had sent them

(apparently he seldom went himself) and other members of the Leopard and/or Crocodile society would hear the name and guarantee them safe passage.

Each Gbannah town had one or more craft specialties organized in a pattern analogous to that described by Chagnon for the Yanomamo (1977:100-101). Each town is almost totally self-sufficient in terms of its resource base. For instance, everyone knew how to obtain salt from certain clays and ashes of special trees. Also, although it was agreed upon that the town of Lampa made pottery, I met women in each of the other 12 villages that had made pots. The same appeared true for iron working, cloth making, wood carving, leather work, and so forth.

In contrast to the Yanomamo materials, this community specialization did more than provide a raison d'être for exchange relations between neighboring towns as these could also be maintained through affinal ties. Local specialization, in addition, removed much of the intervillage competition in trade with the Savannah. As described above, trade was in the hands of the secret societies and each town was guaranteed a share equal to the relative productivity of its craftsmen and Kola trees.

This description of the traditional economic system has presented a situation generally true for the period between 1895 and 1925. It does not represent an "ancient tradition" but an immediate tradition. All behavior patterns described above, with the exception of the Leopard and Crocodile societies, were still being pursued by greater or lesser proportions of Gbannah villagers in 1968. This is because, as a systematic whole, it is an efficient adjustment to their tropical forest environment. The overall ideology of this system might best be described as one of minimizing risks rather than maximizing production. That is, every domestic group head must maximize his available labor and other resources so that even in the worst of years production will

be high enough to meet minimal caloric needs. Therefore, each farm has more than one crop and a variety of the main one, rice. The cassava (manioc) from the previous year's farm is an insured food resource in the current year and provides a base line below which production cannot fall. Finally, dividing the allocation of production between agnates and affines within the domestic group assures an amelioration of kinship and secret society claims. These economic strategies and their attendant ideologies have had far reaching implications for the Gbannah Mah reaction to the national and international political economy.

The national economy of Liberia is largely a product of the investments made by multinational corporations. Major economic decisions, therefore, are not made in the capital of Monrovia but in head offices in New York, Bonn, Tokyo, etc. Enterprises which are most successful on the international scene are those whose size makes it possible to operate at a very low unit cost, reduce the risk to financial institutions, and sustain large developmental setup costs (Perlmutter 1968:2; Vernon 1972:69 et passim). The multinational enterprise, "a cluster of corporations of diverse nationality joined together by ties of common ownership and responsive to a common management," is the dominant and most dynamic institution in the world's political economy today (Vernon 1972:8).

With increasing cooperation among the advanced economies, the developing world is placed in an ever more dependent relationship. Not only are the technologies imported but also the social structure associated with them. For example, whether automobiles are produced in Detroit, Tokyo, or Abidjan, the human relationships in the modes of production are pretty much the same. Industrialization forces all other systems into either syncope or extinction. The current type of domination of the third world is an outgrowth of trends

initiated in the pre-World War II period (Vernon 1972:5). The new "scramble" for neocolonies will increase as more and more vital resources become scarce. Today the world is already divided into spheres of influence, recognized by .1 competitors.

This international economy came to Gbannah by way of the motor road that was completed in 1948. A world that had previously been seen only by wage labor migrants was now brought to their very doorsteps. In fact, the road was routed through three of the towns and two additional towns have since relocated on the road. Administrative decisions from the nation's capital of Monrovia were now less than a day away rather than the week or more that had been the case previously. The trucks that brought in the new goods and people were also available to carry out the local farm products and cash-cropping became a viable alternative to labor migration as a way of obtaining access to the money economy. At selected towns along the road, Lebanese traders set up small shops where they sold consumer goods and tools and purchased kola, rice, and later coffee, cocoa, and rum. Mandingo traders provided the same service to nearby towns off the road. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine what relationship, if any, existed between these two trader groups.

From the Gbannah point of view, the most disastrous result of the new motor road was the granting by the Liberian government in 1948 of an economic development concession of 25,000 acres to Pan Am Corporation officials for the establishment of a cocoa plantation (Cocopa Plantation operated by the Liberia Company). The area was largely unknown at this time by both the government officials and the concessionaires and the granted acreage included the prime farm land of three of the towns. The repercussions of this land expropriation have continued to spread through Gbannah like ripples across water and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

Ironically, Cocopa plantation was originally conceived as an altruistic enterprise by the then U.S. Secretary of State, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. It was meant to stimulate economic development by providing a model for regional development, jobs, and diversity in Liberia's exports. The concession soils proved unproductive for cocoa and coffee was tried in 1954 but by 1964 the plantation had switched entirely to rubber production all the while keeping the same name which means home of cocoa in Mahwe (spoken Mah).

Cocopa is illustrative of problems that can emerge even when the putatively highest motives are involved. A fact that is often overlooked is that people like the Mah are co-investors in these economic schemes. They not only contribute the raw resources from their traditional territory but will also contribute a majority of the needed human labor. The same man-land labor factors that were available to the indigenous system will be utilized by two competing systems.

The people affected were never compensated for their land. As we shall see below no compensation was possible but payments made by the company to non-traditional chiefs and politicians made the situation even more galling. Furthermore, labor relations at Cocopa were bad from the start, the result primarily of two related factors.

First, current economic development theory assumes a plentiful supply of labor if not outright over-population. While this is true of much of the third world, West Africa in general and Liberia in particular have been exceptions. Here the major economic enterprises have been placed in areas of relatively low population density and historically they have had to attract workers from considerable distances (Berg 1965; Rouch 1960; Clower et al. 1966). In this situation, a foreign employer presents little danger to the economic base of one's natal village. The situation changes, however, when the plantation is

not only in "your" backyard but growing its crops on "your" land. Labor migration to such a place no longer represents an escape from the village round but rather a threat to security.

Second, the modern sector depends upon an elastic and free (i.e., unencumbered) labor supply that can move to the enterprise with the greatest need and paying the highest salary. Indigenous labor strategies are founded on different social premises and make the transformation of such rural economic systems into "modern" ones anything but smooth.

Consequently, when Cocopa started hiring in late 1948, very few people applied. Wages at plantations were de facto set at that time by salaries paid on President Tubman's farm. The policy was said to help indigenous rubber producers remain competitive with the foreign enterprises. With less than enthusiastic labor response and wages fixed, the Cocopa management resorted to labor recruiters. Compensation was paid to an administrative (i.e., government-appointed) chief for each man hired from his district--a system that quickly led to abuse through false promises, harassment, etc. As the demand for labor increased so did the negative opinion of the plantation.

The relationship between concession management and the villages has continued to be abrupt and non-cooperative. Between the two sides of the co-investment system, there is nearly a complete lack of communication. The host government and the management see the benefits to the Central Mab as "long term" while the villagers are reacting to the reality of land loss and low wages.

A simplified and personalized view of cause and effect is the result. From the point of view of management the cause of poor village-company relations is an intractable, non-cooperating population. To the inhabitants of the region's towns, it is the company's attitude toward kinship obligations,

traditional feasts, respect for elders, and village life in general that makes a modus vivendi impossible.

In 1960, the Swedish-American-Liberian joint venture iron mines (LAMCO) began operations in the Northern Mah area. The rich iron deposits of Nimba Mountain made the unprecedented, for Liberia, capital investment feasible. Also, since wages were not determined by any indigenous enterprise, salaries were very high by local standards and working at LAMCO became prestige employment.

LAMCO purposely set out to avoid the kinds of problems faced by Cocopa and negotiated its land settlement with each villager affected as well as with the national government. From the traditional Mah point of view, however, there is no possible compensation for land. The Mah, like several other West African peoples, have a vague concept of reincarnation. When the ancestors see that the living are creating a bad world for them to be reborn into, they attempt to apply corrective measures. The failure of crops, death of children, or other drastic action is often resorted to by the ancestors to bring living Mah back to their senses. In 1966, an important Northern Mah Zoo (Shaman) reasoned that if he could destroy the ore trains that ran from LAMCO to the Port of Buchanan on the coast, the mine would close down, the foreigners would quit the land, and the ancestors would stop visiting hardship on his village and kinsmen. When he stepped onto the track to banish the train with mystical power, he was killed instantly by the speeding locomotive and in 1968 the company was still paying compensation to the man's relatives. LAMCO was not more empathetic than Cocopa just because it was an iron mine. Rather, the socialist government and observers in Sweden demanded stricter accounting of the human costs in overseas capitalistic adventures of its citizenry.²

2. The idea of the joint venture scheme where the host government provides part of the capital outlay also ignores a co-investment relationship. (cont.)

The changes that accompanied these investment schemes were more than the insertion of a few employment centers. Rather, a whole new infrastructure developed. Transportation services (taxis and buses) spread in response to demand and trade towns grew along the main roads at a half day's walk from each other. For the central Mah they were Ganta, Flumpa (Gbannah), Saclepea, and Bahn. By the mid 1960s each of these towns had schools. All these changes increased the opportunities for wage labor locally as well as more distant, since travel is relatively inexpensive and the buses frequently ply the main road.

The traditional agricultural economy has had to adjust in three major areas. First in terms of land loss, second to the increased absence of males engaged in wage labor, and third to cash cropping (Table 3). Cash cropping involves the very crops grown on the Cocopa Plantation: cocoa, coffee, and rubber (in 1968 only a very few Gbannah Mah rubber farms were in production). In addition, a new industry has developed around processing sugarcane into rum. Rum making had by 1969 emerged as the most profitable but in turn required the greatest investment. The cost of a cane mill and distilling equipment was approximately \$1,000 in 1968.

Once cash cropping was undertaken, the knowledge of tree management gained at the plantation was readily applicable. In Gbannah the concept of a coffee or cocoa farm is different from that of the traditional kola grove. Kola groves develop haphazardly around rice farm kitchen sites. Coffee and cocoa

The investment "expense" of the indigenous community remains the same no matter how many parties are on the other side. Joint venture ideology is based on the concept of the sovereign nation-state. How valid this line of reasoning is in relation to the relative power of an entity like U.S. or Bethlehem Steel vis-à-vis Liberia remains to be seen.

Table 3

Percentage of Domestic Groups Cash Cropping^a
in Four Sample Gbannah Towns (1963)

Town	Domestic Groups	Domestic Groups Cash Cropping	Percentage
Gipo	49 ^b	43	88
Dea	23	16	69
Gbeibini	57	49	86
Sehwi	44	36	82

SOURCE: Author's survey.

^aCoffee, cocoa, rubber, and sugarcane/rum.

^bSample interviewed out of a total of 119 domestic groups.

farms, on the other hand, are planted on land specifically cleared for the purpose. While kola groves seldom, if ever, number 100 trees, a coffee farm of over 1,000 trees is not uncommon.

In fact, the local communities and concession are tied together at many points in spite of the antipathy described above. In analyzing the labor records at Cocopa, I noticed that there was a shortage of labor (at the concession) during the traditional season for farm preparation (February-May) when the new rice farms are cut. This is expected as the demands for male labor would be highest at just this time in the traditional agricultural round. Both the Firestone Plantation at Harbell and Cocopa expected this periodic drop in labor in these months while anticipating a corresponding influx of labor during the crop maintenance season of June through September when a concentration of male labor is not critical to village agriculture.

What was unexpected, however, was the fact that the number of workers coming from some Mah towns was lowest at just this season. These were the towns with the greatest commitment to cash cropping. Subsequent interviews revealed that the men were using these slack months to care for their coffee and cocoa, to prepare new sugarcane farms, and to distill cane juice. The sugarcane is processed into rum and the price drop from \$8 to \$5 for a five-gallon "tin" between May and October also confirmed this increased activity.

The fact that people will not only work for wages at a plantation but will leave that employment to compete in the same world commodity market indicates that involvement in the money economy as an independent producer is more rewarding than wage labor in Gbannah once a certain level of production is reached.

Along another dimension this means that people are trying to put increasing amounts of land into production. New rules have had to be worked out as to who gets how much access to which parcels of prime land. Cash cropping must compete at some point for the same time, labor, and land as subsistence cropping and these factors are inelastic as far as the village situation is concerned.

Land expropriation, expansion of market towns, and the road itself have reduced the land base. The minimal sibs (gbein) determine the allocation of land by meeting as a group. I observed several instances in 1968 where large cash cropping domestic groups were denied any further expansion on sib land. If one's own sib's land resources are judged inadequate one can apply to another sib by presenting a bag of rice and alcoholic beverage (usually rum). If the request is granted, and it must be done so unanimously, no further compensation is required. In 1969, this land question was far from resolved and indeed was just emerging as a dominant problem. One important elder in the

town of Gipo has all of his coffee and cocoa farms on another sib's land. This particular situation was brought up increasingly in land-use negotiations as the 1969 farming season approached.

Labor migration further exacerbates the problem. In 1968, 42 percent of the men in the area were involved in employment outside their natal villages. The availability of an adequate labor force to manage cash cropping, particularly rum making, is most important if the domestic group is going to achieve any return on its investment in cane mills and distillery. The mean size of the domestic groups in the rum business (distillers) was twice the mean of the community as a whole. It is these domestic groups that need male labor at home and object if more than one younger member migrates at any one time. In general, the more involved a domestic group is in cash cropping, the larger its size.

The production and managerial roles assumed by the wives of migrants alleviate to some degree these competing demands on a finite male labor pool. In the labor histories of a random sample of 50 males in the town of Gipo, it was found that out of 73 completed labor trips by married men, the wives made a rice farm in the home village on 48 of them. Many of the wives who have accompanied their husbands to the concessions returned to the home village during planting and harvesting seasons.

If the responsibility for the organization function of the domestic group is assumed by the wife, she can attempt to "hire" (by an appropriate feast) village labor cooperatives for the male tasks of land clearing and storage facility construction. In some cases the migrants have sent money home for this purpose.

Up to a point this is possible but when so many males are gone problems emerge. (1) The reciprocal labor aspect of cooperatives is negated. (2) The

women get the help of the group when no member has a turn, usually an unfavorable time. (3) Non-migrants would rather devote spare time to cash crops. (4) Since not everyone can be helped, the situation often creates considerable animosity. I have personally heard successful women accused of giving sexual favors to the headmen of the cooperatives for special consideration. These factors help account for the fact that women are forming their own land clearing cooperatives. Out of a total of 16 female reciprocal labor cooperatives in the town of Gipo, 5, or 31 percent, were organized principally for making the members independent of male assistance.

Other changes followed when wives assumed the responsibility for the domestic group farms while their husbands were away. Traditionally a polygynous family lived in a single dwelling and all the wives made a single joint farm. In the late 1940s this pattern began to change. Wives in polygynous units started making separate rice farms. This production independence has, in many cases, led to residential independence (see Table 4).

Table 4

Individual Farms and Residences for Wives
by Polygynous Domestic Group

	Independent Residences	All Wives Share Common Quarters
Wives making individual farms	11	1
Wives making joint farms	7	7

$Q = .83$ $\chi^2 = 5.27$ $P = .02$

SOURCE: Author's survey of 50 randomly selected domestic groups in the town of Gipo, 1968.

With over 40 percent of the males away at any one time, the remaining male and female labor is engaged in production activities on a more continual basis by expanding the role of the labor cooperative. First, the scope of these cooperatives has been expanded to include clearing, planting, and harvesting cash crops. As discussed above the cost of such a group is a feast. Within the traditional agricultural system one is simply transferring production from one year to ensure the continued production in another. Today with cash and subsistence crops competing for the same labor, land, and time, feast costs become equal to what the same food items would bring on the commodities market.

In 1967-68, I observed three men hiring itinerant agricultural laborers because they found it less expensive to do so. Erasmus first documented for Latin America the process whereby reciprocal labor cooperatives are replaced by hired help (1956). This is a process that is in its most incipient stages in Gbannah, a situation that allows for the chance to observe the factors that go into this transition. Table 5 gives the market exchange cost for the food items consumed by a women's labor cooperative working on an important elder's farm for two days. After the first day the job was not done and the elder begged the group to come back, promising an especially fine feast. We see from the Table that the total calculated cost was \$50 for the two days not counting the labor of feast preparation, condiments, etc., which would bring the real total closer to \$60. If the elder had hired labor at the same rate as paid at the Cocopa plantation (65¢/day) his labor costs would have been \$24.70 for the two days with a total savings of between \$25 and \$35.

Another factor facilitating the change to hired labor is the traditional allocation rights. As described above, the husband depends on his wife for the necessary food staples for a feast. With hired help he provides no food

Table 5

Local Market Value for Feast Items Consumed by Keikpo,^a
 Women's Reciprocal Labor Cooperative, June 20, 21, 1968

Quantity	Feast Item ^b	Selling Price in Flumpa ^c
1	Hog	\$16
2	Bags of rice	\$17 (\$8.50 ea.)
1	Antelope	\$ 8
1	Tin (5 gal. rum)	\$ 6
6	Fish (medium large)	\$ 3
	Total	\$50

SOURCE: Author's field notes.

^aKeikpo has 19 members.

^bFeast items must be broad enough in range to provide adequate portions for all regardless of natal sib food prohibitions.

^cPrice paid to producer.

and hence does not have to coordinate his cash cropping activities with his wife's/wives' domestic responsibilities. The increasing use of hired labor may lead to a decrease in the socio-economic position of women in Gbannah.

Another innovation has been the adoption of the peligbua (peli = money) or savings association. These were first encountered by the Gbannah labor migrants to the Firestone Plantation at Harbell and when introduced into the village (apparently in the late 1950s) they were patterned after the labor cooperatives and the same referent, gbua, was used. Table 6 lists the savings cooperatives in existence in the town of Gipo in 1968. All of these had been in existence for less than 3 years but were formed out of the membership of previous savings groups. They are organized principally to help members over short-run cash flow problems. Monthly meetings are held and the members in

Table 6

Active Savings Associations in Gipo, 1968

Name	Person in Charge	Purpose	Membership
Bo Yi	Nya Dolo	self help	15
Gipo Women's Association	Nya Dolo	self help, banking, community development	12
Kpo Si	Wei Pei	self help	10
Money Kuu	Ya Yo	self help	unknown
Unnamed	Kokwei	self help	over 50

SOURCE: Author's field notes.

need of cash plead their case and the entire group approves or vetoes each one individually. If members feel the group is nonresponsive to his/her needs, they withdraw the total amount they have contributed in the past and quit. The same people can belong to more than one savings gbua at a time.

Table 7 gives the membership of the most active group, the Gipo Women's Association. The association is open to both men and women, despite the name. A new member pays 50¢ to join and the normal monthly dues are 25¢. The stated purpose of the club is to give support to any member in case of trouble, ailment, or difficulty and also to raise funds for the development of Gipo. It also serves as a bank where non-members can borrow at interest.

The idea for such a group was proposed by Kour Martha, a woman who had traveled extensively in Liberia. She and a man named Nya Dolo, who was highly respected by the community in such matters, organized the association in December 1966. Each member upon joining takes a Kwi (i.e., Americo-Liberian) name and assumes a title borrowed from the Liberian national government. These titles are said to emphasize the progressive nature of the association on the

one hand and to ensure a lack of domination by any small group of members on the other. One can change, I was told, one's title or Kwi name at will by announcing it to all the other members.

Table 7

Membership in Gipo Women's Association, 1968

Name ^a	Title	Comment
Jacob Dolo	President	Founder
Martha Cole	General Secretary	Founder
Betty Sei	Collector	
Ester Flumo	Critic	
Martha Nessian	Treasurer	
Alice Gunyon	Assistant Treasurer	
Mary Woquoi	Social Secretary	
Annie Yinei	Speaker	
Sarah Leggei	Judge	
Cecilia Leggei	Lawyer	
Holly Gartei	Senator	
Kema (?) Nessian	Senator	

SOURCE: Author's field notes.

^aLast names given approximate phonetic value, tonality not indicated.

These adjustments to land and labor loss on the one hand while creating new social relationships and adding new crops on the other have made it possible for a person from Gbannah to participate in two incompatible economic systems at the same time. Almost all of the inventiveness, however, has been on the part of the Mah and they have made the Western economy an extension of the home village.

The introduction of a capitalist system does not by itself immediately transform all indigenous economies into modern ones (cf. Rosenberg 1976:54,55). International monopoly capital is derived from an entirely different cultural/ecological setting. Its modes of production require a labor force unbounded by ties to kinsmen and land.

Here, the Gbannah material shows, is where the modern economic development scheme comes into direct competition with long-established traditional systems. Contrary to our normal way of thinking, labor, relative to other factors of production, is more expensive in traditional and developing than in advanced economies. This is so because the worker in the most industrialized societies receives a much smaller proportion of the total product (Marx, Capital I:613; Erasmus 1961). Therefore, in finite labor systems people are more valuable and costly than any other factor of production. This is why population growth within the kinship unit is viewed as anything but detrimental to increasing per capita consumption (v. Mamdani 1972). The Gbannah data describe a transition state between the complete control over the resources and modes of production to the eventual loss of that control. The only way the modern economy can increase the supply of labor while reducing its relative cost is to break the tie between the people and the land.

In African colonial history we see repeated examples of the attempt to create fully elastic if not infinite labor supplies for European economic enterprises. This was done through taxation, forced labor, *corvée*, and direct slavery. These earlier processes are now being replaced by what Barbara Ward has labeled the "revolution of rising expectations" and its attendant problems and contradictions (Ward 1962; Scitovsky 1976).

As was pointed out in the text, the surest way of meeting the new desires engendered by "rising expectations" is through increased village production.

The most successful men traditionally were those who were able to attract the most followers. Those who are the most successful in terms of the new economy are exactly those who are the most successful in the old. The social relationships of the traditional modes of production are still near in both spatial and temporal terms because they are still the most viable.

It is not surprising, then, that the Gbannah data show that the larger the social unit in the village, the greater the resistance to labor migration. The labor that is available during the traditional crop maintenance period (time of greatest labor migration) directly determines ultimate production of both staples and cash crops: staples because haphazard weeding, fencing, and pest control make an otherwise productive farm into a marginal one; cash crops because if much over 40 percent of the male labor is away working for wages, cash cropping becomes impossible.

The changes so far have been remarkably rapid and successful, but given current trends they will likely prove for naught. Economic survival in the modern world does not lie with the small producers and the Mah will remain at the mercy of what must appear to them as a capricious market structure. The economies of scale for the foreseeable future are limited in both land and labor dimensions. The technology for sustained high yields on African tropical soils has yet to be developed, and any change in the demographic balance or reduction in available land will have severe repercussions.

The Gbannah Mah are not unique in their experience; they are part of a process. Their continuing loss of control over the modes of production (principally land and labor) in their traditional homeland is not the result of evil designs but the result of their acceptance as fully participating members in the industrial world's political economy.

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