

Rebuilding Liberia: Nat Richardson



Photo: Richard Brewster

In a sparse office with one desk and three rattan chairs, Nat Richardson hunches over a laptop screen. He's searching for information on water pumps, semi-precious stones, and trash disposal techniques. He sends off emails to a road designer from Russia and another one to a Ghanaian friend he wants to bring to Liberia to work with him. He holds a doctorate in geology, but his interests spread beyond education or business card titles.

Sit with him for ten minutes and he'll develop another new idea to improve life in Monrovia and Liberia. As his homeland awakes from a fourteen-year war induced stupor, Richardson is a quiet force helping to rebuild his beloved country.

Educated in Britain and the United States as an environmental consultant, Richardson returned home to Liberia in 1997 to run the state mining company for Charles Taylor. His position in the warlord's government did not leave him immune to problems in the social upheaval. In 2003 his compound was commandeered by a military police chief, and over US\$300,000.00 was stolen from his office and his wife's restaurant next door. He worked within the chaos of corruption, while maintaining his faith in God with a strict policy of honesty and trust.

Today, Richardson is President of AmLib United Minerals, Inc. which includes operation of Bong Mines and several resulting business ventures. Combining his visionary brainstorming and name with his brother's administrative skills, they dip into a wide array of business ideas that few, if any, in Liberia are attempting. He sees business prospects everywhere. He reopened a passenger train route from Monrovia to Bong Mine, northeast of Monrovia, for his mining workers. Then he expanded the service to non-workers for a small fee. Unfortunately, this initial attempt was thwarted by a jealous transitional minister who saw the venture as a

way to receive kickbacks. But Richardson's focus is on the development, not the money. *"I've never set out to get rich,"* says Richardson. *"I've always said, let me stay in Liberia."* He aims to utilize Liberia's rich natural resources and exquisite landscape to raise living conditions. Through his projects he hopes to expand Liberians' life perspective beyond daily survival. The unemployed men loitering on Monrovia's streets used to work in technical positions, he says. But they lost long-term vision because of fighting in the war. Richardson believes that with training and opportunity, these men will be productive employees again. His ideas don't lie dormant; he has already been successful at job creation.

But Richardson cannot rebuild Liberia alone. His faith in God and optimism about President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's administration gives him hope that the years of short-sighted living is over. In the meantime, he is busy researching coffee-growing techniques and harvesting to create more farming cooperatives. Just another idea on his path to bring Liberia back to life.



Photos by Debra Bell
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