

# Building a brighter future

By **HENRI HARMON**

VICE PRESIDENT, GOLDEN VEROLEUM LIBERIA



**HENRI HARMON** is a Vice President at Golden Veroleum (Liberia) Inc. Henri is an accomplished agriculturist, manager and businessman with a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture from the University of Liberia (1976). He worked in rural agriculture and soil analysis with the Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation and Liberia Coffee and Cocoa Corporation. At Firestone Rubber Company he was responsible for extension support to local farmers. Prior to joining GVL, Henri founded and ran an insurance business in the US.

**G**olden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) is proud to have been awarded a concession in September 2010 by the Government of Liberia to produce sustainable palm oil. We will be making one of the largest ever investments in Liberia.

This would not have been possible without the Liberian government's commitment to attracting foreign investment and expertise to help rebuild the economy and realise the country's large untapped potential. We wish to acknowledge the constructive and professional way the Government of Liberia and its Inter-ministerial Commission on Concessions, led by the National Investment Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture, handled the complex negotiations that an investment of this scale inevitably involves, and have continued to support and facilitate our progress.

Sustainable oil palm development will be a central pillar in rebuilding Liberia's rural economy and reducing poverty. By its very nature, palm oil is a long-term investment. GVL looks forward to playing an ongoing role in support of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy and to contributing to the economic revitalisation of the country through investment, job creation, skill building, increased food security and rural economic development.

GVL's concession covers five counties situated in Liberia's southeast, one of the least developed parts of the



GVL's Wakefield Nursery with employee housing under construction in the background. (Butaw, Sinoe County, Liberia)

country. Opportunities in this region have been minimal, based mostly on shifting subsistence agriculture, hunting or fishing. More than 75 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

In this region, GVL has established three greenfield nursery sites from which operations are expanding, and the impact of stable employment and increasing prosperity are evident in the towns around operations. In the two years since commencement of operations, GVL has created over 2,700 new jobs and is training employees in a range of new skills. Employee productivity levels are encouraging and there is an emerging group of young energetic and talented people with real career growth potential. When fully operational, GVL expects to employ 40,000 Liberians directly. The company is building modern houses, schools, clinics and hospitals, repairing county roads and bridges, and upgrading community water supplies. In a mutual win-win, we fund a national scholarship program and sponsor advanced mobile medical services.

As a responsible investor and a member of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), GVL is committed to the sustainable development of palm oil in Liberia. This means protecting the environment and working harmoniously with local communities.

On the environment, and in addition to our conservation commitments under the RSPO, we are working with an international NGO and technical advisors to identify High Carbon Stock (HCS) zones in order to exclude these areas from our development plans.

GVL's engagement with local communities is founded on the principle that we are committed to respecting the sovereignty, culture, heritage and traditions of our hosts, and ensuring that palm oil production brings them real benefits. We will only develop in areas to which communities have openly invited us and on land for which we have been given their Free Prior and Informed Consent.

GVL looks forward to playing its part in building a brighter future for Liberia. By bringing long-term prosperity, we are determined to repay the trust that both the government and local communities have put in us. And by maintaining a sensitive balance between environment and development and by respecting community rights, we are confident we can establish a long-lasting and mutually rewarding partnership with the government of Liberia and the people of the Liberian southeast.