

Written by Wade C. L. Williams, wade.williams@frontpageafricaonline.com

Tuesday, 17 July 2012 22:46



**'THIS IS OUR TIME!'**  
**DRILLING LIBERIA'S**  
**OIL**  
**YOUNG LIBERIANS JOIN EFFORT IN**  
**SEARCH FOR COUNTRY'S NEW**  
**WEALTH, TELL THEIR STORIES, AS**  
**CHEVRON UNVEILS OILRIG AT**  
**LB-12**



**Monrovia** - West Brown 30, is dressed in his blue overall just from the kitchen onboard the TransOcean oil rig Discovery Spirit currently drilling off Liberia's shores for oil on behalf of the American oil giant Chevron.

Brown is among 38 Liberians currently leading the way as pioneers of Liberia's newborn oil industry. Excited to see the a team of National Oil Company officials who had just disembarked a red Helicopter on a tour led by Chevron, seems excited to see Liberian officials onboard the rig for the first time.

"We are happy to see our own Liberian people onboard because we have been working here and people out there do not know that there are Liberians are here working," says Brown. "Even our Maritime authority does not know many Liberians are onboard this rig."

Brown says many are unaware that there are Liberians who have taken advantage of the huge opportunity and are currently working in the oil industry at its embryonic stage.

"People think we do not have oil here but we are Liberians involved in oil exploration and the media has not actually come here to find out what's going on to inform the public," says Brown.

Joey Davenport works for TransOcean O.I.M, the company hired by Chevron to drill its first oil wells. Speaking Sunday July 15, 2012 on the rig he says there is a total of 38 Liberian crew members from different companies, including Chevron the service partner through TransOcean.



DavenPort who has over 30 years wealth of experience drilling for oil around the world says he has seen incredible talents in the Liberians he has been able to work with at TransOcean.



**Liberian crew members on Chevron's new oil rig.**

“What we found is very good talent. They don’t have the experience, but actually some of them have about a year experience now; we got them and they were willing, hardworking, intelligent people that we could work with and we developed some closer ties and relationships with them,” he says.

He says the willingness to learn and the level of dedication to move up the next level has given him and other crew members the urge to invest in the talents of the young Liberians working on the oil rig, who will then lead the way for future local manpower in an industry that experts predicts will grow tremendously.

“So we are proud to help them along in their career and we hope that in the future as more oil and gas exploration continues to roll into Liberia; that we’ve helped to lay a good foundation; a solid foundation of crews that have learned the basics,” says Davenport.

The TransOcean official disclosed that the Liberians have learned most importantly not to get hurt and equally to have a continuing high performing operation on a project expected to last for 33days forty forty-five days.

### **Create opportunities for young Liberians**

Eli T. Seepo, 41, has comes from a background of working on fishing and cargo vessels with 13 years wealth of experience on the sea but had never worked on an oil rig before coming to TransOcean to join the team.

“I’m on the deck, we have a team, we are about nine Liberians in a crew, we work with the American guys. We assist them; we take things from one end to the other. Two Liberians are now learning to work with the helicopter landing,” he says.

Seepo has been working on the Discovery Spirit, TransOcean for a year now and he has been onshore for six months and offshore for another six months. He says he feels passionate about youth empowerment and the government doing all it can to invest in capacity building of the young people.

“I have five children. I want to speak to you as a member of the Media to pass this message to the Liberian people, those that are in positions of power should stop criticizing Liberians who are on the street,” he says.

“These Guys want to work but they do not have the opportunity. So let them create job opportunities for these guys and put them there. If you say someone is useless, you can make them to become a changed person.”

Seepo says the criticisms by people in authority that young Liberians generally are not willing to learn is a bad notion that must be changed by giving the young people a chance to prove themselves.

“How can someone be serious if you who are there to provide the opportunity to make them serious cannot do so? The person can only become serious if you help them,” he says.

“TransOcean has been good to us, but we only need support from the Liberian government and most especially the maritime people.”



The seaman frowned on the authorities in charge of Liberian maritime accusing the bureau that it is not doing anything at all to help secure the welfare of Liberians gradually establishing a niche in the oil sector.



Looking on with keen interest

“The maritime people are not taking us seriously on this rig. The money given to Liberians is very small because the work is very risky; we are being paid U.S\$ 2,000 a month. You cannot compare the office job with the field job, it is only in Liberia we see this going on,” says Seepo.

“If you hear people today saying that Ghana is developed, it started from this point. They made sure they paid their people well and they used the money to develop the county.”

### NOCAL boss impressed



Many if not all of the officials of the National Oil Company of Liberia who were on the tour of the rig were excited to see Liberians forming part of a moment of Liberia’s post war economic history as it relates to the new found wealth ‘Oil’.

NOCAL’s Boss speaking to FrontPageAfrica onboard the rig was overwhelmed by what he was able to see for himself-Liberians involved in the drilling for oil, as many are of the opinion that the country’s youth’s participation in the sector is several years away.

“I felt really great about it and very encouraged. So the way we think that we have almost nobody, we saw that we indeed have some people who have

already started the Journey and already had some experience as some of them has been there for a year experiencing exploration and drilling,” says Randolph McClain, President of NOCAL.

“I felt really great about it and very encouraged. So the way we think that we have almost nobody, we saw that we indeed have some people who have already started the Journey.”

### No Oil Find Yet?

Karl Cottrell, Chevron's Liberia country manager says the company has yet to evaluate what it has actually discovered and will not be making any announcements on what Chevron has actually discovered for a number of months.



“So I can’t comment on whether there is oil offshore or not at this point in time, but I am extremely happy with the way that we’ve operated these wells,” he says.

“We haven’t announced any results on these wells and to speculate on the brightness or the dimness of the industry will be unfair at this point in time.”

Cottrell says his company saw it fit to bring the NOCAL and other stakeholders from the government to tour the rig because of the many doubts surrounding what it looks like offshore.

Most folks in Liberia haven’t had the opportunity to visit an offshore drilling rig and there is a very complex process that is going on offshore, trying to explain what we are doing on pieces of paper in an office environment isn’t possible,” he says.

The Chevron Liberia Country Manager says by giving people the opportunity to visit the rig and see for themselves the complexity of the systems in place and the people who are working those systems, gives a great opportunity for capacity building



and show people what is actually going on offshore.

### The need for Capacity Building



**Joey Davenport TransOcean O.I.M, gives orientation to visitors about the rig.**

Cottrell says with its service providers Chevron has focused mainly on capacity building by bringing Liberians on to the rig since it began operation in the country. But says it takes time to grow in the industry as no one comes knowing it all.

“Obviously we are starting off with a very ground base. You heard the O.M.I talk about bringing the gentlemen in as painters effectively and as they gained skills they’ve been able to move up into more senior positions and more positions of responsibility,” he says.

The Chevron Liberia boss says as the current Liberians working in the oil industry get additional skills the company will continue to move them through but says the biggest challenge is continuing to build their education as the company goes into a period where it will not be drilling offshore but more into data analysis.

Captain Michael Siepert of TransOcean says he came up the ladder the same way Liberians navigating toward the industry in its infancy are coming in.

“Each time a person comes to an operation of this sort, it is very complex and it is a certain skill that has to be developed from the ground up. They came in the same level I came in 35years ago as painters at the low skill end,” he says.

The Rig’s Captain says he sees a lot of drive, intelligence and ambition in the Liberians at TransOcean even though they have no experiential knowledge in the oil sector when they come knocking on the company’s doors.

“So we’ve been giving them that and most of them came in as painters and very quickly we were able to select the keener of the bunch and were able to move those to the next level that’s the rouserbout,” says Captain Siepert.

Among jobs available to these beginners include working the deck, receive pipes, discharge pipes, clean deck, empty trash, move equipment around the rig floor, provide the rig floor with the drilling tools they need for the upcoming operation. It is an opportunity for them to learn, according to the Captain.

Liberia’s youngest Geologist N. Rufus D. Scott, 24 and Wellsite Geologist from Nocal has been with TransOcean for more than a year and a half. He is highly skilled and understands working on an oil rig.

Signing off on an advocacy note Seepo is encouraging other Liberians to take interest in the oil industry and gravitate toward the sector, joining in the drive to give Liberia a bright and prosperous future.

“I want to send a message to my Liberian brothers and sisters and say hey you can also be like me on this rig; I’m no different from you but the only thing is you have to be focused; once you are focused you will be able to do something for yourself in the future,” he says.

### Oil Wealth must bring Financial wealth

Many say there is a huge potential for the resources of this country to contribute to development, but the problem of poor management of these resources continues to haunt the country and if the proper mechanisms are not put into place to regulate the oil resource, Liberia is headed for trouble with its new found wealth.



The inequity in the distribution of the benefits that are derived from these resources and unless those issues are addressed and addressed soon the country is sowing the seed for a renewal of the conflict that shattered its very foundation in the last two decades, says Silas Siakor, head of the Sustainable Development Institute(SDI).



**NOCAI,s President listens to a TransOcean Crewmember explain a concept of the rig.**

"It may not be characterized by violence as we saw it, but it could very well degenerate into a similar situation further down the road if these issues are not addressed."

"Especially with oil now possibly coming online the potential for conflict for competing interest in the resource sector has the potential to undermine the progress that we have made so far," says Siakor

But President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf during a news briefing with a number of media institutions including the BBC, Bloomberg News and FrontPageAfrica, Monday in the Ethiopian Addis Ababa stressed that resources from Liberia's new-found oil discovery will be properly managed.

"But what we are doing right now is we are reforming the sector, ensuring first of all that there are proper allocations of those resources," she says.

We want to also make sure that those resources are reserved for future generations and we want to follow the good examples of countries like Norway to build up a certain sum for the future and oversee the allocations and ensure that people benefit from those funds."

She says the Government of Liberia under her stewardship is also looking at what is happening in countries like Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire where there are good examples to carve the path for Liberia's oil sector.

"As a matter of fact, Liberia and Sierra Leone have joined in a tripartite arrangement with Norway where the both of us will be involve in harmonization of our policies, our structures and our institutions and pattern to a certain extend to Norway," says President Sirleaf.

### **Chevron's Offshore Holdings in Liberia**



On September 8, 2010 – Chevron Corporation (NYSE:CVX) was granted approval by the Liberian government to acquire a 70 percent interest and operatorship in three deepwater concessions in Liberia.

The deepwater blocks, LB-11, LB-12 and LB-14 are located between 12 to 110 miles (20 to 180 km) south of the capital of Monrovia and cover a combined area of 3,700 square miles (9,600 square km).

Under the agreement, Chevron's Liberian subsidiary will conduct a three-year exploratory program that begin in the fourth quarter of 2010.

In Africa, Chevron participates in exploration and production activities in Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo. Chevron produced a net average of more than 430,000 barrels of oil equivalent in 2009 in these countries.

Chevron is one of the world's leading integrated energy companies, with subsidiaries that conduct business worldwide. The company's success is driven by the ingenuity and commitment of its employees and their application of the most innovative technologies in the world. Chevron is involved in virtually every facet of the energy industry.

## Business-in-a-Box

Never write a document from scratch again. Simply fill-in the blanks and print!

Last Updated on Tuesday, 17 July 2012 23:35