



*Remarks*

**WTO Public Forum: World Bank Group/WTO Plenary Session**

*Role of Trade in Ending Poverty*

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### **Salutations**

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2. Excellencies, Friends and Colleagues
3. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
4. Good afternoon.

### **The Opening Recognition**

5. Let me first of all say a big congrats to the team that work on this publication, which highlights some of the rudimentary challenges of poverty reduction and the role that trade must play if we are to collectively graduate our poorest brothers and sisters from poverty. Thank you for this timely work in a post 2015 reality. I am glad to see increase collaboration with the World Bank and the WTO in tackling poverty. I believe this is a perfect marriage if we are to transform countries addiction from official development assistance as the magic bullet to break our citizens from the shackles of extreme poverty. To remain relevant, greater collaboration must happen to yield new and innovative thinking to address an ever changing reality our world.
6. I also want to join the other speakers and participants in extending a big thank you and congratulations to WTO family for yet another intellectually stimulating and fruitful Public Forum commemorating the WTO at 20. Thank you all for the healthy exchanges, I pray that we all leave here more energized to fight the right fight to elevate the value of domestic reforms as an engine of growth and transformation through trade. I would have loved to see some parliamentarians and media personalities particularly from Africa participate in this truly remarkable experience with the hope they too leave here inspired to advocate for trade as an engine of growth.



### **The Role of Trade in Ending Poverty**

7. Ladies and Gentlemen, today I was asked to speak on the four main issues identified in the report as key challenges to poverty alleviation in the context of Liberia. Issues of rural poverty, the informal sector, gender and fragility and conflict.

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**I have developed a 20 page thesis covering these subjects, but I know this is the end of the day and as such I will not stand between you and the bar...**

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8. What I will do instead, is talk about what we, despite our difficult circumstances, have tried and continue to strive to tackle poverty in our country in the context of trade.
9. Ladies and gentlemen, in 2013 we launched our trade policy and national export strategy with the help of ITC, the World Bank and other partners. Since 2013 we have steadily tackled key policy areas of our trade policy. Our trade policy calls for:
  - a. Promoting international export competitiveness of our products by addressing supply side constraints (i.e. quality infrastructure, IT, Power, Roads, Ports)
  - b. Promoting domestic trade and expanding the pool of export ready businesses (MSMEs access to global value chains)
  - c. Increasing the efficiency of import and export administration, customs and border control measures (i.e. IPD reduction in categories; ASYCUDA, one Stop Shop at Port, PPP – APMT)
  - d. Promoting regional trade integration (i.e. ECOWAS CET)



- e. Promoting global market access for Liberian goods and services (i.e. WTO Accessions, National Export Strategy for Cocoa, Coffee, Fisheries, Oil Palm and soon Tourism and Furniture Making)
- f. Making trade enhancing institutions more effective in promoting Liberia's Trade interests (ADB PATSIL, EIF-SPIU)
- g. Enhancing the legal framework and good governance for trade (legal reforms for transparency, commercial court for dispute settlements)

We remain committed to this process because we believe tackling these policy areas will directly help us tackle issues of rural poverty, the informal sector, gender, and fragility and conflict.

### **Characteristics of Poverty in Africa**

10. Friends and colleagues, today 1 billion of our brothers and sisters live in extreme poverty, representing 15% of the world's population of which 80% are living in Sub-Saharan Africa. For Africa, 50% of our rural population live in extreme poverty. For Africa, the youth represents the majority of our population, over 60%. For Africa, women bear the greatest burden of poverty. For Africa, majority of our rural dwellers are subsistence farmers. For Africa, that population is the least educated with the least access to basic services and basic opportunities for freedom from poverty. For Africa, the majority of that population operate in the informal sector. For Africa, poverty of the majority keeps many nations fragile and vulnerable to conflict.
11. So, when we talk about reducing poverty by half by 2030, what does it mean for Africa and what is our role in the interpretation, translation and implementation of that goal. Lets think for a second.



Please take a look at this photo and let's pause for a second and think about what part do you have to play?

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12. I want you to think about that and I will make a proposal to each of you in closing.
13. Now, the work puts forth the challenges and some strategies we can use to tackle these challenges to contribute to poverty reduction but makes it clear that global trade alone cannot overcome global poverty.
14. Before I conclude, let me tell you a few practical actions the Government of Liberia has taken to tackle some of these challenges.
15. First, next Tuesday, at 3PM the Working Party on the Accession of Liberia will be adopting our Draft Accession Package, *ad referendum* and transmitting it for formal action by Ministers at MC10, in Nairobi. This, for us, is a historical moment for the people of Liberia. We firmly believe that the WTO membership will transform our country to a more competitive, reliable, transparent, rule-based trade and investment destination.
16. Second, we are in the process of adopting the ECOWAS Common External Tariff and joining the ECOWAS Customs Union, where we hope, we will increase our domestic private sector access to regional markets to foster greater regional integration from the inconsequential less than 10% cross border trade to a more impactful target. We must trade better among ourselves.
17. Third, we are using ODA to foster investment in quality infrastructure to reduce trade cost in our country. I would also like to emphasize that matching our development goal in infrastructural services, such as education, health, and transportation was the key strategy in our services offer during the WTO accession negotiations.



18. Fourth, we recently pass the Small Business Empowerment Act that targets minimum 25% of government public procurements to SMEs to foster innovation and inclusion of SMEs in the formal economy. The law also mandates at minimum, 5% procurement opportunities for women owned SMEs.
19. Amongst other initiatives, we are focusing on the transformation of the agriculture sector by fostering greater private sector participation in strategic areas.

### Closing

20. Friends and colleagues, now I hope we have all thought about what role we all have to play in alleviating global poverty. Let me put forth this assumption with a caveat, that I am not an economist, nor a specialist of any sort, but rather a humble civil servant who is always reminded of this picture and as such I am constantly asking myself, what am I doing to foster hope for these young people..
21. So for me, I see growth as a function of consumption. Consumption as a function of appetite. Appetite a function of desire. Desire a function of aspirations. Aspirations a function of hope and a promise and faith in dignity of existence. Today, for those of you who are parents with children living in the developed world, many of those kids woke up this morning taking that promise and faith in dignity of existence for granted, as an afterthought. Today the same is only but a subconscious dream for most in the developing world.
22. But what has changed is that, thanks to technology and our borderless world through technology that longing for the reality of that dream seems more and more reachable.



Today an estimated 60% mobile penetration in Africa, is fostering a migration to urban centers inadequate to accommodate such migration inflows. Today, in my country half of the population chose to live on top of each other in abject poverty, with a common desire to fulfil such dreams. Today, the rural poor consumption pattern is changing and their valuation of the realization of that dream of dignity of existence is defined not by their making, but from without. What does this mean for nations consuming poorly? What is our role?

23. In the same way people consume deeper than their pockets because of perceptions and aspirations of their interpretation of the dignity of existence, countries do too. How do we get nations to spend within their means, and borrow responsibly without sentencing future generations to poverty? Most African youth today if you were to ask where would they want to live, the most common response is somewhere in the developed world. Most African youth today, if you were to ask them to name 5 things they currently use made in Africa, they would struggle. We must value African products the same way we value products from elsewhere. But this cannot happen without knowledge transfer, greater partnerships, reduced trade cost, and improved quality of standards and fair and equitable access to markets. The WTO and the World Bank both have strategic roles to play. All of you, have strategic roles to play.
24. What and how you consume, what and how nations consume, what and how the poor consume, can serve as a catalyst for the liberation of the bottom billion if quality economic growth is based on consumption rooted in principles of ethics, morality, equity, quality and transparency.
25. As I said, if I have not left you confused, I hope at least, I have left you with one question – what is your role in alleviating poverty? Please check your refrigerator today when you go home. It might surprise you.
26. Thank you.

