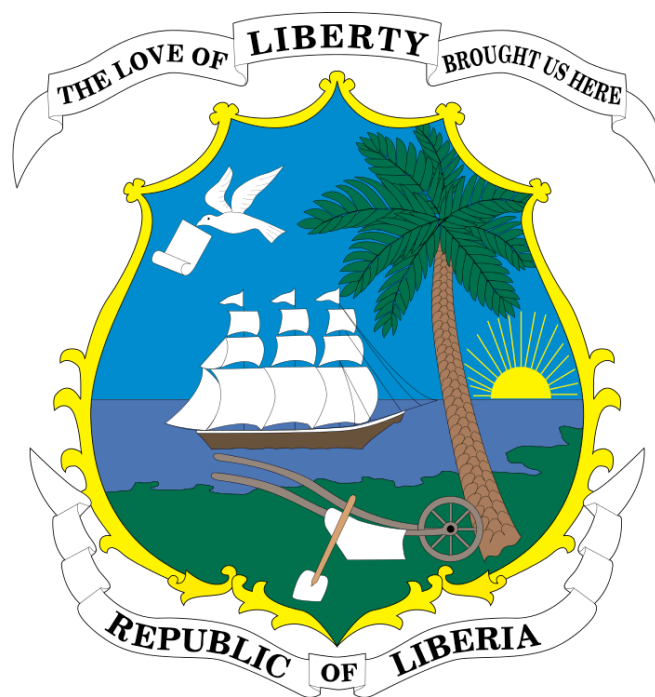

ECOWAS TRADE LIBERALIZATION SCHEME (ETLS) TRAINING WORKSHOP



*Remarks by the Deputy Minister Stephen Marvie, Jr.,
Ministry of Commerce and Industry*

Bella Casa Hotel, Monrovia

1 March 2017



1. Honorable Ministers;
2. Honorable Commissioner of Customs, ECOWAS;
3. Government Officials;
4. The Private Sector;
5. Ladies and Gentlemen,
6. Good morning. On behalf of Minister Axel M. Addy, Minister of Commerce and Industry, I am glad to join you for the workshop aimed at raising awareness on the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) for the public and private sectors, most especially the National Approvals Committee.
7. I am pleased that Liberia has finally joined other ECOWAS Member States to implement the ETLS which will now facilitate the regional trade we have advocated for as a region.
8. Integration and trade in West Africa are well documented in our history as a region. West Africa has always been crossed by trade flows of goods and services between nations. It is this mix of trade flows and culture that have shaped the image of the region beyond borders and aspirations of people to move towards integration.
9. Intra-regional trade is what we need to unlock huge agricultural and industrial potential in the region.
10. Our industrialization efforts could thus be based on structural changes driven by strong regional institutions, a structured network of infrastructures, especially in the energy and transport sectors, and reduced asymmetries between countries through common sectoral policies and convergence and institutions.
11. Liberia's trade with the Mano River Union and the ECOWAS region is grossly estimated at approximately 5 and 10 percent respectively.



12. The ETLS presents opportunities for Liberia's industries, companies and the private sector at large. The rationale underpinning the ETLS is to promote regional trade transactions using regional modalities.
13. With the advent of the Common External Tariff (CET), Liberia is again showing to the rest of the world that the future is regional trade. The CET is the basis of the Goods (tariff) Offer presented by Liberia at the World Trade Organization.
14. We must thank ECOWAS for the level of support given Liberia to train our technicians and policy makers on specific provisions of the ETLS and CET to ensure that decision makers understand the key aspects of the regional instruments meant to promote regional trade, integration and development.
15. We must stress that as we build the capacity of the National Approval Committee and the private sector to ensure effective implementation of the ETLS, the challenges presented by the countless non-tariff barriers - checkpoints within and at borders, duplication of customs, trade and regulatory processes and procedures, ambiguous regulatory practices, cumbersome manual procedures, extreme protection of domestic industries from regional competitors, and arbitrary interpretation of the rules - persist.
16. We need to continue to use constructive engagements and ECOWAS trade and customs fora to remind policy makers of the exigent need to tackle those challenges and facilitate trade, as indicated in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement – an agreement that has recently come into force.
17. Let me emphasize this important message: In line with Liberia's WTO Post Accession Plan, today's initiative builds on the work of the Government's effort to support Liberia's domestic private sector and expand market opportunities for operators as we seek to improve on its overall Doing Business program.
18. The Government is in the process of getting a private sector operator to come in and set up a single window platform to handle the exchange of trade transactions between traders and government agencies, and particular reduce the time it takes to process trade



transactions among government agencies. We thus aim to reduce the time and documents to import and export, as well as, improve other horizontal processes, such as, immigration, labor permits and the general issuance of licenses overtime.

19. The three-day ETLS workshop organized by the Government of Liberia and ECOWAS will highlight critical rules and procedures to follow in the implementation of the scheme. It is a very scientific process and ECOWAS is quite procedural in terms of qualifying your products and notifying the other Member States and our National Approval Committee.
20. Your views and comments are very important in making this workshop a worthwhile exercise.
21. I urge you to take full advantage of the opportunity this training provides and wish you a successful workshop.
22. Let me wish you all a successful deliberation and we hope to begin exporting our products to the rest of the region in the coming weeks and months.
23. Thanks.