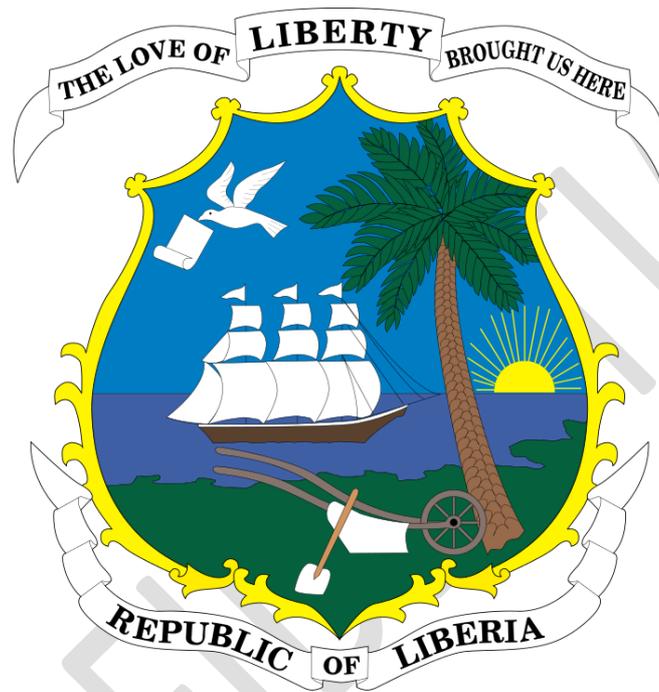

MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, RL



**Africa Strategy Workshop
Commentary: Changing the Narrative**

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As we embark on three days of dialogue on urbanization, the fundamental question is how do we create the Urban Africa we want? We begin by changing the narrative. How do we as people and countries do this? In Liberia we are changing the narrative:

We are striving to determine the Liberia we want, and I share insights from a twofold perspective, as a licensed and certified urban planner with four year tenure with the Monrovia City Corporation, the municipal governing agency for Liberia's Capital City. My Mayor the Honorable Clara Doe Mvogo is also with us today. I also share a perspective as the Deputy Minister for Industry with the MOCI, where we are transforming the commerce story and highlighting the importance of economic diversification for sustainable development.

In Liberia we must change our narrative in the face of formidable challenges:

Post conflict

Post Ebola

Infrastructure deficits

Human capacity development struggles

Rapid urbanization

The list goes on, but to quote our esteemed Member of the Cities Alliance Policy Advisory Board, and Secretary-General of the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa ([UCLG](#)), Mr. Jean-Pierre Mbassi, "A new narrative is needed for African cities that are not romantic but realistic. An African city is not a European city; a city should be embedded in its society".

This dialogue on urbanization begins with People. It begins with a realistic portrait of what it means to urbanize within the context of our uniquely African perspectives. In Liberia, paradigm shift is needed to highlight the advantages of urbanization and build upon our advantages and the opportunities that urbanization can and will bring to not only our individual nations, but the continent of Africa.

2.2 million Of Liberia's 4.5 million inhabitants live in urban areas across the country and over 40%, 1.5 million reside in the capital Monrovia. Monrovia's steep increase in residents, which was primarily caused by internal displacement during the country's 14-year civil



conflict, this extremely rapid growth has severely stressed the city's already limited infrastructure placed acute pressure on delivery of social services, housing and governance. The City's population is growing at over 7%—meaning the city will double in roughly ten years.

Globally, the world's 600 biggest cities account for more than 60 percent of global GDP. The top 20 accommodate a third of all large corporations, and account for almost half of their combined revenues. As the capital of Liberia, Monrovia's opportunities and challenges are significant. It generates two thirds of the national GDP and has a vibrant central business district, bustling informal entrepreneurs, and political leaders that are strongly committed to a successful future for the city.

In contrast, most secondary cities and smaller towns can be classified as rural settlements lacking basic services, infrastructure development and social amenities. Additionally, very little attention is paid to development within the fifteen (15) county capital cities outside of Monrovia. Despite increases in population of all capital cities, with the exception of Barclayville in South-eastern Liberia, there is limited and in some cases non-existent infrastructure development in these urban areas. This has hampered the diversification of economic development outside Monrovia. County capitals and other secondary cities such as Ganta and Pleebo are centers of major economic activities but lack the investment opportunities that accelerate growth. These 15 undeveloped cities present formidable opportunities for urban and economic transformation.

2014 to 2015 saw the crippling of our \$2billion dollar economy with a health crisis that brought our economy to its knees and dropped our GDP to under 1%. In 2014, while struggling with how to tackle the steady drop in two of our major export commodities' prices, rubber and iron ore, we had to redirect our focus from focusing on interventions to address falling commodity prices to mobilizing resources to address a raging health crisis.

Today, we are Ebola free and have learned many valuable lessons. First we've learned that an economy driven by two primary commodities is at the mercy of internal and external shocks



that can cripple it. Second it taught us that an economy driven by consumption rather than production remains vulnerable to internal and external variables it cannot control. It also forced us to rethink about our transformation approach which includes the definition of urbanization. As we learned that two commodities cannot propel an economy into perpetuity, one city cannot sustain a national urban platform.

Today, in Liberia, we have reinvented ourselves as a pro-business environment through good economic management, fiscal discipline and legislative reform to help enable the private-sector to grow. We are cognizant of the role Gov't has to fulfill in strengthening the policy environment and we understand that one Strong City cannot sustain urbanization, cannot promote holistic economic development and cannot alleviate poverty or change the lives of the 65% of the population who are our youth, men and women between the ages of 18-35.

Agenda 2063—The Africa We Want is a flagship campaign of the African Union, tells us to learn the lessons from our past, build on the progress now underway and use the opportunities offered by urbanisation and the demographic shift to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years.

As a nation, learning the tough lessons as we have in the past year, we are more focused than ever on developing and diversifying domestic industries to tackle poverty, unemployment and spur sustainable economic growth. In order to reach our stated goal of becoming a middle-income country by the year 2030, we must ensure our economy and our urban centers diversity. We will promote urban employment generation, improve urban food, water, energy and security, strengthen rural-urban linkages and promote infrastructure development that enhances regional economic cooperation, as well as review channels to increase municipal revenue streams for strengthening local level governance capacities.

The Liberian narrative includes an appreciation of our key comparative advantages and how they have to potential to shift our urbanism.

The largest of which is Agriculture: Climatic conditions in Liberia support agriculture development: abundance of rainfall, fertile soil and a knowledgeable English-speaking



workforce. Several Large concessions in oil palm, rubber, cocoa and rice exist. Agriculture is poised to be a growth market in Africa, as global demand for food production Increases and incomes rise on the continent. Africa has 60 percent of the world's uncultivated Arable land and capacity for productivity growth through the use of modern farming techniques.

Oil Palm Sector: already beginning to manifest it's potential to promote vibrant agro-industrial processing facilities and will increase export developments. This sector has the capacity to produce up to 1.5 million metric tons per annum (currently 42K). At least 81K jobs can be creating which will in turn improve the lives of over 300K small holder and out-grower families. We have the potential to develop 500K hectares of oil palm compared to the current 17K hectares.

Wood processing: Liberia has a long standing history in rubber production. With Rubberwood processing, not only are we mitigating the environmental impact of wood used to burn charcoal, we are also promoting industrialization and, and developing the downstream processing operations. Rubber, as ac commonly has the potential to create 220,000 new jobs/livelihoods of which half in agriculture (every 1.5 hectares of rubber can sustain 1 job and Liberia can increase by 150,000ha) and another half in the manufacture of dry rubber products

- 63,000t produced in 2013, potential expansion to 325,000t
- Over 200,000 ha of arable land available:
- Large untapped ECOWAS market for rubber products
- Large unexploited investment opportunity in rubberwood & its products

We need to understand and appreciate the inextricable link between urban and rural development, and the opportunities this presents. Expanding the agriculture portfolio, means reaching all parts of the Country. This requires a renewed focus on the development of these 15 urban centers that until now have been no more than rural crossroads, a necessary pass through on the way to Monrovia. With economic diversification there is a need to improve



strategic urban planning frameworks and enhance the national enabling environment for Liberian cities to function. They will need to support these emerging economies.

As we diversify, imagine a Liberia with thriving urban centers along our major growth corridors. Where rural Liberians, especially our youth, are employed and begin to imagine a future where poverty may be alleviated and in a spirit of equity, mutual respect and productive and sustainable partnership, we build a better Liberia, one city at a time.

It is my hope that we will, over the next three days, we pragmatically dialogue on these and the many other issues that make up the urban framework, and work towards our Story. The African Story of our resilience and creating a Liberia and an Africa for all her people.

I thank you.

