



REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA



MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

MSME Conference Launch

**OPENING REMARKS
H.E. AXEL M. ADDY
MINISTER**

April 24, 2013

MSME conference 2013
Remarks by the Honourable
Axel M. Addy
Minister of Commerce and Industry

Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia,
Hon. Abel M. Massally, Chairman of the House Committee on Commerce and Industry,
Other distinguished members of the Legislature,
Honourable Members of the Cabinet,
Government Officials,
Representative of our partners: USAID, SIDA, The IFC, USAID FED, Building Markets, the
Marketplace, BSC-Monrovia supported by SPARK and BiD-NETWORK, The Liberia Better
Business Forum,
Members of the private sector: The Liberia Chamber of Commerce, The Liberia Business
Association, other business associations and unions,
and most importantly owners of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Good morning and welcome.

By your presence here today, you have shown that you are passionate about the cause of
developing MSMEs in Liberia. Thank you all for accepting our invitation to take part in this
momentous occasion.

We are here today to open Liberia's first Micro Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
conference. This forum will bring together MSMEs, banks, Micro-finance institutions, and
civil society for a three-day event intended to *highlight the reforms and policies implemented
which are creating an enabling environment for the MSME sector to thrive and grow in
Liberia.*

This year's conference is under the theme "From Vision to Implementation – Buying
Liberian, Building Liberia".

As many of you are aware, in 2011 we finalised Liberia's first MSME policy. This important
document outlined the Government's role in facilitating an enabling environment suitable for
MSMEs. Within the policy we highlighted four pillars we saw as crucial hurdles to overcome
for any businesses in Liberia.

These were, the Improvement of Legal and Regulatory Reforms, Building Linkages and
Increasing Exposure to new Markets, Increasing Access to Financial Markets and Building
Business Skills and Knowledge.

Today's conference is a crucial step in implementing the vision outlined in the MSME policy.
For that reason, each of the days has been tailored to tackle one of the four pillars of the
MSME policy.

Today's focus will be on access to finance. We will hear panel discussions on the role for support institutions, the role of the private sector and lessons learnt from our neighbouring countries. We have distinguished speakers with years of experience from the International Finance Corporation, the Private Sector, Government and Liberian business owners. Each will share their knowledge on how businesses can overcome financial constraints and how support institutions can ease this burden.

Tomorrow, we will target how MSMEs can improve their access to new customers in new markets. We will hear presentations on how multinational firms and Liberian MSMEs can partner to build local supply chains. We will hear how Liberian MSMEs can benefit from the Government's 25 percent local procurement rule. We will hear from our neighbours in West and East Africa on their experience of how Liberia can grow our market for local products.

From Wednesday to Friday, we will have a Liberian trade fair, bringing together the very best of Liberian MSMEs. This is an opportunity to showcase the best of Liberian products; an provide the opportunity for investors, potential customers and other business people to sample what Liberian MSMEs have to offer.

I am also pleased to report that in the run-up to this year's conference, the top 50 MSMEs have been undergoing training in the crucial skills necessary for business. Our partners have imparted training on business skills, marketing and packaging. The trade fair is an opportunity for these firms to display how much they have learned from this experience.

Finally, on Thursday night we will host the first MSME awards dinner. This is a chance for the Government of Liberia to recognise the best, most hard working and most innovative MSMEs in Liberia. Awards will go to those firms that are looking to improve their country through their contributions to the private sector.

I sincerely hope that every one of the MSMEs present here will take the opportunities open to them to develop their businesses through nurturing key contacts, finding new customers and liaising with Government.

Before I close, I would like to pay tribute to all of the speakers scheduled to speak at this weeks' events; I am very much looking forward to hearing each speaker's experience and knowledge on how to overcome challenges faced by businesses in Liberia.

I would also like to thank our partners - the IFC, USAID FED, BSC, Building Markets, the Marketplace and LBBF – who have worked tirelessly in order to make this conference a reality.

Finally, I must pay tribute to my own staff, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's team, particularly the MSME unit, who have nurtured this event from an idea to the implementation of the conference today.

As outlined in the theme of this year's conference, we as a government intend to take the visions discussed over the coming days and act on them with well thought out and effective

policies. I hope the concessionaires and multinational firms that are working within our country will strongly consider substituting some of their imports for those that can be produced locally. Most importantly, I hope that the MSMEs here today, act upon every opportunity presented to them so that we can confidently claim that by *buying Liberian* we can *build Liberia*.

I will therefore call on all members of Government with an interest in growing the Liberian economy to sit up and take note. I sincerely hope that this week's activities will create an open forum, where the views of all different stakeholders can be heard, brought into the government of Liberia vision and most importantly acted upon as we all strive to transform our country.

Again, I want to thank all of you for your participation and say welcome.