

Statement delivered by
Honorable Varney A. Sirleaf
Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia
During his visit to Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
August, 2018

His Excellency Banko Ruzic, officials and staff of the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government

Thank you for the invitation extended me to pay a visit to your beautiful Country. I am very delighted.

I wish to make these few points:

Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP)

The LDSP is a five year (2013 – 2017) Government of Liberia program designed to support and facilitate the implementation of the National Policy on Decentralization. The Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP) is a holistic national development program that focuses on the decentralization of administrative, political and fiscal governance in Liberia and its alignment to the peace building and reconciliation processes, Public Sector Reform Agenda, Poverty Reduction Strategy(PRS), Civil Service Reform (CSR) and the Agenda for Transformation (Aft) under Governance Pillar IV which is now transformed into the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development Pillar 4.

Funding Strategy

Until the end of 2017, the LDSP was largely funded by development partners including the European Union (**EU**), Swedish Government (**SE**), United States Agency for International Development (**USAID**), United Nations Missions in Liberia (**UNMIL**) and United Nations Development Program (**UNDP**).

County Service Center Approach

In fulfilment of the Government's vision of taking services closer to the people, the Government in February 2015 launched a National Deconcentration

Platform. The platform seeks to deconcentrate Government services away from Monrovia making it possible for the people of the counties to receive basic government services without making the long trip to Monrovia. This is intended to solve the problems of exclusion and marginalization some of which are factors that triggered the civil crisis.

Immediately after the launch of the Deconcentration Platform, the LDSP began supporting negotiating and developing vital partnerships between and among the government Ministries and Agencies (MACs) to collaborate in moving the services identified in the Deconcentration Platform; the Program supported twelve (12) Ministries¹ and two (2) Agencies² to move a total of 45 documentation services to the counties. Documentation services in certificates, licenses and permits at the county level from a one stop-shop service delivery facilities or, County Service Centers.

Currently, there is one County Service Center (CSC) in each of the 15 political subdivisions of Liberia, also referred to as Counties.

Statistics from CSCs

Since the opening of the first County Service Center in June, 2015 these centers have provided over 60,391 services to users

Revenue Generation

In addition to providing services, the County Service Centers are contributing to collection of revenue. All payments for services at the CSCs are made through the Liberia Revenue Authority. To date, over 2.5 million United States Dollars has been generated and several million Liberia Dollars.

Challenges

Donor support Program ended in December, 2017. The Government of Liberia has started with its sustainability with some amount allocated in the National budget every fiscal year for operational expenses. During the phase of donor support, operational costs were underwritten by the LDSP through the Ministry of Internal Affairs like stationery, fuel for running of generators, internet supply etc.

These County Service Centers have a serious challenge of the cost of fuel for each of the 65KVA generators that were purchased. It is a thought introduce alternative and low cost and constant power supply to the CSCs. Solar panel would be the best option.

Recommendation

In order to ensure effective service delivery, where the CSCs are regularly serving our people in rural communities, I am appealing to our partners and friends to assist Government of Liberia with the running cost of the CSCs, particularly with provision of Solar Panel to all our 15 County Service Centers.

Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

The Ministry of Internal Affairs will continue to work with relevant institutions and our development partners to pursue peace and national reconciliation. Already, with our oversight, the Peacebuilding Office, and National Peace Ambassador, the National council of chiefs and the Governors Council continue to work with key stakeholders for stability, reconciliation and sustained peace.

We have also established the National Centre for the Coordination of Early Response Mechanism, we are conducting County Reconciliation Dialogues and a Nation-wide Conflict Analysis which identifies key conflict issues.

The Ministry is working with other partners to foster national peace and reconciliation at national and local levels. Currently, efforts are driven in the direction of community-driven decentralized conflict prevention and management capacity in 155 districts in the coming year or so, and implement key components of the Strategic Roadmap for national peacebuilding, healing and reconciliation.

We wish to encourage partners and friends to support us with funding and logistics.

Communal Farming as tool for Peace and Reconciliation

Liberia has vast fertile land for farming. Little has been done to invest in the soil. As a result, over 200 Million United States Dollars is spent annually on importation of rice (our staple food) into Liberia.

President George M. Weah intends to change this variable. Therefore as Minister of Internal Affairs, I am collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture to promote food production at county level as envisaged making use of the soil under my Ministry's Communal Farming Division.

I have reactivated the Communal Farming Division with my Ministry and recruited specialists in the area of Agriculture.

We will work through local government structures, where the communities will identify the appropriate land for community farming. Government intends to

provide support to the farms to cultivate large farms. We intend to honor and award the best farmers at the end of every farming season.

Recently, I embarked upon a tour of the Counties, and result shows that the communities are willing to support this idea of communal farming. Local government officers, community leaders, youth and women groups expressed commitment to make farm, however, they are appealing for support. They need farming equipment or tools and funding. We want to grow more food to feed our nation. We intend to use Communal Farming to bring our people together at the community level which promotes peace and reconciliation.

I wish to appeal to our friends to support this effort.

Additionally, regarding the Communal Farming initiatives, I wish to call for public-private partnership between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and private firms that are engaged in agriculture in Serbia.

Thank you.