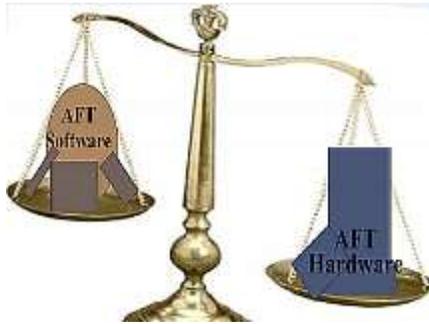AFT
Software

AFT
Hardware

Inside This Edition

The Need to Review the Logic of Prioritizing the "Hardware" of the AFT over the "Software"

The Need to Review the Logic of Prioritizing the "Hardware" of the AFT over the "Software"

There is a widely known prioritization of the programs of the Agenda for Transformation, AFT, which gives top priority to the building of roads, bridges, dams, ports and power---the hardware,

such that governance and human capacity building programs (which are the software) are moved forward at a slower pace. Postponing human capacity development and the development of governance institutions while accelerating implementation of hardware projects can be risky and could cause distortion in long term development. It is better that hardware and software programs are developed in ways that complement each other. This was the original intent of the Agenda for Transformation. There is need for return to the original logic that underpinned the crafting of the AFT and embedding it within the National Vision 2030.

Primacy of the "hardware"

Since 2006, more than half a billion United States dollars of donor support and Liberian government revenues have been spent or allocated to dredging and rehabilitating the ports, constructing and refurbishing roads and bridges and increasing electric power supplies. With the recently signed **Millennium Challenge Compact**, there is now enough money to complete the Mount Coffee hydro power project. The highway from Monrovia to Buchanan is now refurbished. The Monrovia—Robertsfield highway is to be expanded and the Ganta—Harper highway project

New Caldwell Bridge in Monrovia

has cleared the drawing board. A well organized and efficient unit exists in the Office of the President to track the implementation of hardware programs and report directly to the President. At any moment, the President knows, in real time, the state of progress on any of the hardware projects. This signifies the importance attached to the hardware of the Agenda for Transformation.

Refurbished the Gbarnga - Ganta highway

The logic that has elevated and prioritized the hardware of the AfT over the software suggests that without roads, bridges, electricity and ports, the productive forces of Liberians cannot be fully unleashed: farmers will not be able to reach markets; schools, clinics and hospitals will not be accessible or will not be built at all. Generally considered, this logic of prioritization makes sense up to a point. It is true that certain strategic hardware programs do serve as triggers or catalysts of other programs, both hardware and software,

and should be identified and prioritized. But a determination should be made of such critical programs so that it becomes clear that the Agenda for Transformation is not wholly relegating human capacity building and strengthening of governance institutions and processes to a lower level of importance.

Otherwise, as this government moves toward its last days, the rush to complete roads and bridges would increasingly appear to be the sum total of the priorities of the AfT and every road construction project will take priority over establishing a school, equipping a hospital, strengthening the civil service, implementing decentralization that involves local people in governance or even addressing the burning constitutional amendment issues that confront our nation.

TNIMA nursing students in class

Restoring the symbiotic relationship between "hardware" and "software"

Additionally, there is need to reaffirm the AfT's original assumption about development and the relationship between the hardware and the software programs. The basic assumption that underpinned the AfT when it was crafted was the symbiotic relationship between hardware and software programs. **Hardware programs by themselves do not spur development**. Under the base assumption of the AfT, hardware and software were assumed to be twins, perhaps Siamese twins. One cannot do without the other. Looking back at our experience as a nation, we find tragic evidence of the neglect of the software while promoting the hardware. The Mount Coffee Hydro Electricity project which we hasten to restore is important reminder. **Was it not marginalized and neglected youth recruited into armed groups that rampaged and pillaged our infrastructure?**

Two generations later, we are rebuilding the hydro power facility as a high priority but with a less clear plan and certainly far less resources to develop the productive capacities and address the challenges of the new generation of youth whose vulnerability, God forbid, might put them in a situation similar to that of those two generations ago. In our intense focus on the hardware, we must return to the basic assumption of the AfT and strengthen the twining of hardware and software.

LOIC students working on 110KVA generator

Since the AfT's process assumed that hardware and software are twins, the development and implementation of hardware and software programs can be further pursued so that they support each other, especially since our ultimate goal is to become a middle income nation within a given time period. For example, **we could strengthen the link between the training and employment of Liberian technicians and engineers such that the training and employment of such technicians becomes an integral part of the infrastructure development program to which we are fully committed.** If we did so over time, our commitment to infrastructure

development would attract many more young people into the study of mathematics and science. And **if we link the training of engineers and technicians to the decentralization program, our need for road maintenance engineers and technicians at county and district levels becomes clearer to us**. We can further incentivize the study of math and science in our schools, and engineering and other technical subjects in our polytechnics and universities. In this way, we begin now to produce the human capacity to carry on the hardware development beyond the life of the AfT---into **AfT II** and eventually into middle income status. The alignment of human capacity development with various aspects of infrastructure development needs to be completed and constantly revisited.

Aligning infrastructure construction and human capacity building

In our ten years of hardware development strengthening the connection between what we construct and repair and what we teach in our schools and training programs would be an important strategy for sustaining development and a legacy to build upon. The study done early this year by the Governance Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the

Dr. Michael Slewon, Chairman National Commission on Higher Education and Dr. Emmet Dennis, UL President

National Commission on Higher Education revealed a disappointing picture of disconnection between our national quest to become a middle income nation and our educational and training programs that should get us there. Our higher education and professional programs had, over five years, produced between three to five thousand Accountant and Management majors, and a similar number of Sociology majors who could not find jobs. This is a clear indication of the need to not only strengthen the conversation between those who are developing and implementing the hardware programs and those who are building our human capacity but to also properly structure the conversation.

This is an important governance challenge. Ad hoc inter-ministerial committees have shown their shortcomings. Inter-agency issues are often seen as crosscutting issues which are of interest to all agencies involved but hardly the full responsibility of any. This is why the President created a Project Monitoring Unit in her office to monitor the implementation of the hardware projects which are seen as priority. Are there similar project monitoring units for software projects?

Prioritizing Decentralization

If we can clarify the need for a strong relationship between infrastructure development and education and training, we can also clarify the need for an equally strong relationship between infrastructure development and decentralization. **Where do local people fit in the process of infrastructure development which has been prioritized?** The entrepreneurial self-organization of local people is fully evident around Liberia even where major roads have not

been finished and become barely passable during the rainy season; or where road construction is

Muddy and inaccessible road in Sanoe County

substandard. Vehicles stuck in the mud provide opportunities for local people to create by-passes and impose tolls or mobilize their energies to pull these vehicles out of the mud for pay. At some of the most challenging places on the road, local people have sat up tire repair and welding shops; women converge selling fruits and even cooked food. What does this tell us about decentralization and the potential it has for fueling local economies? Yet our prioritization approach must help us see the empowering synergy between infrastructure development and local empowerment and local governance as pointed out in the original conception of the Agenda for Transformation. **Today we do not seem to be clear about how the establishment of a system of local government even while addressing the roads, bridges, dams and ports priority brings greater vitality to the hardware project, creates immediate multiplier effects and strengthens local people's sense of inclusion and ownership and their social and economic empowerment.** This is what decentralization is all about. Are we to finish the roads before turning to establishing local governance institutions? **Failure to prioritize decentralization can lead to foregoing opportunities for local development and local governance.** Local people around Liberia are poised to create new opportunities and accelerate the use of those available.

Sad Sinoe Story

An example is the case of Sinoe where a deep water port exists and where 45 percent of Liberia's portion of the tropical rainforest is to be found, and now where Golden Veroleum maintains a significant portion of its southeastern operations. The failure to link resource production regimes that should include value-addition projects with appropriate local governance arrangements, especially in the areas of political and economic governance has left Sinoe riddled with political strife, struggles over distribution of recruitment opportunities for unskilled wage labor, paralyzing reliance on the government bureaucracy as the major source of employment and with poor education and health services.

Inarticulate concession agreements and perhaps ineffective enforcement of agreements with Atlantic Resources and perhaps other logging companies have led to the extraction and stockpiling of hills of logs along roads leading to the port, and at the port for export. Questions asked about wood processing draw a blank stare or a cynical response from local people. A County whose potential gives it a comparative advantage for

Golden Veroleum Palm farm in Sanoe County

becoming the wood processing center of Liberia, as it once was, is today supplying Malaysia, Indonesia and China with logs that are processed in those countries while Liberia fails to develop its wood processing industry—an industry that does not require knowledge of rocket science—

and while Liberia faces a housing crunch, a significant shortage of desks, chairs, benches, boards and other wood-derived school equipment. **Without developing and implementing projects for local economic empowerment, the roads from Juarzon and from Tartweh will remain essentially logging and oil palm export roads leading to the Port of Greenville** for the export of logs and palm oil to Indonesia, Malaysia and China among other **countries and local people will remain seasonal wage laborers engaged in nasty inter-communal fights about jobs as tree cutters, and palm nuts pickers.**

One can understand delays in scheduling value addition in the oil palm industry, given its recent development; yet, a plan for value addition needs to be concretized and put fully and deliberately in the public domain. Government, local people and other interested parties can monitor the plans. We can all make sure that preparation for value-addition in oil palm industry includes appropriate human capacity development and the establishment of appropriate governance institutions. These can be put on steam and progress measured. **Tension among local communities will be reduced, peace will prevail and local people will have hope.**

Delays in scheduling value addition in the palm oil sector seem understandable at this **time but the mystery and opacity surrounding the logging industry remains a puzzle.** *Why are logging companies that are required by concession agreements to engage in some wood processing in Liberia not engaged in wood processing in Liberia but are only exporting round logs despite the law requiring some local wood processing?* Why has the **implementation** of the highly publicized Dorbor Jallah Report not been given visibility and put in the public domain? What should be the role of Liberians in wood processing? At what point will Liberian entrepreneurs who themselves are struggling to be exporters of round logs to Europe and Asia be required and assisted to do wood processing linked to providing building materials for our national and local development?

A few months ago, the President, leading a development dialogue, observed that in Sinoe, young people were not in school; instead, they were going off to the gold mines in droves. Chiefs and elders raised similar concern at the launch of the Deconcentration Platform in February. Unfortunately, a full discussion did not address this concern. Had a discussion developed about youth neglecting school and going off to gold mining camps, the analysis of the problem would have shown that youth choices in Sinoe are minimal and largely unacceptable to them. Their choices are: (a) to attend ill-equipped local schools that prepare them for no future, except to rival hundreds others to become part of the coterie of local leaders—and at low and intermittent pay, or (b) to seek unskilled jobs as tree cutters and oil palm workers, or (c) to take a chance in the gold mines where returns could be quick and associated activities could be profitable. This is not irrational thinking. This is why addressing the concern about youth flocking to gold mines requires the provision of sound productive alternatives: better schools that prepare youth for employment in technical and vocational positions that should emerge from wood processing, agriculture, and from value addition that should be scheduled for the oil palm industry; for road maintenance; schools that teach technical skills essential for port management and the range of ancillary and multiplier economic activities that will develop. One can immediately see the role that a community college can play in skills development for wood processing, for the first stages

of palm oil processing, for providing technical skills for servicing and maintaining the port and the roadways. A community college that teaches skills needed to service an emerging economy is the appropriate complement to the infrastructure development programs currently underway in Sinoe.

The imperative of decentralization to make hardware productive

Can the construction of local infrastructure and enhancement of the resource economy gain desired results without a corresponding shift in aspects of political, fiscal and administrative governance to local levels? No. The level of inefficiencies will be astronomically high if local level decision making authority is not established. If decisions having to do with procuring spare parts, hiring mechanics, choosing district leaders, employing school teachers, resolving land disputes among others are left to Monrovia-based or Monrovia-appointed and supervised functionaries, the developmental dividends to be gained from the infrastructure which have been prioritized will be low. Alienation rather than local ownership will be the local mind-set and sustainability of those infrastructures will be a herculean task.

There are those in government who oppose decentralization for several reasons. Some high government officials are opposed to decentralization on philosophical grounds: they believe the central state should deliver all services to people and be the hierarchy that controls all relationships in society. They believe in the Hobbesian state. These officials are wrong. Our national crises have shown that the quest for total control by the central state leads to autocracy and tragedy. **There are those who believe local community land rights threaten private enterprise and economic development. They are also wrong: land titles vested in local communities strengthen local communities in**

Gola forest in western Liberian

pursuit of both individual and community social and economic development. Suspicion exists that there are a few officials of government who fear decentralization because they believe decentralization will divest them of power or dilute their power prerogatives. They too are wrong. Decentralization will transform the nature of their mandates and responsibilities but will surely leave them with power and critical opportunities to serve their people.

The President has taken a firm stand on decentralization and is encouraged to press on and not allow those with misconceptions and misgivings to stand in the way of implementing our nationally agreed decentralization program.

The Legacy Agenda: Restoring the Balance

The administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has two full years to continue to fulfill its mandate. Hardware projects such as roads, bridges, dams and ports are more easily visible and can be pointed to as "the legacy." About 40 years ago, the road to Vahun was constructed and hailed as a "legacy" achievement. About 50 years ago, the Mount Coffee Hydro Electric Power Plant was

Vaihum road, Lofa County

constructed and

Mount Caffee Hydro Electricity Power Plant

it was considered a "legacy" achievement. We have the benefit of at least half a century of experience that hardware projects cannot become legacy achievements when standing all by themselves. The software complements in governance reform, education and training advancement, health care services are indispensable if we are to think about the "legacy" because the **legacy is established when achievements are sustained.**

Not since 1964 (51 years ago) has the administrative jurisdictions and subnational authority relations been reviewed and upgraded to become compatible with the level of democracy and development we aspire to achieve. Across the length and breadth of Liberia the need for decentralization is voiced and felt.

Not since 1972 (43 years ago) has Liberia's public sector, including the Civil Service, been reviewed and reformed. Inarticulate mandates, missions and organizational designs, high turnovers, unclear merit-based career paths, weak grievance adjudication, recruitment, training and retention processes, among other challenges, affect service delivery and slow down movement to middle income status.

Not in a century has Liberia had clear and settled land rights law that empowered local people, vesting them as owners of the land and drivers of development processes. It has been recognized by development specialists and practitioners around the world that concession-driven economies do not necessarily spur development. Small holders, small and medium enterprises backed by sound basic, vocational, technical and tertiary education, and appropriate institutions of governance are at the core of development---not raw material exporting concessions. Vesting Liberians with secure land rights will be a legacy achievement.

Implementation of the Agenda for Transformation will yield optimal results by a return to the original principle of building a symbiotic relationship between the hardware and the software. We argue for redressing the growing imbalance by restoring equal prominence and attention to addressing the governance and human capacity development challenges so as to accelerate inclusive growth and people-centered development.