

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND HARD CHOICES ON SUCCESS IN THE
NEW LIBERIA

By

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Liberia is at a critical juncture. We have just come through a catastrophic convulsive seizure and profound post-event confusion still persists. Where we go from here will depend on the rational choices we make now and how we collectively, openly and sincerely carry them out. Other nations have been here before. Some succeeded and others failed miserably. We must agree to disagree, if need be, but we should keep our eyes and minds on the best interests of our nation or our collective demise is certainly assured. The task at hand require solid inner fortitude, extreme discipline, foresight and a level of patriotism never before experienced in our nation. Recent painful examples should forever remind us that despite all the rhetoric and apparent paradox nobody else from outside will help us more than we can help ourselves. They all have their own agenda. Do the math! All of us cannot attack the same problem the same way. Or else our efforts and results will only be limited but we must each do or say something, no matter how unpopular it may be. What may be popular is not always right and what is right is not always popular. The system that currently exists in Liberia does not work. We need new bold thinking and action. It is in this vein, using our utmost imaginations and analytical skills, I wish to offer you some practical suggestions concerning the task at hand for our nation.

1) I will propose that we seriously consider, after due deliberations, establishing an **Economic & Security Crimes Act**. Because the importance of this Act, it should be enacted by the Legislature and not passed by Presidential Decree as it should survive each succeeding president because this of perpetual national interest. Under this act, we will deal with e.g. issues of businessmen and their deals/ negotiations that are directly or indirectly detrimental to our national security interest and long term economic goals. The issues of bribes, tax evasions, misappropriation/embezzlement of funds, shadowy loans, etc will be tackled under this act. It is recommended that enforcement of this Act should fall under the jurisdiction of a panel of Superior Court Judges. Sentencing guidelines will have to be established to ensure punishments commensurate with the crimes are levied appropriately. Decisions concerning hearings in private or public giving national security concerns are to be debated. Open or anonymous tips and suggestions from all citizens about all activities at levels of government and individual activities. Whistleblowers protection to be guaranteed. Legal rights and representation of people so accused are to be safeguarded.

2) The Establishment of an **External Economic Intelligence Service (EIS for short)** whose function will be to gather, process, appropriately disseminate useful economic/manufacturing mechanisms and processes from places we have visited abroad that we can readily adapt to our setting for rapid economic integration as part of our long term strategic goal. This Service should be a vibrant part of our present Ministry of Economic and Planning Affairs. This Service is to be different from the present stifling, counterproductive

Politicized internal intelligence agency whose true values we are yet to realize as a nation. No need for endless ministerial delegations. Our embassies abroad, students abroad and patriotic citizens should make this reality. What are our embassies and missions abroad for? Private country club for a privileged few?

3) All previous, present and future **government loan agreements** by our government should be published in full for all to see so we all can review the repayment terms, the signatories to those loans, etc.

4) **Competitive inter-county fairs** annually to showcase agricultural products, livestock and local ingenuity as well as **annual competitive national/inter-county high school science fairs** with different prizes to vie for in order to encourage the scientific education and manufacturing processes early. Selection of teams of talented Liberians who have won at the national level to participate in such events abroad for broader recognition. Hence, the restructuring of our **national awards system** (Star of African Redemption, etc) to go to Liberians at home and abroad who make meaningful contributions to our nation to be so recognized via a free, transparent and fair selection process. What can we learn from the English and South African award systems?

Liberia, via successive inept leaders, has not made us proud. No matter how you look at it, no formula for success exists in Liberia. Liberia has abandoned its children. How can you love a parent that has abandoned you? No national prioritization in the awarding of limited government scholarships exists. Talented students sent abroad for further studies are habitually abandoned in midair at the whim and wishes of the president and/or his ministers whilst ministerial girlfriends and their relatives are on fully paid government scholarships to study subjects like secretarial science, African studies, underwater basket weaving and art design. Many of these 'special students' go on to be superannuated students and guess who foots the bill? Simultaneously students who study in nontraditional countries, many very qualified, upon their return home are discriminated against to the point of nonexistence. When they leave Liberia in anger, then their patriotism is perpetually questioned. Yet some of us try to be patriotic and that is why we are here today. Instead of sending numerous ministerial girlfriends on multiple shopping sprees and escapades as well as countless presidential and ministerial health checkups abroad without any clear-cut benefit to the population at large, we could reinvest most of the money spent this way in the EIS. Despite the abundance of our natural resources, yet we do not have a manufacturing base nor psychological willpower nor national pride to

decrease our perpetual dependence on foreign goods. I am sure we can benefit much as a nation if we catalogue what we can learn from the Jamaican apprenticeship system, Hungarian farming and manufacturing efficiency methods, Brazilian local technological transformations, Ghanaian educational models, South African energy production techniques, German and Japanese engineering capabilities, Israeli wealth generation and entrepreneurial skills, Chinese/Iranian and Ukrainian offset printing and electronic reproduction techniques.

Our market women, despite their lack of formal education, have a lot to teach us. They have time tested skills, ingenuity and wisdom that we can draw upon as we embark upon the very tortuous road but many of us are too proud or even shy to be seen associating with them. Let me remind you that whilst others were involved in wanton corruption and mortgaging away our future, many market women sold their local produces and other goods and even sent some of their children abroad for further studies. They are experts in their own way. We need to turn to them for their input. It has even been suggested that we need to have a representative of the Liberian Market Women Association in every ministry for their input.

Our products, achievements, culture, etc should be displayed at our embassies and missions abroad during Independence Week without exception.

From many indicators that we read, we are told that we are behind by 75-100 years. If we want to close this within 15-25 years, we have to seriously look at means of wealth generation that white Americans, Europeans and Japanese have mastered so well. This quest goes hand in hand with a strong educational base. China, Brazil, Korea and Singapore are well on their way in this regard. Atta Turk of Turkey, David Ben-Gurion of Israel, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, David Suzuki of Japan, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Mao Tse Tung of China, etc—all had vision for their countries and they delivered. Could we not do the same for our country?

We have most of these structures in place with out much structural adjustment. Instead we need more mental/intellectual adjustment. Look at our embassies abroad currently. In my opinion, they can do more for Liberia and Liberians. What are they for? Country club for the privileged few?

Things we need to look at critically and change within ourselves if we are to make any true strides towards our goals:

Mental Lethargy (Oblomov): We have ample sugar cane supply but we still import sugar; we have cassava but still import flour, etc; we can make and export quality whisky and wine from sugar cane, rice, etc; yet we spend enormous money on importing whiskey; we have coconut, palm nut, etc; yet we

die to import cooking oil. We have "jologbo" for worms, yet we yearn for worm medicine from abroad; we have Raulwolfia

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trees with abundant reserpine, yet are dying waiting for imported high blood pressure medicines, without considering investing in local natural products chemistry; we have abundant mango, guava, etc but we are dying to buy jam from abroad; oranges and other citrus fruits; yet we await juices from abroad; we have trees and wood but we want imported furniture; abundant fish but can't wait to buy canned sardines; abundant coco and coffee but we can't wait to get our morning ovaltine; etc, etc.

We have printing presses at home. Why could we not print nice, attractive labels to put on our containers/glass jars for these products.

Go in any USA grocery store and see how many labeled made in USA? Go in any Liberian grocery store and see how many made in Liberia?

The ministry of Commerce thru the World Trade Organization should be the one to deal with negotiations concerning the unfair trade practices and subsidies by the developed countries once we are in the exporting mode. We can learn how the people of Tunisia and Mauritius are doing it.

You are prouder when you have something made in your country that many other people use and desire.

Congo-and-'Congolites'- better than Natives mentality: The debate rages on.

Consummate alcoholics mentality®: No amount of voluntary self policing has worked so far even if we are hit hard by calamity, punishment or tragedy; yet it seems that no learning has taken place.

Abdication of Parental Responsibilities: Parents are not setting good examples. We all can cite numerous examples off the top of our heads. For example, Liberian males having kids and basically leaving them to fend for themselves and their poor mothers always bear most of the burden of child upbringing as well as the blame for their eventual failures. We often hear: 'my parents did not do this for me, so be thankful.' If they are your kids, you have to be responsible all the way. Not halfway.

Abdication of Financial Responsibilities: Paying bills and taxes to the teeth in America but then when we go to Liberia, we refuse to take responsibility for all these things; i.e. trying to have it both ways and think it is alright ; yet we wonder why we are where we still are.

Pretty Floyd Mentality: Dressing tip to top with nothing in our brains nor pocket and proudly showing off to others while our household members are starving and disintegrating. Always putting others down and ridiculing those who are working hard and trying to make a living the old fashion way by earning it.

Abuse of privilege: Abusing our offices as kings and not as public servants." Do you know who I am?" Jobs being awarded not to the best candidate but because of family, tribal, relationship connection or under the table deals. How can we then progress as a nation? No accountability.

Crabs & Go and Back Stabbing Mentality: Pulling each other down like crabs because of fear they will gain more recognition than us. Where is our patriotism??? Where are we headed? Not helping another Liberian just for the sake of Liberian patriotism but always for our own ulterior motives.

Lack of respect for each other and each other's household/family because the person is poorer or uneducated. Where are we going?

Money Mismanagement: Many of us are in the habit of spending money like there is no tomorrow. Save, Save, Save for your children's future, your retirement. Invest locally in e.g. manufacturing ventures. Develop confidence in our banks with deposit insurance, so we can deposit money locally. So that money can be turned around as loans, venture capital, etc with returns/interests. Americans mostly deposit their monies locally, etc. You can make a lot of money but if you spend it lavishly without plans for the future, you will really never make it. We can learn a lot from the Liberian market women if we want to.

From Sonnewein to Beverly Hills Mentality: misplaced priorities. Living-above-our-means: when you do so, you tend to overextend, steal, lie, cheat and are more prone to corruption. The rest is history. Look at the Mexicans who share a single apartment instead of living large and in exclusive neighborhoods so that they can save their money and open their own business or send money back home, etc.

I have a degree and everybody should adore me now mentality: What are you doing with that degree?

Don't play on my intelligence mentality: The saying goes: you can learn a lot from a dummy. Don't be offended when called stupid. Let the person tell you why. Maybe you can learn something from that person. Hello, common sense is not so common. Often, we hear: Don't tell me anything. We all know why we are in America. IS THAT REALLY TRUE?

Learning English Only Mentality: Treasure troves in other languages are being ignored to our peril due to our narrow-mindedness. Look at affordable Hungarian pocket sized junior and senior high school textbook summaries that most of us do not know about. How about the debate about a single language to supplement

English in Liberia. The debate can be initiated. Swahili is quickly becoming the lingua franca of East and Southern Africa. There are intrinsic advantages there. What can we learn from them?

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From America only mentality: We all know how far we have gotten with that mentality.

Somebody else can do it better than a Liberian mentality: We should know better by now from our travels abroad as they have shown us bluntly that theirs is better or more desirous no matter how inferior the quality. By this attitude, they usually help to improve the quality of their products. It is not bad to appreciate things from other countries but you should put things in perspective. Years ago, we used to laugh at Hong Kong made but that is no more. What happened?

Finally, **the fatalistic; that you got to die from something Mentality:** God's will is not enough. It must be put in its proper perspective. It should not be an excuse for thinking. We have to begin to more seriously investigate things and to connect the dots more often. We must begin to ask questions-oral or written, no matter how dumb we feel they are.

In summary then, these are some foods for thought that I hope we will examine critically. **Along with economic prosperity comes collective social security, healthy population, longevity, etc. Remember, that economic empowerment and psychological readjustment on the backdrop of the respect of the rule of law by all without exception will form the bedrock of our national prosperity- all prerequisite for true political independence. Note that the form of capitalism that has worked the best for most people most of the time is regulated capitalism-unlike the one we currently know in our country.** Thank you!

Any questions?

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