



International
Trade
Centre

REMARKS AT

WTO HIGH-LEVEL SESSION: COMMEMORATING LIBERIA'S 5TH
ANNIVERSARY OF WTO MEMBERSHIP

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I would like to congratulate the Government of Liberia on the 5th anniversary of its accession to the WTO.

Liberia has made impressive strides in the last decade to strengthen its business environment and integrate into regional and multilateral systems, thus providing greater opportunities for businesses to engage in international trade. Preparing for WTO membership and subsequently becoming an active member of the institution in the last five years have been key to the country's growth and development strategy.

The process of WTO accession is indeed extremely difficult and complex. Drawing from my past experience as a WTO delegate, I am well-aware of the efforts needed to work through the intense scrutiny of every trade-related piece of legislation, revise and adopt new trade regimes, and in certain cases, undertake an overhaul of entire sectors. The accession process is much more challenging and demanding for the newly acceding states – and requires numerous and lengthy negotiations with so many different Members.

In this context, Liberia's rapid accession process – with intensive negotiations commencing mid-2014 and concluding in July 2016, is truly commendable. Liberia's accession process is now termed by WTO Members as the 'Liberian Accession Model' and is a clear reflection of the strength and dedication of the national negotiating team, the strong support received from the highest political levels, and the immense coordination and support from relevant government departments and institutions.

The efforts made by Liberia to make such significant strides in its trade agenda, being a post-conflict state and struggling with the impacts of the Ebola outbreak and other economic shocks, should be applauded.

ITC firmly believes that trade should work for all and bring positive change to people's lives. Our vision is to make trade work for all people – from the cocoa bean farmers to the cassava exporters to the tourism service providers in Liberia. ITC works on the reforms and improvements needed to improve the lives of the ordinary citizens, and especially the

vulnerable and marginalized communities, so that they too are able to live a better life.

Accession to the WTO is indeed an important step towards bringing about these developments in the lives of the people. It helps to get the necessary regulatory frameworks in place, to get the economies going.

Only a few years into WTO Membership, Liberia is also actively engaged in efforts to strengthen the position of fragile and conflict-affected states in the WTO. Liberia, along with Afghanistan, led efforts to establish the g7+ WTO Accessions Group – an offshoot of the larger g7+ group. The g7+ WTO Accessions Group – has been set up to facilitate the integration of post-conflict and fragile economies into the multilateral trading system through WTO accession-related reforms. It is heartening to see the leadership and support provided by Member states such as Liberia and Afghanistan which also recently celebrated its 5th anniversary of WTO accession to guide and engage other states and welcome them into the fold.

ITC has captured Liberia's incredible journey in our latest report, which we are pleased to share with you today.

ITC, along with its partners, has been engaged with Liberia through its accession phase, and will continue to support Liberia as it navigates the post-accession world. Accession is not the end of the race, but rather the first milestone in a continuing race to build a better, fairer, more open and integrated trading world for Liberia.

ITC has supported Liberia's efforts to integrate into the regional and global economy and designed various capacity building initiatives to prepare Liberia's stakeholders and the regulatory frameworks for a successful accession to the WTO.

ITC supported the formulation of the National Trade Policy and National Export Strategy to steer the country towards regional integration into the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) and multilateral integration into the WTO; and support development of export sectors with potential for value-addition and diversification. Based on the National Export Strategy, Liberia also requested for support to

develop export strategies for the cassava and wood-furniture sector. Dedicated initiatives were also undertaken for women entrepreneurs in Liberia through the ACCESS for Liberia businesswomen to International Markets, and the Trade at Hand for Liberia's Market Women.

Following up from these past initiatives, we are pleased to be implementing the Liberia Tourism Development Project – developed in response to the National Export Strategy on Tourism – with the objective of enabling Liberia to promote itself as a tourist destination. Through this project, ITC has supported the development of the first-ever tourism brand and marketing strategy for Liberia – and this is to be officially launched at an upcoming event.

We are also working to strengthen participation of traders in value chains and to make use of market opportunities. Efforts are currently underway to build up capacities of cocoa farmers in Liberia – to engage in value addition, and better position their products in target markets. We are also supporting the cassava sector in Liberia, in order to strengthen capacities of

women entrepreneurs engaged in this sector and attract further investment into this sector.

This is only a brief insight of the initiatives being conducted in Liberia. ITC is looking forward to build upon these initiatives and continue this partnership with Liberia – so as to help the country recover from the impact of the pandemic and past economic shocks, add value to existing products, identify new product lines, connect to regional value chains, and provide more opportunities to Liberia’s entrepreneurs.

ITC remains committed to contribute to Liberia’s future growth, development and stability – and this will depend crucially on businesses, particularly MSMEs, women entrepreneurs, and the vulnerable/marginalized communities.

We salute the work of the WTO Secretariat to support Liberia. And, we congratulate the Government of Liberia for the immense efforts undertaken to reach this milestone. Thank you.