

## **Gedeo, Linus (2012): Reporting Liberia. Generational Change or Breeding the Culture of Public Sector Dependence.**

I followed with keen interest the trend of the new debate on **Generational Change** which has captured the airwaves in Liberia. School campuses, teashops, street corners and radio waves have all devoted the biggest chunk of their time discussing and debating this intriguing topic.

While both the youths and old folks agree that generational change is a compulsory transition, the timeframe and manner to effecting this transition has polarized them. Through the spectacles of the old generation, generational change is a process that begins with preparing the youths to gradually assuming and properly managing the mantle of leadership in both the public and private sectors of the nation. On the contrary the youths think they have waited quite too long for the transitional process and think it is an event that must happen now.

The debate ensued only weeks after the inauguration of President Sirleaf and at the time she was preparing to perform her constitutional responsibilities of forming the government. With the formation of her team now virtually over, current record shows that she considered all sides of the argument and thought to balance the appointments to high profile public service positions. Retired old folks were called back into public service and youths jumped from nowhere to very high profile positions. Youths contributing regularly to radio phone-in programs commenting on or criticizing government's plans and policies are quite aware that they are definitely paving their way to the public service. Many are now junior and senior public servants and lot more youths are craving for similar presidential recognitions derived from these phone-in programs.

Presidential appointments are currently under public-scope to see whether more youths or members of the old generation are recalled. The president recently appointed her youth advisor who is not a youth. Youth organizations have unequivocally registered their disenchantments about the appointment and calling on her to rather appoint a youth to the position. They have threatened a noncompliant posture with the advisor until the president rescinds the decision. This definitely speaks volume of how desperate youths are in crowding the public sector.

The 2011 general elections also recorded thousands of youths vying for representative positions in the House of Legislatures. Thanks to the over 60% youth population, many were successful and are today serving in their first ever positions as representatives. Alignment with the youths or simply being a youth shaped the political landscape of the elections. Qualification or length of experience was never a matter of concern. There is now a rocketing momentum of most youths seeking very high profile public service positions regardless of their level of education or experience. Calls for youth empowerment seems to now have a different meaning from a process whereby young people gain the requisite knowledge and ability to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of others to calling youths to public service. I think the advocacy is

unfortunately shifting from strengthening the educational system and providing scholarships, to calling for youth representation at all levels of the public sector abruptly.

This certainly brings me to the question why are the youths on a stampede to the public service? Are there indicators from the old generation that this is the only source of quick wealth and a direct flight to the top of the social and economic ladder? These obvious questions have obvious answers. Apart from those that reaped from the bloody civil war, tracing the source of wealth of most members of Liberia's older generation today will definitely find linkages to the public service. Mansions have been built; huge acres of lands and fleet of cars have all been acquired in record short period of time. While the truth will be told that in most instances corrupt tactics were employed in acquiring the quick wealth, the truth will also be told that the system of governance in Liberia has over the years made the public service a lucrative and attractive heaven.

Past and present governments have provided extremely expensive vehicles to senior and junior staff members, and given hundreds of gallons of gas coupons monthly. Fabulous salaries and other benefits follow from tax payers' money just for a few while the majority helplessly copes with abject poverty. Today some public servants are paid over ten thousand United States Dollars monthly and driving over twenty-five thousand dollars vehicles in an economy where thousands and thousands go to bed hungry. Massive Inequality before and massive inequality now! Lessons of our bloody past which was also triggered by this and other societal mischiefs have been sent to utter oblivion.

The growing level of youths' attraction to the government's lucrative heaven is a grave matter of concern. Job creation through entrepreneurial ventures is either not being considered by youths or not being stimulated by the government. Just as it was in past governments, this government is threading the path of leaving behind a generation that is completely dependent on public service. Current records show that more youths are interested in politics. There are thousands of youth discussion centers on political issues spreading all across the country. Unemployed youths waste away the hours commending and criticizing the government hoping to gain popularity and then called to public service instead of considering other options.

The government needs to plan and implement programs to quash the youth's stampede to public service and stop breeding public sector dependence. Let it become evidently clear that there are other areas available through which their dreams can be realized.

The need to break from the obnoxious past of this nation; the need for an equitable distribution of national wealth and the need for development are all compelling reasons for a new generation that must be mentally and morally prepared because the onus of change rests on it. Today we render a guilty verdict on the older folks for what their greed and insensitivity caused us yesterday. They are guilty for paving roads that lead to their farms and engaging in other infrastructural development only meant to last for a political season; they are guilty for signing

concessions that compromised national interest; they are guilty for dumping national wealth into their suitcases and widening the social gap.

Let the generation after us not be subjected to similar fate but grateful to our diligence, patriotism, honesty and peace loving characters. It is time to break from the irresponsible and egocentric past which has eluded our beloved country the needed development we crave. To those youths that have already been called to public service, refuse to be corrupted and espouse to be an agent of change.

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