

HOPE RESTORED

By Charles Nelson

An In-Depth Look at the Recent Cabinet Tour of Western Liberia

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf remains as focused as ever in her drive towards national reconstruction. Undoubtedly, the quest to turn Liberia - a country once referred to by many with considerable disdain - into a post conflict success story is well on course. To enable this odyssey to come full-circle, the Liberian leader is fully aware that she must decentralize. To this end, her policy of 'taking the Cabinet on the road' has become an administration trademark. It brings the Cabinet closer to the people in the local areas - which is most unprecedented in Liberia's recent history—and gives the county visited a chance - even if for a short while - to be in the spotlight and receive accolades.

The recent decision by President Johnson Sirleaf to hold a Cabinet retreat in Grand Cape Mount County no doubt showcased the rich tourist potential of the lush green western Liberian county. The county's coastline is glorious and has the wherewithal to compete with any beach resort in many great western cities. The warmth of the people is much to write home about with Robertsport, the county's capital, a city jealously waiting to be discovered. The Cabinet retreat did not only showcase how maverick the county's tourist potential is, it also illustrated how glaringly high the county's ability to proceed in food production is. Sadly, there was much too much farmland left unattended, indicating that Cape Mount County is operating well below par.

Not only was Cape Mount's potential as a country to thrive highlighted, but political tensions were also resolved during the retreat. There has been a schism brewing between Superintendent Catherine Watson-Khasu and the leadership of the county's Legislative Caucus. This had taken a huge toll on the ability of the county to move forward with its development agenda. The Cabinet retreat provided a glorious opportunity for conflicting parties to have a meeting of the minds under the able stewardship of President Johnson Sirleaf, Vice President Boakai and other Cabinet members.

The town hall meeting held at the Robertsport City Hall gave the President a unique opportunity to send out a clarion call of hope and unity to county officials as well as residents. Her call to citizens to put aside their differences and develop the county was timely. She emphasized that Grand Cape Mount County has the ability to improve provided that the citizens united. It was most refreshing to know that the Liberian leader's appeal to the county's Legislative Caucus to work with the Superintendent was accepted. It's fair to say that all things being equal, a new dawn in Grand Cape Mount County is upon us!

President Johnson Sirleaf's message of hope and unity transcends. Her message also reverberated throughout Gbarpolu and Bomi counties, also included on the Cabinet's site visit agenda. She touched on the looming global food crisis, imploring Liberians to pull themselves by their bootstraps and plough their land. It is this, she emphasized with the utmost vim and vigor, which will serve as the national panacea. President Johnson Sirleaf challenged the Agriculture Ministry to provide seed rice to help farmers. Though this

“grow-more-food” call was not new, the conviction with which President Johnson Sirleaf spoke undoubtedly triggered a deep rallying fervor in the residents of the counties visited.

The message of hope from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Cabinet members were not only conveyed in words, but also in action. The fact that some development projects were commissioned, with quite a few going through ground-breaking ceremonies, demonstrates the progress being made in improving the lives of citizens of Grand Cape Mount, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties. For example, Gbarpolu County is about to receive a Central Market in Bopolu City constructed by the Sirleaf Market Women Fund at the cost of US \$50,000 dollars. Upon completion, the Market will have storage facilities as well as bathrooms. The President also toured the Bopolu Central High School where she was pleasantly thrilled to see young students showing off their skills in Microsoft Word. This is enormous progress for a county which had previously put forward only two students for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) exams. The President and party also toured other projects nearing completion, including a commissioner’s residence and the Administrative Building in Bopolu.

In Bomi County, President Johnson Sirleaf broke grounds for a guest house to be funded by county residents to ease the accommodation strain experienced by officials visiting the county. She also toured the plush Administrative Building in Tubmanburg. The Building was constructed by Gilgal Construction Engineering, a Liberian construction firm. In Sinje, Grand Cape Mount County, President Johnson Sirleaf formally opened the Radio Cape Mount 102.4 FM. The station has a 100 kilowatt radius and is to provide news and information to Cape Mount, Bomi, Gbarpolu and parts of Montserrado counties. The station is significant because local citizens provided bricks and other forms of casual labor during the period under construction.

Undoubtedly, these are genuine symbols of progress vindicating the modest progress made by the Johnson Sirleaf Administration. That having been said, the Liberian leader is under no illusion that there is much more to be done. To this end, she is staying the course and continuously restoring hope.