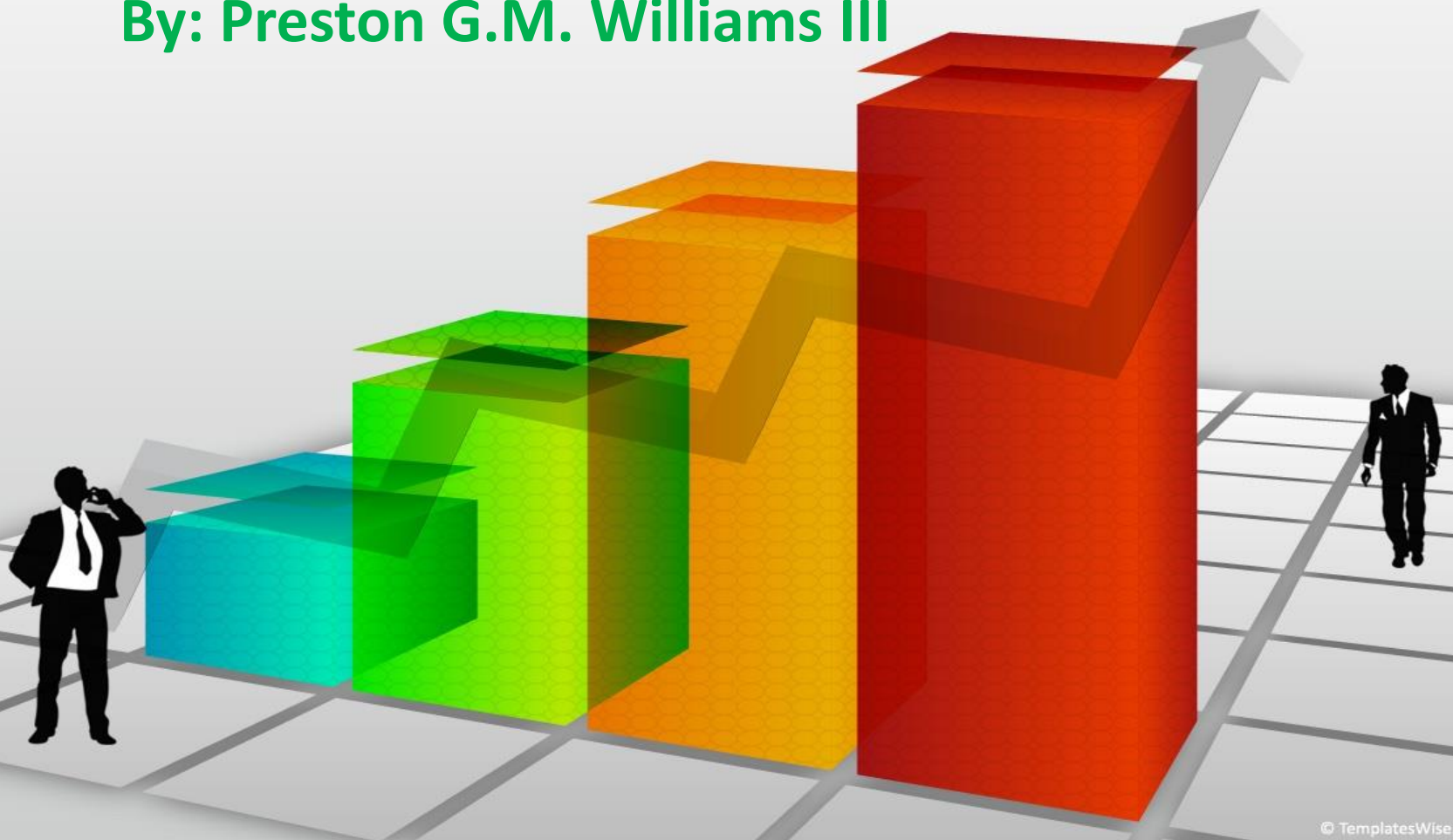# "The Future of Information Technology & Telecommunication in Liberia."

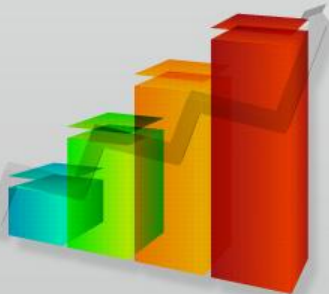## By: Preston G.M. Williams III

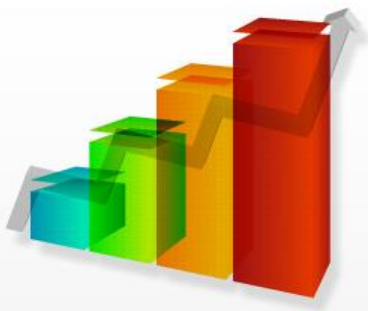# Information Technology & Telecommunications:

Strategies for a sustainable economy.

- In the aftermath of a brutal civil war which lasted more than a decade and left the country decimated, the government and people of Liberia have another opportunity to quickly identify new ways to create a versatile, robust and scalable local economy.

- Information Technology (IT) and Telecommunications are poised to have significant impact on all aspects of human development far into the future.

- These are strategic considerations for a country pursuing redevelopment in a competitive global economy.

Creating a Pathway to Self Sufficiency.

- Like any other Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC), The Republic of Liberia is struggling with insurmontable debt.

- This means that creating a budget for growth and development requires a strategy that will allow the nation to meet its most immediate needs including the provision of adequate security, food, healthcare and education for a disproportionately illiterate population.

- Having met those very essential requirements, it is critical for the government and people to identify new ways to invest in human capital – the driving force behind innovation.

- Information Technology and Telecommunications are quickly becoming proven ways forward for any country determined to become a *player* in the global economy.
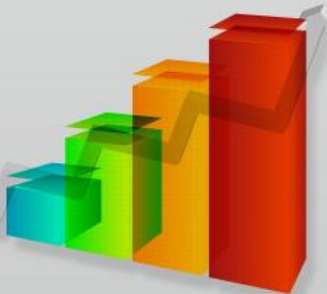
Innovations in IT.

- New innovations in Information Technology including easy integration of divergent operating systems and platforms, as well as the proper configuration of robust and versatile topographies makes technology acquisition a more readily accessible proposition in the 21st century.

- These new developments coupled with reduction in cost of production (cheaper materials, less costly hardware components and quicker software development turnaround time) are leading to more manageable manufacturing overhead and a faster time line to full-scale production.

The New Face of Telecommunications.

- While contemporary « *Go-To-Market* » strategies are being influenced by social media, product availability is driven by capacity planning to meet informed customers « on-demand » requirements.

- This phenomenon is being played out in real time as we see Apple and Samsung bring products to market in extremely short time frames.

- These feats are possible today because most or all of the infrastructure and necessary data points are easily attainable through converging technologies.
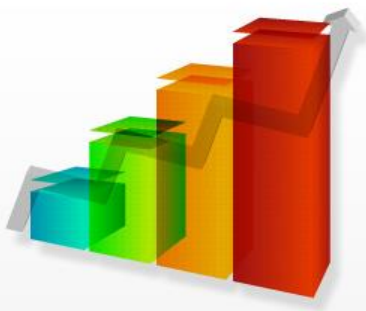
Government VS The Private Sector.

- Governments generally lag behind corporations in achieving certain goals and objectives because they are not driven to perform by the same demand variables.

- Corporations are driven to meet market demands while exceeding profit projections within specific periods of operation. Governments do not have a similar mandate.

- Besides responding to investors and shareholders, some Boards of Directors require that management generate better than expected quartely results in order to meet annual revenue projections.

- Example: Governments rarely sprint to deliver lightening fast product-to-market benchmarks. Companies do!

GOL VS Private Investors.

- The Government of Liberia is not faced with such demands. Hence its budgetary committment to spend $2 Million USD during the 2012-2013 fiscal year is reflective of its overview of the need for IT & Telecommunications in its current development cycle.

- With a stable political arena, businesses can now encourage private investors and corporate entities to once again look to engage the Liberian people as they strive to build a new nation.

- Both for profit and not-for-profit organizations are in demand today as Liberians utilize their improving GDP to purchase much needed products and services.

- The country is hopeful as it looks to gain a place in the emerging world market.
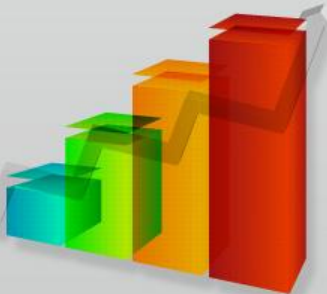
Inter/Intra Government Communications

- Enable government ministries to communicate directly through inter and/or intra-governmental exchanges (secured e-mail, encrypted transaction processing, management dashboards, etc).

- Develop an accurate, complete and comprehensive national database with relevant demographic information to create a holistic, realistic and actionable national development plan. Who lives where? Who does what, how, where and when?

- The plan should be properly vetted and expand beyond political borders (county lines).

- It should incorporate **ALL** sectors of the economy and include contingencies which can be subjected to timely review on an ongoing basis.

- Apply « *Lessons Learned* » to future plans and accompanying budgets.

- Telecommunications should be deployed against a backdrop of available Fiber, Wi-Fi, WiMax and other integrated satellite technologies already online in the developed nations as well as those undergoing proof-of-concept evaluation.

- Services such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) should be adopted to better map out road development as well as urban/city , rural and regional planning.

Creating the Curriculum of Tomorrow, Today!

- Prepare students to acquire skills needed by the government and private corporations.

- The curriculum (High School & University) should be streamlined to include training that will enable graduates to engage directly and meaningfully in the new era of « *The Knowledge Worker* ».

- Create business incubation units at participating universities to attract funding for students and professors willing to pursue Research and Development (R&D). This could result in the establishment of the next Yahoo, Google or Facebook.

- Through creative thinkers and committed leaders, The Republic of Liberia can leverage its investments in information technology & telecommunications to attract and retain a viable workforce, thereby reversing the brain drain syndrome which has adversely impacted the country over the last two to three decades.

CONCLUSION.

- With the creation of a dynamic electricity grid to power various devices and equipment, the country can introduce any number of products and services into a market thirsting for innovation.

- As more revenue becomes available to grow its emerging economy and the injection of local and international talent, Liberia is poised to once again play a critical role as a productive member of The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations.

- A proper mix of government investment and capital infusion from the private sector can catapult the Republic of Liberia into the next phase of nation-building.

- It will be rewarded with a seat in the global market place of ideas.

Questions & Answers

- The floor is now open for a dialogue about the current situation and the future of Information Technology (IT) and Telecommunications in The Republic of Liberia.