

Keynote Address By

His Excellency Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr.

President Of the Republic of Liberia At The

First International Policy Roundtable on Local Governance and Rural Development,  
Farmington Hotel, Margibi County, Liberia

June 8, 2026

Honorable Members of the 55th Legislature present;

Honorable Abdoulie Njai, Member of Parliament of the Republic of the Gambia;

Honorable Sara Beysolow Nyanti, Dean of the Cabinet, and Members of the Cabinet of the  
Republic of Liberia;

The Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Madam Christine N. Umutoni, Resident Coordinator, United Nations in Liberia;

His Excellency Dr. Manoj Nardeosingh, Secretary General, African-Asian Rural  
Development Organization (AARDO), New Delhi, India;

The Chair and Members of the National Council of Chiefs' Expert Speakers and Invited  
Guests;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to join you for the opening of this very important International Policy  
Roundtable on Local Governance and Rural Development.

At the outset, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the African Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO) and the Ministry of Local Government for convening policymakers, practitioners, development partners, traditional leaders, and experts from across Africa and Asia to deliberate on issues at the heart of sustainable development.

Special recognition goes to Dr. Manoj Nardeo-Singh, Secretary General of AARDO, for his leadership and commitment to strengthening cooperation among member states. I also commend the Ministry of Local Government for its dedication to advancing Liberia's decentralization agenda and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning for supporting Liberia's engagement with AARDO.

Distinguished Guests,

This gathering comes at a particularly significant moment in global development discourse.

Across the world, governments increasingly recognize that sustainable development cannot be driven solely from national capitals. Lasting progress must be anchored in strong local institutions, empowered communities, and responsive governance systems that bring decision-making closer to the people.

The theme of this roundtable, "Advancing Local Governance and Rural Development for an Inclusive and Prosperous Future," speaks directly to one of the most pressing challenges facing developing nations today: ensuring that growth and opportunity reach every citizen, regardless of geography.

For Liberia, this conversation holds special meaning. Having emerged from a long-running and devastating conflict, whose root causes included poor governance and marginalization of rural communities, we did not have an option. We had to build democratic credentials that, at their core, keep the participation of all Liberians in the decision-making process that affects their well-being.

Today, we are recognized as one of Africa's enduring examples of post-conflict recovery and democratic transition. What we are doing here is intentional, let no one take it lightly.

The peaceful transfer of power between democratically elected governments, the continued strengthening of our democratic institutions, and Liberia's recent election to a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council are powerful affirmations of the international community's confidence in our country's progress and potential.

While we are proud of how far we have come, we remain focused on how far we must still go. I strongly believe that the true measure of national development is found in whether ordinary citizens see improvements in their daily lives.

As someone who grew up in rural Liberia, I also see national development reflected in how we address rural neglect; whether farmers can access markets, whether young people can find opportunities close to home, whether women are empowered to participate fully in decision-making, and whether communities have access to essential services and economic opportunities.

That is why local governance and rural development remain central priorities in this Administration. The desire to improve living conditions move young people to harsh urban communities to coast-COAST-Come Over And See Trouble.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Government is implementing its flagship development plan, the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development, to decentralize opportunity, strengthen local governance, and ensure that development reaches every county and community.

By investing in agriculture, infrastructure, education, tourism, and health, and by promoting good governance, the Agenda seeks to bring meaningful relief to historically marginalized communities and empower them to play a greater role in shaping and benefiting from Liberia's development.

This is why decentralization is the nexus of our development strategy.

The implementation of the Local Government Act of 2018 continues to provide the framework for the gradual transfer of authority, responsibility, and service-delivery functions to the people. It is a juncture to bridge the gap between policymaking and the people.

Through these reforms, local governments are better positioned to address rural neglect and community needs, promote citizen participation, and strengthen accountability. We must now move development to the people.

Effective local governance is a democratic imperative. When communities are empowered to participate in planning, budgeting, implementation, and oversight, development becomes more responsive, transparent, and sustainable. When local institutions function effectively, citizens gain confidence that the government is working in their interests. When local leaders are equipped with the skills, resources, and authority to serve their communities, development outcomes improve significantly.

I am therefore particularly encouraged by discussions between AARDO and the Government of Liberia regarding the establishment of a West Africa Training Center for Local Governance and Rural Development in Liberia. I want you to know that this initiative has my government's full support. Such a center would offer valuable opportunities for capacity building, knowledge exchange, leadership development, and practical training for county officials, district commissioners, city mayors, chiefs, and other local leaders.

Sharing experiences across Africa and Asia will help generate innovative, locally relevant solutions to common development challenges while strengthening institutional effectiveness across our regions.

Distinguished Participants,

The challenges facing rural communities across Africa and Asia are often remarkably similar. They include inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, youth unemployment, climate vulnerability, food insecurity, and resource constraints. Yet these challenges also present opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and learn from one another.

No nation can achieve sustainable development in isolation. The partnerships represented in this room demonstrate the power of international cooperation to advance common prosperity and mutual learning.

Liberia is not coming to this conversation only as a beneficiary of international support but also as a willing contributor to the global exchange of ideas and experiences.

Our journey from conflict to peace, from instability to democratic governance, and from recovery to development offers lessons we are proud to share with others.

As you engage in the coming days, let me encourage all participants to approach our discussions with openness, creativity, and a commitment to practical solutions.

Let us create pathways that deliver opportunity and dignity to rural populations. Let us also work together to ensure that development is not confined to capitals but reaches every community and every citizen.

As we reflect on the importance of local governance, we are reminded of an African proverb: "A river that forgets its source will soon run dry." Nations that neglect their communities, villages, districts, and counties cannot experience lasting development. Our rural communities are not the periphery of development; they are its foundation. We quickly forget where we come from.

On behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, let me reaffirm our commitment to working with all our development partners, local authorities, traditional leaders, and citizens to advance rural transformation and strengthen local governance.

Let me congratulate AARDO and the Ministry of Local Government on organizing this important gathering, and I thank all participants for your presence and dedication to this mission.

It is now my honor and pleasure to officially declare the First International Policy Roundtable on Local Governance and Rural Development open

Thank you.