

# Policy Brief on the President Meter Change For Hope: We Voted, So What?



"I will not be judged by the eloquent speeches that I will give but by the quality of the decisions that I will make", George Weah, President of Liberia.

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REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA  
**MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS**  
**PRO-POOR AGENDA IN ACTION**

PSIP PROJECT:  
**Rehab Road Project**  
**700m**

CLIENT: GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA  
CONSULTANT: JLN INTERNATIONAL  
CONTRACTOR: SIDANI GROUP HOLDING  
PROJECT DURATION: 12 MONTHS



**OSIWA**

***“CAMPAIGN PROMISES MATTER: THEY ARE A FORM OF SOCIAL CONTRACT BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND VOTER” AND THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE HELD TO ACCOUNT”.***

*“I will not be judged by the eloquent speeches that I will give but by the quality of the decisions that I will make”*, George Weah, President of Liberia.

**Executive Summary:**

During electoral processes, politicians, especially those from the opposition, ascend to state power based on the rhetoric of “change” and this is not unique to Liberia. President George Weah’s campaign mantra was “Change for Hope” and his campaign promises were derived from his Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) manifesto which contained sixty five (65) campaign promises. Upon taking office in January 2018, he made additional twenty two (22) promises making a total of eighty seven (87).

The twenty two (22) promises were policy statements made through public speeches and proclamations. Experience has shown that most campaign and post-campaign promises raise citizens’ expectations and in many instances, they are unrealistic and become unachievable. In other instances, citizens do not have the tools or skills to track the implementation of promises in order to hold their leaders to account. Political history has shown that some leaders were voted out of office because of a failed campaign promise.

A classic example was in 1992 when President George W. Bush was not re-elected because he increased taxes in the wake of a drastic decline in the political-economy of America against a campaign promise made that he would not raise taxes.<sup>1</sup> Campaign promises are governance related and in pursuit of good governance it is important that civil society organizations who are legitimate voice of citizens hold political leaders to account for their campaign and post-election pledges.

**Context:**

Experience from political history has shown that it is difficult for presidents to keep all promises made. However, campaign rhetoric and promises matter because they set the blueprint of a president’s policy agenda if elected. Because campaign promises are a form of social contract, one way to enforce it is to employ an independent and non-partisan approach to track the progress made by an elected government in order to increase accountability, transparency and reduce mistrust between the government and its citizens. This is particularly so in Liberia where there has been a prolonged history of bad governance and misrule.

Naymote Partners for Democratic Development’s approach in tracking the CDC-led government was non-subjective and does not make a judgment on whether the policy agenda is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The tracking of George Weah’s one year in office by NAYMOTE has created the opportunity for ordinary citizens to scrutinize the work of their government relative to the promises that were made during the 2017 election and since his inauguration.

This tracking was undertaken against the assumption that citizens care deeply about whether their government has followed through on what it originally promised and provides CSOs the tools to cut through the misinformation that so often plagues political discourse surrounding the state of government. At the same time, citizens often find it difficult to determine whether mentioned promises have been met or not.

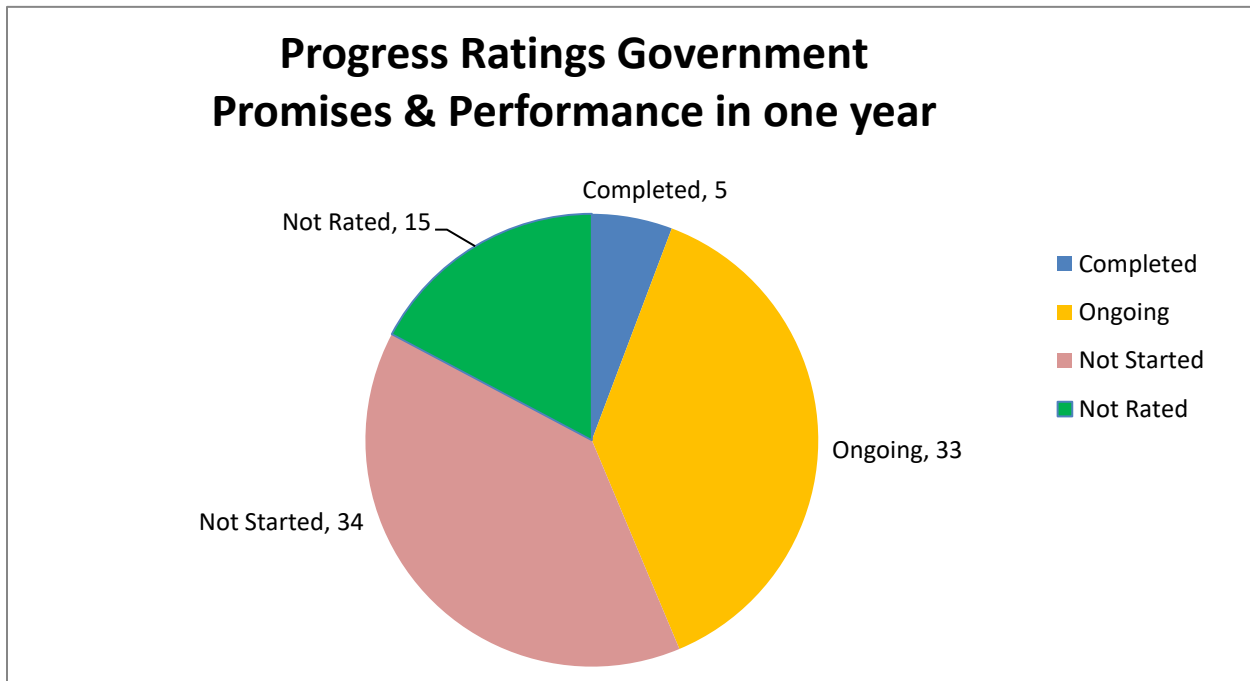
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.texasmonthly.com/politics/george-hw-bush-lose-1992-reelection-ross-perot/>

**The tracking tool used by NAYMOTE tackled this problem head on.**

Of the 87 promises tracked during the period of one year, 5 were considered as completed, 33 promises are ongoing, 34 not started and 15 could not be rated due to the lack of available information to assess progress towards implementation. 30 of the 87 promises tracked

fell under Pillar One of the Manifesto: “Power to the People”, 34 under Pillar Two: “Economy and Jobs”, 10 under Pillar Three: “Sustaining the Peace” and 13 under Pillar Four: “Governance and Transparency”.



A few months into his administration, the President promised that the construction of roads was his number one priority.<sup>2</sup> Road as an infrastructural development requires intensive capital investment. To facilitate this process, the government with the endorsement of the National Legislature, speedily passed into law the Eton and EBOMA loan agreements, in the amounts of \$536 Million and \$420 Million, respectively.<sup>3</sup> The government was passionate about these loans and the government labeled those who called for ‘due diligence’ in negotiating the loans as “Enemies of the State”. Disappointingly, the

President did not provide any information on the status of these loans in his annual message to the nation on January 28, 2019. This is an accountability deficit, a major requirement and principle of consolidating democracy and sustaining good governance.



<sup>2</sup> This was a post-election promise to construct a coastal highway from Bassa to Maryland County.

<sup>3</sup> <http://apanews.net/index.php/en/news/liberias-weah-signs-eton-financing-ebomaf-loan-agreement-into-law>

## Policy Alternatives:

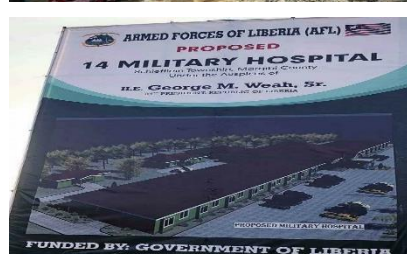
Comparatively, Liberia has the longest presidential tenure of office in the West African Region.<sup>1</sup> The six years period provided for in the Constitution for presidential tenure reduces pressure on a President to make good on his or her campaign and election promises. At the same time, there should be consistent and sustained pressure from CSOs to hold the current government to account.

**Option 1:** CSOs should develop and engage in a sustained legislative and policy advocacy for the reduction of the six years term for the presidency to four years. This would engender a sense of urgency on the presidency to fulfill campaign and other post-election promises.

**Option 2:** In order to engender citizens' trust in the government, no new promises should be made by the government. The President should instead focus on completing ongoing projects in fulfillment of promises made during his first year in office.

**Option 3:** The government should develop a strategic approach to attract private sector investment as it is the "engine of economic growth and development". Economic growth through private sector investment will contribute to job creation and wealth creation and this would help in addressing some of the economic challenges faced by the government and achieve some of its promises.

**Option 4:** In the formulation of the 2019/20 budget, government's recurring costs should be reduced and the amount saved is reappropriated to respond to and address inclusive public service delivery that is accessible, available and affordable. This would contribute to addressing some of the government's promises.



### Recommendations:

**Formulate a communication strategy:** The government should develop a results-based communication strategy to facilitate a two-way flow of information between the government and citizens.

**Future promises should be informed by analysis:** Promises are policy statements and they should be informed by analysis based on empirical evidence.

**Establish an inter-ministerial coordinating mechanism:** The government should consider establishing an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate government's efforts in fulfilling promises.

**Develop a system for tracking promises:** The government should develop a monitoring and evaluation system for monitoring government's promises and link them to the pillars of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) and its implementation.

### ABOUT NATMOTE

*Naymote Partners for Democratic Development is a prime democratic advancement institution in Liberia with 17 years of professional experience. We have trained some of the most prominent young politicians (males and females) in Liberia. The institution was established in 2001 by student's leaders and activists to promote citizens' understanding of democratic processes and the long-term benefits of their participation in these processes. More information please contact [info@naymote.com](mailto:info@naymote.com) or 0770510479.*