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## NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter

Working for democracy & making democracy work

Number 14 | July 2013

*Ongoing Activities in NDI's new program*

### **Selection of Advocacy Partners and two Public Hearings**

NDI's new program, funded by the Embassy of Sweden, aims to increase citizens' political organizing and legislative advocacy, and to assist the Legislature in creating opportunities for citizen access. A number of activities pursue these objectives.

#### ***Baseline Assessment***

NDI started the new program with a baseline assessment. NDI met with over twenty civil society organizations (CSOs) in Montserrado and other counties as well as members of the Legislature, the executive branch and county level government officials. These meetings were very informative and engaging and helped NDI to determine the levels of citizen participation, to learn about CSOs issue expertise and legislative advocacy skills and to identify opportunities for citizen-CSO-legislature linkages.

#### ***Two introductory legislative advocacy workshops***

After the baseline assessment, NDI conducted two introductory workshops



*Participants at NDI's workshop*

- Maintain a relevant network of partners throughout the country.

NDI's future work with advocacy group partners will include skill-building workshops in the area of developing and launching advocacy campaigns. NDI will also assist its partners to effectively engage with legislators and other civil society groups during national issue forums, and national lobby days organized by NDI, its CSO partners and the Legislature.

#### ***Two public hearings***

On July 4 the Senate Committee on Autonomous Commissions and Agencies held a public hearing in Gbarnga on electoral law

to legislative advocacy for CSO participants from throughout the country. The first workshop was tailored to organizations that have little to no experience in conducting evidence-based advocacy with the legislature and little understanding of legislative processes, functions, roles and responsibilities. The second workshop targeted CSOs with more experience in engaging the legislature. A select number of CSOs that participated in the first workshop also participated in the second. This allowed for cross-fertilization and the sharing of experiences between both categories of CSOs.

### ***Selection of three legislative advocacy partners***

Given NDI's limited resources, based on a set criterion, NDI will work closely together with three CSO networks to provide them assistance to effectively organize and advocate to the legislature on specific policy and legislation. NDI's baseline assessment identified policy issues of importance to CSOs, citizens and the legislature. Based on these findings, NDI is exploring partnerships in the following sectors:

- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH);
- Extractive Industries/Natural Resources;
- Women's Empowerment.

Important criteria for partner groups selected include among others:

- Citizen-centered orientation;
- Prioritize marginalized groups;
- Advocate on social-economic and

reform. NDI assisted CSOs to prepare oral and written testimony and present it effectively. Additionally, NDI worked with the chairs of the committee and the Legislature's Committee Support Services (CSS) to prepare invitations, developing agendas and a list of witnesses, securing venues as well as other logistical arrangements.

The Gender committees of House and Senate are planning to hold a public hearing at the Capitol Building in Monrovia on July 10. The hearing will focus on gender related issues in the proposed National Budget for 2013-2014. For this hearing, NDI will provide the CSS and CSOs similar support and assistance provided for the hearing on electoral reform.

The following CSOs testified in Gbarnga at the electoral law reform hearing: the Election Coordinating Committee (ECC), the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL), the National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYMOTE), the National Union of Associations of the Disabled, the Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L), the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC), the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), the Bong County Women Organization and the Bong Students Union.

The following organizations have already prepared their testimonies for the hearing on gender and the budget: Action for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (AGENDA), the South East Women Development Association (SEWODA), the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) and the National Civil Society Council of Liberia. The

governance issues; and

August E-Newsletter will report on both events.



*Mr. Fallah Boimah gives a testimony on behalf of the National Union of Associations of the Disabled at the public hearing on electoral law reform. Behind the table Commissioner Ansumana Dukuly of the National Elections Commission, Senator John Ballout and Senator Jewel Howard Taylor.*

### *NDI's Legislative Strengthening program closed* **A sound foundation to modernize Liberia's Legislature**

At the end of June 2013 NDI closed a four-year program, USAID-funded program to support the modernization and development of the Liberian Legislature. This program pursued selected aspects of the Modernization Plan that was adopted by the Legislature for 2009-2013. The program's two principle objectives:

- To enhance legislative capacity to fulfill lawmaking, representation and oversight responsibilities; and
- To enhance the capacity of the Liberian Legislature to operate in a more accountable, transparent and efficient manner.

To achieve these objectives the following activities were undertaken in cooperation with the Modernization Committee of the Legislature and other relevant committee chairpersons.

#### ***Building skills and infrastructure of Legislature's staff bureaus***

- Opening of the Legislative Information Service (LIS) (i.e., the research service, library and archives).
- Establishment of a Legislative Budget Office (LBO).
- Skills building for staff of the LIS, LBO, House and Senate Press Bureaus, the Legislative Drafting Service, and the CSS.

#### ***Support for the functions of the legislators and their personal staff***

- Training for the personal staff of representatives and senators in policy analysis, preparing summaries of proposed bills, and legislative processes.
- Orientation of the newly elected legislators of the 53rd Legislature.
- Preparing key committees and the Women's Legislative Caucus with skills in gender responsive budgeting to examine the national budget.
- Organization of a budget summit for the House of Representatives.
- Seven policy seminars linking lawmakers with subject matter experts on the following topics: decentralization, gender responsive budgeting, election law reform, youth policy, affordable and adequate housing, extractive industries, and gender equity in politics).
- Two study investigation missions on affordable and adequate housing and extractive industries).
- The publication and distribution of directories of House and Senate.
- A sub-grant for "Legislative Spotlight" radio programming linking constituents to their legislators.

#### ***Building and improving Information Technology (IT)***

- Launch of the Legislature's website and training on website maintenance and content management. Take a look at: <http://legislature.gov.lr/about>
- Provision of computers and other IT equipment to Legislature's staff bureaus.
- Computer related trainings for legislative staff on topics including: how to use open source programs, press tools and how to troubleshoot IT user problems.

- Provision of training in use of the electronic voting and attendance systems for responsible House and Senate staff.
- Creation of a manual and later an electronic bill tracking system now integrated on the Legislature's website. The system will enhance the transparency of the legislative process and help the House and Senate track bills between both chambers efficiently.
- Introduction of Freedom Fone to provide recordings of legislative debates that will enable radio journalists from across Liberia to access up-to-date legislative news on demand, and disseminate it to the public with the use of a mobile phone.

### ***Capitol Building connected to the World Wide Web!***

As its final activity, NDI contracted Mwetana Consulting and Technology Group to install Ethernet throughout the Capitol Building. The equipment includes a wireless internet signal (WiFi) covering the entire Capitol Building as well as a cable running to the office of every Senator and Representative. This new infrastructure greatly enhances the potential for public openness and transparency in the legislative process. It also improves the quality of the Legislature's capacity for research and communication in pursuit of its lawmaking, oversight and representational functions.

The achievement at the National Legislature was possible only through the effective collaboration and contributions of NDI, Mwetana, the Liberian House and Senate, and USAID.

### ***Thanks!***

NDI is very grateful for its good working relationship and partnership with lawmakers and staff members of the Liberian Legislature and the financial support of USAID in implementing this program. Through the program, a sound foundation has been laid for the continued modernization of the Legislature. At the Legislature's own initiative, it can now make use of these new opportunities to shape sustainable conditions for the improvement of its lawmaking, oversight and representational functions.

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*Information brochure Legislative Drafting Service*

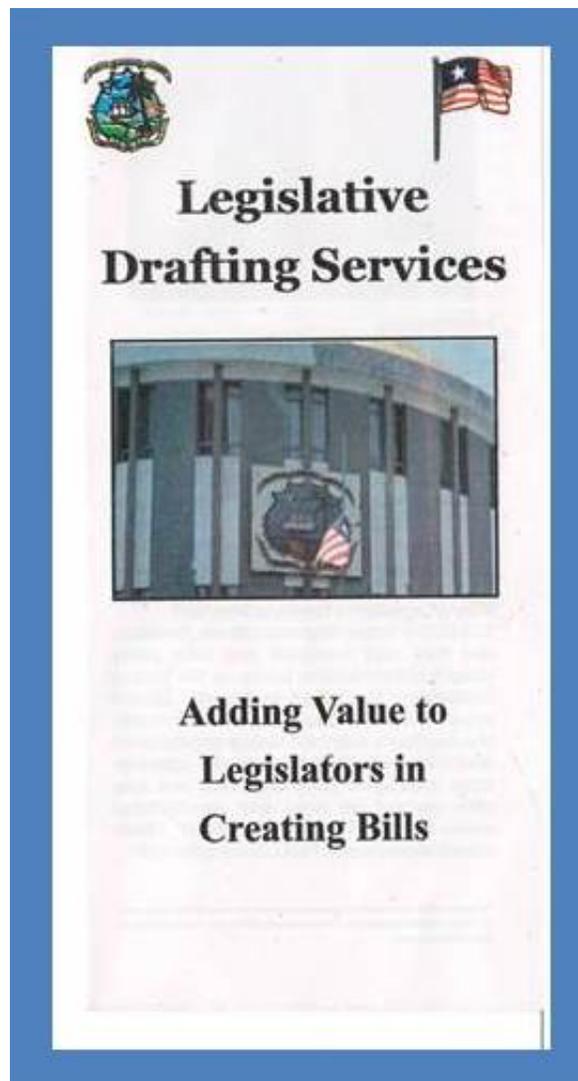
## LDS stands ready to serve lawmakers

One of the last activities in NDI's Legislative Strengthening program was the publication of a brochure with information about the Legislative Drafting Services (LDS). NDI also published similar brochures discussing the functions of the Legislative Information Service (LIS) and the Legislative Budget Office (LBO). The brochure provides basic information to legislators on the services available through the LDS, including advice and assistance offered to legislators and their staff in preparing bills for introduction in the House or Senate and in preparing amendments for pending bills. The LDS can also advise and assist any conference between the House and the Senate, by drafting amendments to reconcile differences between House and Senate versions of a bill.

NDI trained the staff of the LDS to refine their skills to manage the drafting process of the Legislature and to develop clear and accurate draft laws that facilitate proper implementation and interpretation by other branches of government.

The brochure states:

*'In pursuit of its mission, the LDS seeks to develop a professional working*



*relationship with each legislative office and committee. The LDS stands ready to demonstrate this value and expertise. Representatives, Senators and their staff are encouraged to utilize the services available in each LDS office. Please call upon us!'*



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