

NRM Concerns and Recommendations to Legislature on Oil Sector | Meeting in Margibi on WASH | Legislative Spotlight | National Issues Forum and National Lobby Day: Febr. 12 - 14

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Working for democracy & making democracy work

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To Improve Liberia's Oil Sector, NRM Raises Concerns and Proposes Recommendations to National Legislature

"The desire of civil society of Liberia is to see an oil sector that provides the needed impetus for stimulating the development agenda of the country, but is done in a manner that is characterized by transparency and a strong sense of sustainable management, coupled with a conflict-sensitive business practice approach." This is among the major recommendations of a position paper, published December 20, 2013, by the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM), one of NDI's partners.

NRM scrutinized two bills pending before the National Legislature for a Petroleum Act and a National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) Act. Although NRM generally commended the government and



Members of NRM met in December 2013 to discuss the Petroleum and NOCAL Acts.

Chairperson Jimmy Shilue explained that it was developed following consultations with the National Civil Society Council of Liberia and other civil society groups such as the Liberia Oil and Gas Initiative (LOGI) and the Publish What You Pay Coalition. A three-day consultation took place of CSO leaders from across the country, with the view to providing a thorough understanding of the proposed Acts, encouraging participation in the debates, and consolidating views for further engagement with all actors.

the Legislature for the efforts of these bills, to make the oil sector more transparent, accountable and beneficial to the development of the country, the Consortium listed fourteen concerns followed by fourteen specific recommendations.

NRM's key positions and recommendations included the following, among others:

- The Petroleum Act should be clearly consistent with the environmental protection laws of Liberia in all respects.
- The process for the participation of citizens should be clarified and strengthened in the Petroleum Act; from their participation in the initial development of plans through the management of funds.
- The Petroleum Act should require all oil companies to specify the quotas and seniority levels at which they will hire Liberian citizens. It should also require companies to spell out how training and employment will specifically target women, youth, and people with disabilities.
- The role of the President of the Republic is currently too strong in both proposed Acts. For the purpose of

The head of the NRM Secretariat, Jackson Speare, added: *“As a watchdog group involved with facilitating grassroots communities’ involvement, the NRM Consortium will work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the nation’s natural resources are equitably managed and distributed in order to mitigate negative social, economic, political and environmental consequences”*.

Release of the NRM Consortium’s position paper coincided with the final days of nationwide consultations conducted by the House of Representatives in 14 of the 15 counties. Those consultations were subject to both praise and criticism in the public discourse and the press over the last few months. Divided opinions focused on several issues, such as the broad breadth of outreach to citizens, the costs of the consultations that were estimated at approximately US\$1 million, and the low number of civil society organizations that were invited to participate. Appearing as a guest on the Legislative Spotlight radio program, Deputy House Speaker Hans Barchue praised the House’s initiative and the outcomes of the nationwide consultations. In discussion with NRM’s Jackson Speare and Rev. Chris Wleh Toe, Secretary General of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, he declared that lawmakers will be open to the future participation and inputs from civil society organizations, like NRM.

ensuring balance in the management of the sector, the Acts should require that the President nominate all senior staff of the Petroleum Directorate and NOCAL for scrutiny and confirmation by the Legislature.

At a press conference to release the position paper, NRM



Deputy House Speaker Hans Barchue with journalists in April 2013.

IF YOU WANT TO RECEIVE THE FULL TEXT OF NRM'S POSITION PAPER (7 PAGES) ON THE PENDING BILLS FOR THE PETROLEUM ACT AND THE NOCAL ACT PLEASE SEND AN E-MAIL TO: jacksonspeare@yahoo.com

WASH to Host Consultative Meeting in Margibi County

As part of its effort to increase citizen knowledge about WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) issues in the development of their counties, the Liberia CSO WASH Network will launch its maiden county consultation this January in Kakata, Margibi County. Other consultations will follow.

These consultations are among WASH's many activities to promote participation and engagement of citizens in decision-making, thereby ensuring that WASH issues are elevated and promoted at the national level. According to Prince Kreplah, Chairman of the WASH Network, these consultations will also promote transparency and accountability in the sector and in the use of funds that are earmarked for WASH projects.

Citizens of Bomi, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Montserrado and Grand Bassa counties will participate in similar consultative meetings in the coming months.

“At the Margibi County meeting it is expected that discussions among citizens,

local officials and lawmakers will strengthen the political will of politicians to act”, asserts WASH Network Chair Prince Kreplah. In this way, according to Kreplah, WASH issues will be prioritized in development agendas and county and social development funds will be made more transparent than in the past.

Upcoming Events: National Issues Forum and National Lobby Day

Mark your agendas! Liberian CSOs and NDI are organizing a National Issues Forum on Wednesday, February 12th and Thursday, February 13th. On those days, several topics of national interest will be discussed in half-day sessions. As planned, the Forum will address timely issues now addressed by Liberian CSOs, such as women’s empowerment, education policies, labor conditions and youth employment, security sector reform, decentralization and local government, and electoral and constitutional reform, as well as natural resources, and water, sanitation and hygiene. The Forum is open to CSO activists, media practitioners, academics, legislators, legislative staffers, civil servants of government, executive branch officials, and representatives of political parties and local and county governments. Look out for the next e-newsletter that will bring you more information.



Legislative Spotlight Radio – Upcoming Shows

The NDI-sponsored Legislative Spotlight Radio is broadcast live on Truth F.M. 96.1 every Wednesday at 11:00 a.m.

The January 22nd show will focus on human rights. Representative Worlea-Saywah Dunah, Senator Jewel Howard-Taylor and Beyan Korta, President of the Christian Association of the Blind, will appear as guests. Please tune in!!!!

The show will be recorded and rebroadcast on Thursday, January 23, 2014 at 11:00 a.m. on Radio Veritas 97.8 F.M.

Civil society organizations will participate in a National Lobby Day at the Legislature shortly after the National Issues Forum.



NDI's Civil Society Program: Building Citizen-Centered Political Engagement

NDI, with support from the Embassy of Sweden (EoS), is implementing a multiyear program to foster greater interactions between citizens, the Legislature and other public institutions. The program works to:

- Increase citizens' participation in the political process;
- Partner with CSOs and the Legislature to create more opportunities for citizens to engage in the legislative process; and
- Assist CSOs to identify strategic entry points in the legislative and budget processes to engage with lawmakers and conduct broader advocacy campaigns.

NDI's CSO Advocacy Partners

NDI presently sub-grants to three networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) as advocacy partners. Through awareness-raising, community organizing, and policy and legislative advocacy, these networks conduct campaigns to protect and fulfill human rights to water, sanitation and hygiene, citizen participation in sustainable and peaceful natural resource management, and women's social, political, and economic empowerment. These partners are: the Liberia CSO WASH Network, the Southeast Women Development Association – SEWODA, and the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management.

NDI's Legislative Spotlight Radio Partner

LMDI (the Liberia Media for Democratic Initiative) continues to broadcast the Legislative Spotlight radio program, which has come to be known for its reports from legislators and its vibrant policy discussions with citizens. The weekly one-

hour show is followed by a monthly program in Liberian English and call-ins with legislators in local vernacular languages on community radio stations, to reach diverse listeners throughout the country. You will find the schedule for upcoming weeks elsewhere in this e-newsletter.



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