



NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter

Working for democracy & making democracy work

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Ebola-crisis: NDI downgrades its program

On August 7, President Sirleaf declared a State of Emergency in Liberia for a period of 90 days, to try to curb the outbreak of the Ebola virus, which poses a serious public health risk and is undermining the economic stability of the country. According to President Sirleaf, Liberia's health care system is under immense strain and the Ebola epidemic is having a chilling effect on the overall health care delivery. Out of fear of being infected with the disease, health care practitioners are afraid to accept new patients, especially in community clinics all across the country. Consequently, many common diseases which are especially prevalent during the rainy season, such as malaria, typhoid and common cold, are going untreated and may lead to unnecessary and preventable deaths. To mitigate an increase in exposure to Ebola, the government has instituted "extraordinary measures" including, disallowing large gatherings and a curfew among other measures.



In light of these restrictions NDI has not been able to implement planned activities for the month of August. Additionally, NDI has taken steps to lower the risk of exposure to the Ebola virus by temporarily relocating expatriate staff members to their home countries until further notice. In the interim, staff will be working remotely to remain in contact with partners and make contingency plans for postponed activities and monitor political developments. NDI will assess the security situation daily to determine the appropriate time for international staff to return to Liberia. NDI's Liberian office will be open on a limited basis with

essential local staff going into the office periodically. All other local staff will be working from home.

Natural Resources for the Benefit of all Liberians

From May 14-16, NDI organized a workshop on concession agreements and social development funds. NDI co-organized the workshop with its local partner the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM). Despite Liberia's wealth in rubber, wood, palm oil, iron, diamonds, and more recently oil, the majority of Liberians remain in poverty because they do not benefit from the revenue generated by these resources. The agreements obligate foreign companies to contribute to the social development of Liberia, including providing employment to Liberians, building schools, and health facilities. These obligations are more often than not enforced, because the government lacks sufficient capacity to monitor the implementation of the agreements. Further corruption is endemic in the sector due to weak government institutions and legislation.

It is important for Liberians to properly manage their natural resources for the common good of all citizens because the mismanagement of the country's natural resources by few group of people was one of contributing factors for the 14 years civil conflict that ravaged the entire country.

Dorothy Tooman, Executive Director of Development Education Network – Liberia (DEN-L), in her welcome speech at the start of the workshop.

NDI works together with Civil Society Organizations, like NRM, to strengthen their knowledge and skills in the area of advocacy to enable the group to advocate to the legislature on issues that ordinary citizens are concerned about.

Family Photo of the participants

During NDI's workshop, NRM received information from an international expert about the obligations and responsibilities of foreign companies in agreements with the government. Other topics discussed included governance shortcomings and how those can be addressed, land rights, protection of local communities, and labor law. Participants also received guidance on how to



analyze concession agreements. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for CSO's to focus on the issues that are directly related to the living conditions of workers and communities. One of the workshop sessions included presentations by the four regional platforms of NRM. They presented findings from a series of surveys they undertook in their regions. Topics they covered included contributions from concessions to socio-economic development, the management of social development funds, monitoring mechanisms used to manage these funds, how citizens can become more involved in the management of these funds, as well how strengthening transparency and accountability at the county level more broadly. Below are some key points raised in their presentation:

- A communication gap exists between the affected communities and local authorities.
- Lawmakers strongly influence the management of the social development funds.
- Citizens do not have sufficient information about the content of concession agreements to provide feedback and raise their concerns about the management of resources.
- Authorities do not have the capacity to monitor the agreements.

Africa is losing billions of dollars yearly as a result of poor management of the continent's natural resources and Liberia is not exempted. This NDI-workshop is very strategic as it will improve our insight on the various concession agreements including the usage of the social development funds.

Jackson Speare, coordinator of the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management, during the workshop.

NRM regional platforms developed an action plan to address the challenges they experience in raising awareness and opportunities they see for greater citizen involvement in legislative advocacy around concession agreements. Their plans took into consideration the findings from the concession agreements analyzed during the workshop and from their county surveys. Each plan outlined targets and tools for their advocacy. As one of the participants concluded at the end of workshop: *'this workshop was very practical as participants played a dominant role as compared to other workshops where organizers drive the entire process; we can take the results of this workshop back to our region and start to work with it'*.

Affordable Housing: a Fundamental Right

In May, the Legislature, through its Senate Committee on Public Works and Rural Development and the House Committee on Health and Social Welfare convened a public hearing on the recently launched national housing policy, drafted by the National Housing Authority (NHA). The hearing was chaired and co-chaired by Senator Oscar Cooper and Representative Chea, respectively. Both lawmakers played an active role in the NDI organized, USAID funded, legislative study investigative mission on affordable and adequate housing in 2012. Through the mission, lawmakers learned about areas of major concern to citizens. They also received expert guidance to support them to formulate policy recommendations to the executive. The findings from the study mission spurred the NHA to draft the national housing policy and the political will among lawmakers to hold the public hearing.



West Point

The first testimony was given by Mr. Samuel W. Thompson, Managing Director of the National Housing Authority (NHA). Mr. Thompson highlighted that, although decent housing is a fundamental right, sixty percent of Liberia's urban population lives in slums. An affordable housing policy will reduce poverty, improves national security and has a huge impact on the economy as the building materials sector, construction and labour sector,

infrastructure sector, utility providers and household furnishing markets will benefit from it. He presented a list of fourteen recommendations to the lawmakers, such as encouragement of public-private partnership framework and the use of mining and agricultural concessions to support housing development and urban infrastructure needs.

A panel of five legislators conducted the Public Hearing:

- Senator Oscar Cooper Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Works and Rural Development;
- Representative Johnson Chea Co-Chair on the House Committee on Health and Social Welfare;
- Representative Ben Fofana Co-Chair of the House Committee on Public Accounts and Expenditure;
- Representative William Dakel member of the House Committee on Health and Social Welfare; and
- Representative Eugene Fallah Kparka Chair on Public Utilities and member of the House Committee of Public Accounts and Expenditure.

The Commissioner of the Township of West Point, Madame Miatta H. Flowers provided her testimony. She identified four major challenges for the Township: over crowdedness, frequent fire outbreak, sea erosion and the non-accessibility to basic services due cluster of homes. She supported fully the need of building affordable houses for the community but as sixty percent of the residents live on fishery it is important to take this into consideration when planning for relocation and housing construction.

On behalf of the South-Eastern Women Development Association (SEWODA), national coordinator, Helena Torh Turo, highlighted that the south eastern region is one of the most underdeveloped, particularly in terms of housing and infrastructure. She painted a vivid picture stating that homes built for middle income earners will not be affordable for most women and families in the region. She recommended gender sensitive approach in implementing the policy that would consider the ability of women to access economic opportunities and afford housing.

The President of the Slum Dwellers Association of Liberia, Bestman D. Toe, shared his views with the lawmakers that the Government of Liberia and international partners should strengthen the slum upgrading process. In this

they should consult people living in slums so that they can provide feedback into this process.

The Ministry of Public Works was represented by Jackson J. Paye, Assistant Minister for Rural Development. He admitted that the Ministry does not have any policy on affordable housing. However, since 2007 the ministry was involved in the building of 239 houses by the National Housing Authority and 181 houses by the Aureus Mining Company. He agreed that there is a need to expand low income housing programs to the rural areas, but pointed that it needs to be coordinated with the decentralization process underway.

Nya Twayen, Deputy Director General of the National Social Security and Welfare Cooperation (NASSCORP) informed the hearing that his institution is not financially strong enough to serve as a major investor in affordable housing given the current volatile economic status of the country. However, NASSCORP has contributed around US\$3 million in several housing projects and is willing to serve as guarantor for low income earner mortgage loan.

Newly built affordable houses in Buchanan

The Governor of New Kru Town, Alice B. Weah, asked the government to set the criteria and qualification for affordable housing for low income earners and to hold a town hall meeting to discuss opportunities and challenges with the



residents. Clara Town was represented by Williametta G. Carlos, Commissioner of Garworlohn, informed the lawmakers that 66 percent of the people in Clara Town lives in slums. The lack of a drainage system and garbage collection are the main challenges and this is partly due to the lack of adequate housing. Although the township is now working on the control of water pumps and latrines, the development of a housing program is urgent. There is a need to include facilities like playgrounds, youth and women centers, schools, and health centers in the urban planning more broadly.

Elijah Whapoe, representing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) injected that EPA supports the concept of affordable housing, but underlined the need of “green” housing facilities to protect the environment. He promised that the EPA will provide a comprehensive document to the Legislature on how environmental issues can be considered in building affordable housing units in various communities.

The final testimony was provided by Prince Kreplah, Chairman of the Liberia CSOs WASH Network. He regretted that most of the country's population lives in deplorable housing. In his view it is essential to build an adequate and standardized water and sanitation system in housing units. Additionally, the government should ensure that water pollution does not occur in areas where forest and agriculture concessions are in effect.

At the end of the public hearing the chair and co-chair concluded that the hearing enhanced both committees understanding of policy options in pursuit of adequate and affordable housing. Both underscored that the legislature needs to partner with civil society, government and independent experts to move legislative action forward to improve access to adequate and affordable housing.

Senate Holds Public Hearing on Water and Sanitation

On May 5, the Liberian Senate Joint Committee on Public Corporations and Public Works held a hearing to collect evidence from citizens on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) issues in their communities. A diverse group of Liberians participated in the hearing, including students, persons with disabilities, and civil society representatives. NDI staff worked with committee leaders to select session topics and assisted civic groups in preparing testimonies for the event, which was recorded and aired on national television.

The Joint Committee Chairman, Senator Oscar A. Cooper, delivered opening remarks and acknowledged that the Senate organized the hearing as a result of a February letter from Montserrado County Senator Joyce Sumo, urging the house to take swift action to revamp the WASH sector. Sumo's appeal was motivated by her observations during an investigative study mission for legislators on water and sanitation organized by NDI and its civil society organization (CSO) advocacy partner, the WASH Network. Activists from the WASH Network and the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM), also an NDI civic partner, testified during the hearing.

The WASH Network chairman Prince Kreplah appealed to the legislature to increase its budgetary allocation to the sector, citing the large number of Liberians who still lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. Noting the harmful effects of irresponsible use of natural resources on water and sanitation conditions, the NRM representative advocated for the

enactment of environmentally friendly resource extraction policies.



A student representative's testimony on the poor state of water and sanitation conditions in Liberian schools that prevented productive learning was a major highlight of the hearing. She pointed out that many schools lacked toilet facilities, forcing students to relieve themselves in bushes. Senator Cooper was moved by the presentation and

promised to spearhead the campaign for reform: "I would on behalf of the Senate apologize to you the young students of this country for not providing the necessary WASH facilities you need in your school. I will ensure the Liberian Senate takes appropriate steps."

The Joint Committee compiled its findings for presentation to the Senate. Among other recommendations, the committee proposed the centralization of WASH services to better regulate the sector and called for increased funding to rebuild facilities at the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation. In the coming months, the Liberian Senate will determine a course of action for improving the WASH sector based on these recommendations.

Every Wednesday and Thursday Legislative Spotlight Radio



The NDI-sponsored Legislative Spotlight radio program is broadcast live on Truth F.M. 96.1 every Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. The show is rebroadcast every Thursday at 11:00 a.m. on Radio Veritas 97.8 F.M. Look out too for the magazine version on community radio stations in all 15 counties.

Please tune in!!!!



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