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Working for democracy & making democracy work

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Training Activists on Natural Resource Management

NDI organized with its partner, the Natural Resource Management (NRM), a three-day training on how to develop a policy paper on concession agreements and the management of the County and Social Development Funds (CSDF) for members of NRM's four regional groups. Throughout the training, the activists had very lively discussions on topics such as, how concession agreements can contribute to the social development of the country and how to improve the administration of the CSDF. The final outcome of the workshop will be a policy paper, that is currently being drafted, that makes strong recommendations for reforming concession agreements to ensure CSDFs that include natural resource revenues are managed using sound, evidence-based analysis to support development projects.



NRM's four regional groups are organized by county, and include the West (red), Central (purple), South Central (orange), and Southeast (green). Montserrado is administered by Headquarters in Monrovia.

Concession Agreements' Contribution to Social Development

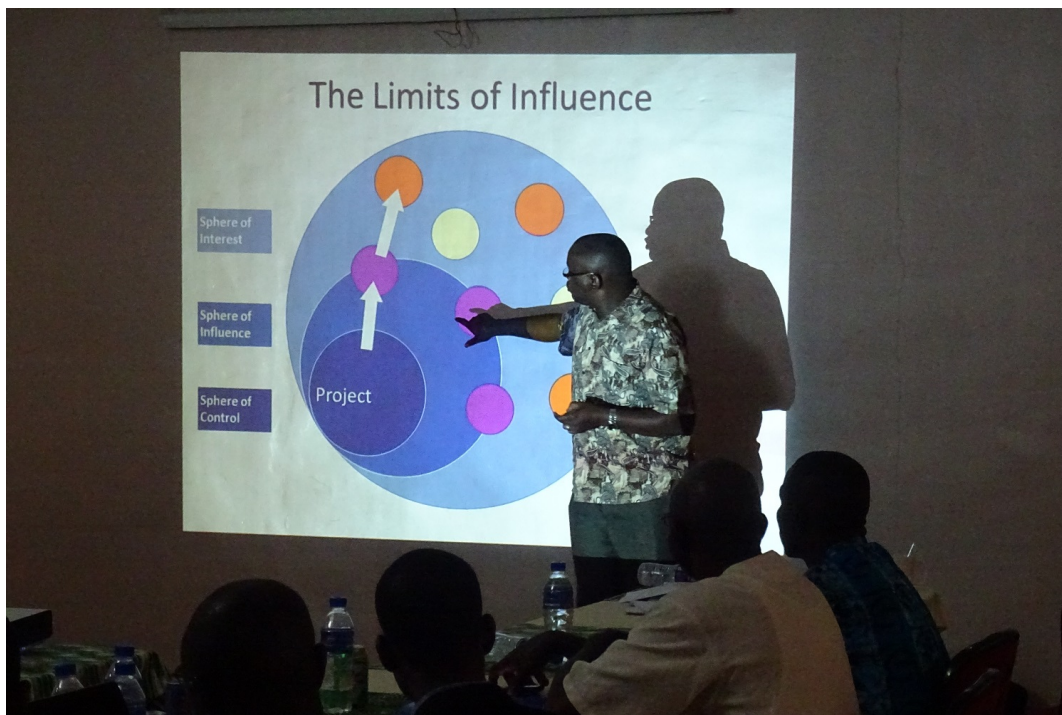
Historically in Liberia, the content of concession agreements is often different from how they are implemented, and far too often their implementation negatively impacts local communities. Although companies and government officials make lofty promises to communities in concession areas, people often lose their land, job growth is nonexistent, and there are delays in development projects such as the construction of schools or health clinics. Because of these problems, a portion of the training focused on how NRM can more effectively advocate for fair and sustainable use of natural resources.

The objective of this part of the workshop was to formulate evidence-based recommendations for the Liberian Legislature on how greater inclusion of communities could positively impact the implementation of concession agreements. The attendees discussed how concession agreements are implemented in all of NRM's four regions, identified underlying problems, discussed best practices that are appropriate to address the identified problems, and established action items for validating the information. From these discussions, the attendees developed several preliminary recommendations:

- The text of concession agreements should be publicly available in a simple summary distributed in the communities.
- Processes for monitoring the implementation of concession agreements should be better organized by the government
- The number of state institutions involved should be reduced in order to

streamline monitoring and enhance transparency and accountability.

- Affected communities should be involved much earlier in negotiations and they should be given more say in how revenue is used to benefit their communities.



International expert, Amani Mhinda from Tanzania, in action during the workshop.

County/Social Development Funds (CSDF)

All of the attendees agreed that strengthening local communities requires that the management of the CSDF must be improved and that the local communities themselves are more engaged throughout the process. Currently, there are too many stakeholders involved in the CSDFs including ministries, regional authorities, and lawmakers from the county, and this often leads to conflicts and delays. For example, the executive and legislative representatives on CSDF boards differ on how they believe funds should be allocated, and they both want to control the process. This often leads to conflict between the two sides and delays the entire process.

During the training, participants debated the involvement of the executive and legislative in the CSDFs and made suggestions on how to best strengthen communities' role in allocation of CSDF funds. One suggestion was to have reliable representation of communities on the County Councils, which is the body that decides which projects will be funded by the CSDF. Other recommendations included the timely publication of the agenda for the Council's meetings, as well as the publication of the meeting minutes, transparent procurement procedures for development projects, a selection of projects that benefits social development, and improved monitoring of projects

in progress.

The workshop attendees benefitted from the unexpected appearance of two Lofa County lawmakers: Representative Eugene Fallah Kparkar and Senator Stephen Zargo. Both of them underlined the need of more citizen participation in decision making and invited CSO's like NRM to share their views with them.

After the training, the activists returned home to validate and garner support for their recommendations. Their ultimate goal is to produce a policy paper outlining their recommendations, which will be the basis for a Public Issue Forum scheduled for November. At the forum, NRM will share its recommendations with lawmakers, CSOs, and the general public and engage relevant stakeholders in a discussion around those recommendations.



Family photo of the participants in front of the Passion Hotel in Gbarnga, where the workshop took place.

SEWODA Presents Findings on Education in the Southeast to Minister Werner

On September 14, one of NDI's CSO advocacy partners, the South Eastern Women Development Association (SEWODA), presented a report on the quality of public elementary schools in Southeast Liberia to the Minister of Education (MOE), George K. Werner. The report was the result of research

conducted by three Citizen Observatories that SEWODA organized in River Gee, Grand Kru and Maryland counties. Citizen observatories are groups of trained citizens who monitor social development issues. The monitors visited 88 public elementary schools in each county. The findings indicate that the schools have insufficient resources to support an adequate learning environment for the 19,561 students to realize their full talents and potential.

Presenting the report to the Minister, SEWODA Program Officer Edward Klah highlighted the most important findings:

- 2 schools of 88 observed (2%) have a library;
- 72 schools (88%) do not have textbooks;
- 10 schools (11%) have sufficient benches for students;
- 53 schools (60%) are without a hand pump;
- 81 schools (92%) have hand wash facilities (bucket and soap);
- 53 schools (60%) have latrines for students;
- 44 schools (50%) have separate latrines for teachers.

According to SEWODA the results of the observations show that the quality of the public elementary schools in the southeast does not meet the standards that are set in the Education Reform Law.

Minister Werner praised SEWODA for taking this initiative. He emphasized that communities should take more ownerships of their schools, which the efforts of SEWODA contributes towards. Nonetheless, Minister Werner stated that, “Government is aware of the shortcomings and let’s work on solutions instead of criticizing.” He said his ministry is committed to working with SEWODA on future observation of education facilities in the counties.

The Education report can be found [here on NDI’s website](#).

(Pictures below: school latrines and class room in Grand Kru County.)



More Citizen Observatories' Reports Are Coming!

Each of the Citizen Observatories (CO) in River Gee, Grand Kru and Maryland Counties consist of twelve volunteers who monitor the social issues in the Southeast. They summarize their findings in reports that are submitted to the responsible authorities. SEWODA uses these reports to engage lawmakers and other stakeholders to make concrete steps to improve the living conditions in the Southeast. Future reports to be released in 2015 (by county) include:

Grand Kru: Security and Land Disputes;

Maryland: Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Implementation of County Social Development Fund;

River Gee: Health and Implementation of County Social Development Fund.

Citizens' Involvement Crucial Addressing WASH Issues

Citizens, county authorities and members of the legislature gathered in Sanniquelle, Nimba County, to discuss that county's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) situation. This event was one of seven Stakeholder Dialogues organized in seven counties by NDI's partner the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Network (WASH). Previous dialogues were held in Grand Cape Mount, Lofa and River Gee counties and additional dialogues will occur in Margibi, Grand Gedeh and Grand Bassa counties in the next few months.

During the event, residents of Sanniquelle shared their concerns about WASH issues in their communities with local government officials. Several citizens reported evidence of uncoordinated control of waste, citing specific examples of secret burials and improper disposal of waste from cattle. Many attendees suggested to the lawmakers that WASH issues should be a priority of the

Nimba County CSDFs. Other attendees frowned at the Sanniquelle City Corporation for failing to demand that property owners install functioning flush toilets.



Participants of the WASH-meeting in Nimba County.

During the meeting, Representative Prince Tokpah (Nimba County, District #2) expressed delight over the gathering of citizens to discuss improvement of WASH issues in their county. According to the Representative, water, sanitation and hygiene add value to life. He warned constituents to observe WASH laws, and admitted that the current lack of appropriate WASH facilities faced by most Liberians is “a violation of citizens’ rights.” He promised to work with other legislators from his county, constituents, the WASH network, the executive and other partners to identify and address the challenges associated with water, sanitation and hygiene. He assured the audience that WASH issues were included on the agenda for the coming County Sitting, which is an assembly convened by lawmakers and citizens to identify development needs of the people.

“Citizens’ involvement is crucial to address WASH issues and no one should make politics of it,” he said. He also cautioned delegates at the County Sitings to avoid unnecessary criticisms and pay more attention to living by WASH standards. “Liberia will only do better when we do better,” he said.

County Secretary Paul K. Harnue, who represented Superintendent Fong Zor Glay, said his office has taken several steps to address the current WASH “nightmare” facing the county. “Our focus is drawn to the Community Led Total Sanitation-process, as a hallmark of sanitation in the county,” he said. He added that specific attention was being given to control the movement of cattle, and engaging NGOs to constructing flush toilets instead of pit-latrines, which are a threat to the health of communities.

Special Assistant Reuben Sauser represented the Liberia Water and Sewer Cooperation (LWSC). He informed the participants that his organization was overstretched in meeting the WASH-needs of the 500,000 inhabitants of Nimba County. He also mentioned that the maintenance of existing WASH-facilities was a major hurdle, emphasizing that the LWSC needs a lot of money from the government to invest in water management. “One can go without electricity but not without safe water,” he stated.

WASH Stakeholder Dialogue Objectives

To promote citizens participation and their engagement in national and sub-national decision-making related to WASH service delivery, improvement, quality, and access.

To demand for and work with citizens to influence the national development agenda, development budget, development planning and execution, and take a people centered approach in a manner that promotes visibility of water and sanitation.

To promote political and citizens prioritization of WASH in development agendas, national budget and other policy instruments while promoting transparency and accountability in the use of public WASH funds and distribution of project.

Legislative Spotlight Radio



**Wednesday 28 and Thursday 29 October:
Legislative Spotlight Radio**

The NDI-sponsored Legislative Spotlight radio program is broadcast live on Truth F.M. 96.1 on Wednesday October 28 at 11:00 a.m. for the last time this year. The show is rebroadcast on Thursday October 29 at 11:00 a.m. on Radio Veritas 97.8 F.M, also for the last time this year.

However, the magazine version on community radio stations in all 15 counties will be broadcast in November.

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