New in Liberia: Citizen Observatories | Upcoming Events in June |
25 CSOs participate in Legislative Engagement Workshop

NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter
Working for democracy & making democracy work
Number 24 | June 2014

SEWODA Organizes First-Ever Training for Citizen Observatories in Liberia

From April 8 to 10, the Southeast Women Development Association (SEWODA) organized a workshop in its region for fifty of its members, to sharpen their legislative and public sector monitoring skills.

Citizen Observers discuss plans to begin identifying social issues in their various counties

SEWODA recently initiated citizen observatories in three counties of southeast Liberia (Grand Kru, River Gee and Maryland) with support from NDI and the Embassy of Sweden. Citizen observatories are designed as civil society actions to monitor the performance of county

by county leaders.

On the second day, participants broke into groups by county, allowing them to brainstorm about specific social issues to be monitored in each. Citizen observers from Maryland agreed to monitor performance in the water and sanitation sectors and to track the use of County Development Funds. Those representing Grand Kru have decided to monitor education, security and land issues, while River Gee citizen observers selected infrastructure development, basic health and education as priority issues for monitoring. Participants approached these issues from a women's empowerment perspective, which matches SEWODA's central mission. The groups fleshed out specific strategies, target groups and tools they will use to be successful in their observation activities. They include field visits, town hall

leaders and national legislators on important social issues affecting each county. Monitoring activities will generate information and evidence that SEWODA and other civil society organizations (CSOs) will use in advocacy initiatives. SEWODA's citizen observatories are the first of their kind in Liberia.

NDI provided technical assistance, instructors and a curriculum for this important SEWODA initiative. The first day provided an overview of the Liberian government system, enabling participants to better understand the structure and responsibilities of the three branches of government. Specific attention was paid to the three roles of the Legislature (lawmaking, oversight and representation). Participants also discussed elements of legislative monitoring, based on examples from the work of NDI's legislative monitoring partners, the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC). Discussions particularly highlighted the importance of monitoring both at the national and county levels, as it encourages elected representatives to be more transparent and accountable to ordinary citizens. On the other hand, monitoring can also help communities identify the most effective approaches to influence policy choices made

meetings, photo documentation, questionnaires, and community gatherings. The information collected will be shared with stakeholders such as county authorities, women and youth organizations, and lawmakers.

Participants in group discussion

The reports will be tailored for each target group. Accessible tools such as cartoons, dramas and radio programs will target community members while more formal letters and reports with clear recommendations will be sent to county authorities and lawmakers.

To conclude the workshop, citizen observatory members conducted a simulation exercise in which they developed action plans for awareness raising, community mobilization and legislative advocacy based on observation findings. This exercise was a practical demonstration of the knowledge and skills that participants had drawn from the three-day training. The citizen observatories are expected to issue their first reports in the coming months.

NDI Expands its Legislative and Policy Advocacy Training to Reach More CSOs

Following a successful first year of NDI's new civil society program, the program has broadened to reach 25 additional groups. In April, members of those groups completed part two of an introductory training on legislative engagement and advocacy. With this expansion, NDI's legislative advocacy workshops have now reached more than 320 activists from all 15 counties and more than 65 CSOs. The April training built upon and deepened skills that were introduced to the same groups during part one in March. While the first workshop allowed participants to learn about the governmental system in Liberia, the working methods of the Legislature and the responsibilities of lawmakers, the second workshop specifically addressed the skills, knowledge and tools that CSOs need to advocate for their objectives.

Participants discussed the basics of legislative advocacy, such as the importance of having a thorough understanding of themes and using evidence-based approaches. They also considered strategies for forging working relationships with lawmakers, and reaching out to citizens with clear and persuasive messages that present attainable solutions.

The workshop singled out the investigative mission as a method for CSOs to gather evidence and directly engage with lawmakers on the issues. Prince Kreplah, chairman of the CSOs Network on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), shared an example where WASH organized an investigative mission for lawmakers and legislative staff to give them a first-hand understanding of water and sanitation issues facing communities in Monrovia. Kreplah explained how the mission motivated and informed quick legislative action, through debate on the Senate floor that called for a public committee hearing on the topic. In another session, CSOs learned how to capitalize on public hearings to testify on their issues and to strengthen collaboration with the Legislature. Groups were also equipped with skills for writing and presenting convincing and evidence-based testimony. Acknowledging the significance of the exercise, one activist remarked: "It's a joy to improve your knowledge and strengthen the evidence for your cause in such a practical training on conducting testimony".

The second day of the workshop addressed community organizing and mobilization. Tools for CSOs to hear primary concerns from citizens at the grassroots were discussed. Following in-depth discussions, participants came up with best practices for awareness raising and community mobilizing around

priority issues. For example, participants from Lofa County shared a successful example where women and men organized a peaceful demonstration to convince the authorities to investigate a rape involving a young girl. Noting the importance of media involvement in CSO advocacy, two sessions were geared to strengthening the participants' capacity to effectively engage major media sources in their advocacy efforts. Additionally, the sessions emphasized the need for groups to utilize diverse tools such as leaflets, text messages and Facebook in order to broaden citizen outreach.

The last day of the workshop provided CSO representatives an opportunity to apply the lessons learned. In breakout sessions, they developed action plans containing goals, strategies, advocacy messages, target groups, and relevant tools to improve the quality of Liberian schools. The action plans proposed ideas such as using drama to curb violence against children in schools as well as introducing toll free phone numbers for reporting teacher misconduct. Given the high quality of the action plans produced during the breakout activity, the 25 CSOs pledged to work together further to strengthen their legislative advocacy campaigns in the future.

The following CSOs attended the two introductory workshops on legislative engagement and advocacy organized by NDI in March and April:

- Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (Montserrado)
- Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Bong)
- Civic Education and Good Citizenship Movement (Lofa)
- Consolidated Youth for Peace and Development (Montserrado)
- CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM, River Gee)
- CSO Platform on Decentralization (Grand Gedeh)
- Empowerment for Social Change in Liberia (Montserrado)
- Foundation for Community Initiatives (River Cess)
- Gee-GUNE Association (Gbarpolu)
- Global Movement Against Societal Ills (Montserrado)
- Gold and Diamond Miners & Workers Union of Liberia (Montserrado)
- Liberia CSOs Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Network (WASH, Margibi)
- Liberia Labor Congress (Montserrado)
- Liberia Education for All Technical Committee (LETCOM, Montserrado)
- Save My Future Foundation (Montserrado)
- Security Sector Reform Working Group (Montserrado)
- Sinje Women Group for Development (Grand Cape Mount)
- Southeast Women Development Association (SEWODA, Maryland)
- We Care Foundation (Montserrado)
- Women for Empowerment and Self Employment (Sinoe)
- Women for Peace and Development (Bomi)

- Women in Politics (WIP, Montserrado)
- Women Rights Watch (WORIWA, Grand Bassa)
- Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL, Montserrado)
- Special Emergency Activities to Restore Children's Hope (SEARCH, Nimba)

Upcoming Events in June

Thursday, 26 June – Friday, 27 June
Monrovia
An in-depth NDI skill-building workshop for invited CSO advocacy partners on Community Organizing and Community Mobilization.

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 Tuesday 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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This publication and the activities described were made possible through the generous support of NDI's donor

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