
Monitoring Lawmakers | Natural Resources | Community Radio Stations

1 message

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Legislative Spotlight broadcasted by 15 community radio stations
JPC monitors performance of lawmakers in their constituencies
NRM Platforms: improve the management of natural resources

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Working for a transparent and accountable management of Liberia's natural resources

NDI works closely with three advocacy civil society organizations (CSOs), one of which is the CSO-coalition on Natural Resource Management (NRM). NRM is a coalition of 22 CSOs that advocates for the fair, transparent, and peaceful management of Liberia's natural resources, and for profits from the sector to benefit the poor majority of Liberians. As natural resource management particularly affects communities in rural areas, NRM works with local groups that are part of four regional platforms throughout the country.

In June, NRM organized two regional planning sessions with members of the Gbarnga and Zwedru platforms. This year and into 2016, both platforms are focusing on the functioning of the County Social Development Funds (CSDFs). These funds are created to finance development projects, like bridges and schools. The CSDFs are funded through subsidies from companies like Golden Verillium, Acetor Mittal, Chevron, and others, through their concession agreements with the government.

While the structure of these funds and their control is extensively documented, their management is often very unclear and confusing to the various actors involved. Numerous government commissions, ministries, agencies, and

legislators have access to the CSDFs for their specific projects, which leads to confusion and disarray over how the money is being used and which development projects get funded. Through its regional platforms, NRM is collecting information about the working methods of the CSDFs in real time, and will come up with recommendations on how the management of these funds can become more transparent, accountable and respond to the needs of communities.



NRM Platform meeting in Zwedru

NRM members also discussed the lack of transparency and public input during the drafting of concession agreements, and noted the inadequate way in which the government monitors the fulfilment of concession agreement obligations. The government negotiates and signs concession agreements in private, without public input. NRM is advocating that they should be discussed in public before they are adopted. These concession agreements often include development obligations such as building a health center in the neighboring community. Monitoring the fulfilment of these obligations requires well-informed, dedicated and consistent officials.

In July, NRM held similar meetings with the other two regional platforms in Buchanan and Tubmanburg. NRM will work with all of its platforms to improve the management of natural resources, to ensure that the people of Liberia will benefit from them.

The Legislative Spotlight is broadcasted by 15 community radio stations

On Wednesdays since 2011, the Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives (LMDI), supported by NDI, has produced and broadcasted the popular radio program “Legislative Spotlight.” During this radio program lawmakers meet with CSOs to discuss hotly debated issues, and listeners call-in to offer their views on the topics. Details of the broadcasting schedule are listed at the bottom of this e-newsletter.



The Voice of Grand Kru in Barclayville

In 2014, NDI initiated a partnership with the Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR) to extend the reach of the Legislative Spotlight to all 15 counties through ALICOR’s network of community radio stations. These stations offer a platform for local communities to discuss the social issues that are affecting their well-being and to share information at the grassroots level. ALICOR assists the community radio stations to add local content to the Legislative Spotlight that is recorded in Monrovia and distributed to each community radio station on a disc. The local content may vary from the poor quality of schools, to the importance of enhancing the participation of women in decision-making processes, or promoting water and sanitation facilities in every community. Citizens, local county officials and legislators also discuss how the needs of the community dwellers should shape county development agenda, which is crucial to the development of Liberia.

Counties	Stations	Frequency	Airing time	Day in month
Bomi	Radio Bomi	98.9	8:15pm	2 nd Wednesday
Bong	Radio Gbarnga	96.4	4:15pm	4 th Saturday
Gbarpolu	Radio Vahun	100.5	5:30pm	3 rd Tuesday
Grand Bassa	Magic F.M.	99.3	9:00am	3 rd Friday

Grand Cape Mount	Radio Piso	93.2	7:15pm	2 nd Monday
Grand Gedeh	Smile F.M.	98.6	7:15pm	3 rd Thursday
Grand Kru	Voice of Grand Kru	98.1	8:15pm	4 th Sarurday
Lofa	Radio Kintoma	104.0	7:30pm	4 th Saturday
Margibi	Radio Joy Africa	97.5	8:00am	2 nd Saturday
Maryland	Voice of Pleebo	93.5	5:15pm	Last Saturday
Montserrado	Voice of Rural Montserrado	89.3	6:00pm	2 nd Wednesday
Nimba	Radio Sehnwai	97.9	6:00pm	1 st Wednesday
River Cess	Rivercess Broadcasting Service	99.3	6:30pm	4 th Tuesday
River Gee	Radio Gee	90.2	6:15pm	2 nd Tuesday
Sinoe	Voice of Sinoe	88.3	7:15pm	2 nd Monday

Monitoring may help to improve the performance of lawmakers

NDI supports two CSOs that monitor the Liberian Legislature: the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) and the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC). These two organizations serve as the eyes for the public in the legislature by monitoring and reporting the activities of lawmakers in public meetings, hearings, and other sessions. IREDD and JPC record such information as lawmakers' attendance; topics raised, discussed, and voted on during sessions; who introduces bills; and each member's voting record, among other things. The JPC also monitors how lawmakers fulfill their duty as a representative by documenting each member's visit to their districts and interaction with constituents. This is especially important during the so-called 'agricultural break.' During this break, which typically begins in late August and lasts until early January, no legislative sessions are held, and it is expected that lawmakers make use of this time to visit their constituencies.



Family photo of the JPC county monitors in Gbarnga

JPC has appointed a monitor in each of the 15 counties to record the representation activities of a select group of lawmakers during the agricultural break. The monitors will also identify which legislators have a local office, and how such offices function where they exist.

In June, the 15 JPC county monitors, all of whom work for community radio stations, gathered in Gbarnga for an orientation and training. They discussed with each other how they will carry out their assigned tasks, and how they will share their planned activities with lawmakers.

It is important to establish how active lawmakers are in their constituencies. JPC's findings may inspire lawmakers to become more active and increase engagement with their constituencies. It may also help citizens to get a better understanding of the work of their representatives, and facilitate contact between citizens and their elected representatives. The presence of a well-functioning local office may also contribute to a better and more frequent relationship between voters and lawmakers. And that is important for both sides. As one of the JPC county monitors argued: *"Many lawmakers were not re-elected during the general elections in 2011 and the senatorial elections in 2014, because they were invisible for their constituents. Monitoring may help to improve the performance of lawmakers."*



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.

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