

Southeast Lawmakers Review SEWODA Education & Health Findings # Serious Sanitation and Safe Drinking Water Challenges in Buchanan # NRM Policy Forum on a Fair Distribution of County Social Development Funds

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Placing WASH on Your Legislative Agenda Will be Our Best New Year Gift---CSO Tells Legislators.....

Instead of the usual sharing and giving of gifts during Christmas and New Year, six members of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Network met with Senators and Representatives at their Capitol Hill offices on December 9 asking legislators to place WASH on their legislative agenda in 2016.



Senator George Tengbeh and WASH lobbyists

WASH is a network of six local grassroots organizations engaging government authorities through advocacy efforts to take policy actions to improve access to clean drinking water, create hygienic environments and improve sanitation. NDI with funding from Embassy of Sweden is providing training to WASH members to constructively engage elected officials on ways they can support positive change on these issues.

Among the recommendations WASH provided to the legislators included establishing a separate committee to oversee WASH issues, creating an act to establish an exclusive entity to deliver adequate WASH services to address current fragmentation, and allotting visible specific budget lines to support the sector. The group represented their respective network from Bomi, Margibi, and Montserrado counties. Above all, the group explained that when stringent legislative actions are taken to improve service delivery of water sanitation and hygiene, the dignity of constituents will be restored and human rights respected.

Outlining the numerous WASH challenges Liberians face daily, a representative of the network from Bomi County, Madam Fatumata Swaray, informed Gbarpolu County Senator Daniel Natheen that it is demeaning to not have access to basic social service like proper toilet facilities and a clean environment. . “Today, I have come on behalf of WASH Net Bomi and women of the county in general to request for our Christmas and New Year gift. We the women use the bushes as latrine, no proper garbage disposal, struggle for drinking water, and no control mechanism to keep the city tidy thus posing serious health hazard to our children and stripping us of our pride.” Swaray pleaded Senator Natheen. Swaray emphasized that the legislature has an important role in correcting the lack of oversight from state authorities on this issue. She recommended that a similar level of attention given to combat Ebola outbreak also be given to WASH as the poor state of the sector is a major contributing factor to the spread of waterborne diseases..

In response, Senator Natheen commended the activists for highlighting such a sensitive issue and acknowledged that WASH issues are a challenge for Liberia’s 15 counties. “I was born in Gaingolala, Gbarpolu County where what you’re talking about is visible. For you as a group to advocate with me to help improve it, I’m very much with you when we return. Honestly, when you asked for Christmas and New Year gifts, I thought you wanted money from me,” Natheen concluded.

In separate lobbies, Grand Cape Mount County Senator Edward Dargoseh and Margibi’s Jim Tornorlah, tasked WASH to support them with case studies of government entities responsible for WASH in other countries as an example of what such an entity could look like in Liberia.. According to Senator Jim Tornorlah, WASH issues are still subject to debate and review acts that created all entities with WASH responsibilities. He assured the group that he will liaise with Senator Oscar Cooper, Chair of Senate Committee on Public Works, and obtain copies of a public hearing report on WASH to gather doable findings that seek to improve the sector. Tornorlah applauded the group for their far-sighted and issue-oriented activism. They also met with staff members from the offices of House Speaker Tyler and Deputy Speaker Barchue.



WASH Members and Senator Natheen posed after meeting in his office. After these successful meetings, WASH plans to expand

their engagement with other legislators to inform them on the WASH issues facing Liberians and provide recommendations on a new way forward. As recommended by Senators Edward Dagoseh and Jim Tornorlah, WASH will begin researching case studies of African countries with an exclusive public entity that oversees control and maintenance of the sector. The new year offers new opportunities to build stronger partnerships between civil society and elected officials and to demonstrate how they can work hand-in-hand to identify policy solutions to improving the WASH situation in Liberia.

Southeast Lawmakers Review SEWODA Education & Health Findings

Following a successful observation of specific social issues in three of Liberia's southeastern counties, NDI and the South East Women Development Association's (SEWODA) in mid-October 2015 conducted an education investigative mission in River Gee, Grand Kru and Maryland counties in Southeastern Liberia.



Students show broken benches to legislators

Findings on education and health conditions in the three counties by SEWODA's citizen observers prompted the lawmakers' interest in the issues. In May 2015, NDI trained the local group on gathering evidence to engage policy actors. Legislators, security personnel, and local authorities joined in a study mission focused on Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), security, land disputes and implementation of the County Social Development Funds (CSDF).

Representative Numene Bartekwa (District 2 Grand Kru County) visited Dayokpo and Dan Beach public elementary schools in Sass Town, two hours from the county capitol in Barclayville, to see the condition of the schools. The Dan Beach school students greeted their lawmakers by holding up the damaged benches and makeshift stools they are forced to use at the school, and pleaded with them to provide seats, blackboards, text books and pencils.

The lawmakers visited the dilapidated schools, which, despite a requirement that the Ministry of Education (MOE) provide adequate facilities, are unhealthy, makeshift mud structures. Students who attend the school are forced to sit on broken benches and stools and a majority of the teachers lack a minimum "C" training certificate.

"This is not the kind of condition we can expect our kids to learn under," said Representative Bartekwa. Representative Bartekwa, who acknowledged the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for assisting the partners with the investigation and promised to mobilize the Ministry of Education, local county officials and his colleagues at the legislature to improve the conditions of the schools.

Bartekwa explained that he had contacted Speaker Alex Tyler and was calling for the MOE to submit county specific program budgets, which will make it easier for lawmakers to track what the ministry does in each county regarding education funding.



Wholegray Way residents show their drinking water

In Old Kru Town Morais noted that “ looking at the prevailing situation of most residents in Southeast Liberia lacking basic services like toilets and clean drinking water, it is all tied to accessibility of this region. Therefore, my interest is road road construction.”

Old Kru Town Community Chairman Thomas Senior told Senator Morais that “if you want to use the toilet you have to walk around 20 minutes under a cotton tree because the toilets are unhealthy.” He agreed with the lawmaker that the region is seriously cut of from the rest of the country due to lack of good road network. Morais committed to having ten toilets constructed by January, 2016 and asked SEWODA to work with citizens to identify suitable sites for the toilets.

River Gee County Development Superintendent, Joseph Bohlen and the County Education Officer Bayee Wesseh, led an investigation team that visited Killiekpo public elementary school that found the structure unsafe and poorly constructed and lacking textbooks, benches and chalkboard.

On October 22, 2015, Senator H. Dan Morais of Maryland County led a study mission through the communities in Maryland County that lack adequate water, sanitation and hygiene.

In Old Kru Town Morais noted that the county’s poor roads are closely linked with its water and sanitation challenges. “Looking at the prevailing situation of most residents in Southeast Liberia lacking basic services like toilets and clean drinking water, it is all tied to accessibility of this region” Morais said. “Therefore, my interest is road construction.”

Investigators Find Serious Sanitation and Safe Drinking Water Challenges in Buchanan

In October NDI and its civil society (CSO) partner WASH invited Senator Jonathan Kaipay to

investigate water and sanitation issues faced by the citizens of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County. While there they met with Buchanan Mayor Julia Bono and other local officials.



A creek that residents use for toileting, drinking and bathing

Mayor Bono noted the city's poor garbage disposal system and their effort to improve sanitation and to restore safe drinking water by installing renovated hand pumps and public latrines. Mayor Bono explained that the city will use county development funds to make improvements that will make the city healthier and more beautiful.

The study mission revealed that homes in Buchanan lack self-contained toilets and that there are no management mechanisms for hand pumps in the communities. Currently most water pumps do not function properly and there are poor garbage collection practices in the city. Citizens lack a basic understanding of waste management and there is little or no funding for water treatment and sanitation. The expected support from County Social Development Fund (CSDF) is stalled – the allocations have been made but the city has not received the funds.

Attendees suggested that the water hygiene issue might call for a “class action” lawsuit against business entities in Buchanan that are in violation of city ordinances. Most businesses in Buchanan, particularly those that produce and sell drinking water in small plastic sachets, are not in compliance with the law. The group recommended that a long-term development plan for the city that includes a pipe-borne water system for Buchanan and a coastal development and beautification proposal.

Superintendent of Grand Bassa County, Madam Etweda Cooper told the investigators that most water and sanitation facilities in Buchanan are damaged and that the city is over-crowded which makes it difficult for Grand Bassa County authorities to enforce ordinances.

During his meeting with the Superintendent and citizens of the County, Senator Kaipay called for the following:

- The need to strengthen the government's ability to monitor and evaluate program implementation which is a major problem currently facing the Liberian Government.
- The need to create a national agency for social welfare. Citizens and Senator



Jonathan Kaipay discuss investigation issues

The citizens told the Senator Kaipay that schools in Buchanan do not have hand pumps and safe drinking water. Those that were installed in few schools were poorly maintained and are now damaged, which puts many children at the risk of contracting water borne diseases.

The investigation team visited Big Joe Town located on the outskirts of Buchanan. While there, the team met with members of the community who mentioned that there are no toilet facilities and clinics or medical facilities. There is only one school, the Sowetha Memorial School, with very poor water and sanitation facilities for up to 216 students (126 male and 90 female). The school has no toilets and no drinking water so, teachers have to make students fetch water from the nearest creek where people from the community go for bathing, toileting, and washing.

NRM Policy Forum: A Fair Distribution of County Social Development Funds

On November 28th at the Bassa Women's Community Center in Buchanan NDI's CSO partner the Natural Resources Manufacturing Consortium (NRM) held a policy issue forum on the future of the County Social Development Fund (CSDF) at which they encouraged the more than sixty attendees to assist with the development of recommendations on how to make the distribution of funds more equitable for the citizens of Liberia.



Group photo of participants at the Policy Forum

NRM National Coordinator Jackson Speare presented an overview of the NRM program and outlined the challenges to an equitable disbursement of CSDF funds pointing out that the legislature has assumed control of the CSDF to the detriment of local communities. Among the NRM recommendations is transferring power over how the funds are used to local leaders.

Senator Nyonblee Lawrence (Buchanan) and Grand Bassa County Superintendent Etweda Cooper met with NRM representatives before, during and after the policy issue forum and pledged their support to NRM and its goals.

Senator Lawrence said that she is frustrated that the funds are not being directed to the local communities and that the process under which they are administered is not transparent. She told attendees that the legislature has politicized the CSDF by placing them under the general budget process. Lawrence recommended that the CDSF management board “be comprised of non-partisan experts and professionals who are appointed because of their skills in accounting, development, science, law, medicine and community-building.” Senator Lawrence said that Grand Bassa County’s priorities are building and supplying high schools and junior high schools so that the community’s students don’t have to travel to Monrovia for their education. She recommended that the CSDF be used to fill the gaps that the national budget cannot fill including health clinics and feeder roads that would lead to economic development in the regions.





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