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Working for democracy & making democracy work

Successful Launch of Toolkit on Legislative Engagement and Policy Issues Forum



On February 24 NDI launched the Toolkit on Legislative Engagement, followed by a Policy Issues Forum. The Toolkit teaches Civil Society Organisations how to organize trainings on engaging lawmakers on issues of importance to their constituents. The Policy Issues Forum was organized and hosted by three groups of Liberian CSOs (Southeastern Women Development Association – SEWODA, Security Sector Reform Working Group – SSRWG and Liberia CSOs Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Network - WASH).

In the next E-Newsletter we will report on both events.

On the picture Laura Nichols (standing left), Country Director of NDI, distributes the first copies of the Toolkit to (from left to right) Lena Nordström (Ambassador of Sweden in Liberia), Frances Greaves (Chair of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia), John Jukon (CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management) and Representative Christian Chea (River Gee County).

WASH and NRM urges the President to deliver on her promises

On January 25 the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, delivered the Annual Message on the State of the Republic, entitled '[Delivering on the Promises](#)'. In her message the President talked about the attempts of her administration to deliver on the promises by outlining the actions that have been taken by the government since she came in office in 2006. Two CSO-partners of NDI, the CSOs Water Sanitation and Hygiene Network (WASH) and the Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM), issued a media release with comments on the Annual Message. Below are highlights of their comments:

Water Sanitation and Hygiene

The CSOs WASH Network welcomes the President's pronouncement of the commencement of the rehabilitation of White Plain Water Treatment Plant and the transmission pipeline, because 1.1 million people in and around Monrovia will have the opportunity to have access to safe drinking water. However, the network noticed that there is no indication of a timeline for these works.



The WASH Network points out that the President again promises the rehabilitation and expansion of the water supply systems in six county capital cities: Zwedru, Buchanan, Kakata, Voinjama, Robertsport and Sanniquelle. WASH believes that this should already have been finalized in 2015. The Network calls on the government for the purpose of transparency to make clear when these six water supply systems will be ready to deliver safe water. The Wash Network says it is shocked that the President's address did not say anything about the plans to improve and streamline the governance structures of the water and sanitation sector. The President made a commitment in 2012 to do so. At this moment there are too many government stakeholders involved in this field, which hampers the efficiency and progress.

Natural Resource Management

The Consortium on Natural Resource Management applauds the proposal to establish the Liberia Land Authority but emphasizes that clarity should be given about the future of the Land Commission. To keep both institutions might cause duplication and overlaps of functions.

The Consortium is surprised that the President's address failed to inform the legislature about the status of the petroleum reform process especially after the bankruptcy of the National Oil Company. This situation needs serious attention, as it could undermine or put a strain on the generation of revenues that could be available to benefit the poorest part of the population.



Impact of County Development Funds: improvement of roads and bridges.

The NRM Consortium notes with commendation that in the President's remarks that US\$ 95 million has been allocated since 2006 to the County Development Funds of which US\$ 80 million was expanded. However, the President did not report on the economic, social and infrastructural development impact of this. Additionally, the Consortium urges the President to take steps to improve the management framework of the funds especially due to persistent occurrence of mismanagement, transparency and accountability issues emerging over the funds in various counties.

WASH and NRM call on the Legislature to strengthen oversight and lawmaking efforts in addressing the shortcomings in the annual message of the President, so promises are really delivered.

The Elections Coordinating Committee preparing for the upcoming elections

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC), the coalition of civil society organizations (CSO), monitoring elections since 2011 in and out of Liberia, in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), convened a four day Strategic Plan Retreat on February 3-6, 2016, at the Imperial Lodge, Thinkers Village, to deliberate on strategies for the upcoming 2017 pre and post-elections activities.

The retreat brought together the Executive Members of the ECC and County Coordinators to chart a new programmatic direction, discuss their roles and activities leading to elections, election-day, post-elections period and set a timeline to guide their work. The ECC intends to systematically monitor all electoral activities (voters' registration, exhibition, campaign, etc.) in the pre-election period and beyond, including deploying observers to voting precincts around the country on elections day. During discussion at the retreat, the ECC re-committed itself to promoting gender equality in line with international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other instruments, as ratified by Liberia. The ECC is particularly concerned with increasing female participation in the electoral processes as voters, candidates, electoral administrators, and observers. To this effect, a gender promotion strategy will be reflected in the ECC strategic plan, as well as in its revised governing documents.



The goal of the ECC is to monitor electoral activities and give credible public information on various electoral processes. Some of the key monitoring interventions under consideration are electoral research and more effectively supporting the electoral law reform efforts by providing an analysis of the amended electoral code and procedures; a programmatic focus beyond elections to other good governance and democracy related activities; monitoring political party conventions and primaries to note the level of transparency that exist with these processes and the diversity and democracy of party nominations, including whether parties will follow the thirty percent gender quota suggested in the electoral code; monitoring the National Election Commission (NEC) preparations and overall election administration; long-term observation of the campaign period, including political party rallies, instances of misuse of state resources, uneven playing fields, inflammatory or hate speech, as well as critical pre-election incidents as they occur, such as violence against women or other electoral violence, intimidation, or vote buying.

Laura Nichols: new Senior Resident Director of NDI in Liberia

Laura Nichols arrived in Monrovia on January 11 as the new Senior Resident Director of NDI in Liberia. Laura previously led NDI programs in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. She brings more than 25 years of experience in civic engagement, political party strengthening, domestic election observation and political process monitoring to Liberia. Most recently, Laura served as Senior Resident Director for NDI in Yemen, overseeing political party programming, supporting citizen engagement and enhancing the transparency of electoral and constitutional reform processes. Before that, she was the NDI Resident Director in Kosovo, where she oversaw political party and legislative

programs, and assisted women and youth to increase their role in politics and civic engagement. Prior to joining NDI, Laura was very active in politics in Canada, serving at the provincial and national levels of party leadership, as well as working with opposition caucus leaders in Parliament and legislatures across the country .

Laura is looking forward to contribute to the democratic development of Liberia: *'It is an exciting time to be working in democracy development in Liberia. Building on NDI's long standing presence in the country, I am looking forward to working with our partners to increase citizen participation and voter confidence in this period leading up to the 2017 election process.'*

WASH Network Completes Community Organizing Training

"From time to time, we have brought together people that are ordinary residents of our communities to discuss what they lack in terms of availability of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. This community organizing workshop has added more value to what we will do in the future". So said Alex Balo of Grand Cape Mount County, head of the local WASH-chapter, after participating in a workshop on Community Organizing, that took place from 13-15 January in Gbarnga.

Over twenty participants from the CSOs Water Sanitation and Hygiene Network (WASH) Network's five chapters across Liberia benefited from the workshop that delved into key areas such as: craft of community organizing, how to build up a campaign, creating effective leadership, media and communication strategies and how to develop an action plan.



Elce Redmond, a community organizing expert from Chicago (USA) with much experience in organizing for affordable housing, fair paid jobs and good public education, facilitated the working sessions. He trained the activists on how to identify the different target groups for their campaign and how to reach out to them. He provided skills on how to do a door to door mobilization and on how to address the bad WASH-conditions affecting community dwellers to service providers. He mentioned the use of *Direct Action* campaign as an innovative way to effectively seek consensus at the community level. Consensus in the community means power. To ensure the campaign is *direct*, one has to set a clear and specific target. Once you have a target, then you also have a demand. Stating, "*Power concedes nothing without a demand.*"



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