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**Policy Seminar Debates Gender Equity in Politics
'A bill is among first steps. More steps need to be taken'**



Rep. Mariamu B. Fofana, Chair-Committee on Gender Equity and Child Development cautioning the audience on the importance of a bill that seeks balance in women and men participation in politics.

"Women and men really don't have equal opportunity in Liberia and the purpose of the bill is to correct historical discrimination against women." With this statement, one participant summarized the feelings of many legislators, political party and civil society representatives as they revisited

of representatives through free and fair elections. *"The new bill violates the principles of liberal democracy under which all are equal"*, he argued. He also cited the equal opportunity clause of the Constitution and argued that the bill would violate that provision.

the gender equity bill during NDI's policy seminar on Gender Equity in Politics.

The purpose of the seminar was to assist legislators in their study and consideration of policies and laws to achieve greater gender equity in Liberian politics. Some 90 participants at the May 29th seminar discussed supporting and opposing views on the draft bill, as well as other measures that should be taken to enhance gender equity.

In 2011, and even earlier, attempts to push similar laws through the Legislature failed to gain the required momentum. Over the past few months a new bill was drafted that reads as follows: *"In an effort to ensure equity in representation of both genders in the governance of the nation and political parties, no political party list of elected officers and candidates for public office shall contain less than 30% and no more than 70% of a single gender"*.

In his welcoming remarks, NDI's Resident Senior Director Aubrey McCutcheon noted that the policy seminar was an extremely timely one. *"In this current second session of the 53rd Legislature we expect one or two pieces of legislation which would call for greater parity between women and men in politics"*. *"I also urge participants to consider what political parties can do on their own initiative, as well as what civil society groups, the Elections Commission and female candidates must do if gender equity is to be realized"*.

In the opening session of the seminar, Ms. Nomboniso Gasa, former Chairperson of the South African Commission for

This view was opposed by Counselor P. Teplah Reeves, President of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, who argued that there are no equal conditions currently for men and women. *"People discourage women from coming forward, sticking as they do to traditional gender roles that see women as caretakers of the family"*, said Reeves. She described a recent effort of the drafters to assign lawyers to engage men within the current Legislature and to discuss their legal and policy concerns about the bill. Cllr. Reeves also pointed to the lack of committed resources to empower women and the general prevalence of sexual harassment in the Liberian workplace.

In the final session a second panel of Liberian experts debated additional measures that should be pursued, in addition to legislation. Ms. Estella Nelson, President of the Liberia Women's Media Action Committee, emphasized the need to empower women with technical skills to enable them to analyze and advocate on policy issues. *"Women need to be encouraged to be a part of the political process. There is a need for more efforts to prepare women for leadership"*, said Nelson. She also encouraged assistance to women on how to take advantage of the media and she challenged the media to give serious coverage to women candidates and their platforms, thus reversing a current media bias.

Mr. Mulbah Morlu Jr., Vice-Chairperson of the Congress for Democratic Change, underlined a standard he said all political parties should pursue when he argued:

Gender Equality, shared experiences from other African countries. Among others, she mentioned the good examples of Rwanda and South Africa, with 56.3% and 44.5% women in their parliaments, respectively. Rwanda currently leads the world with this achievement in gender equity. Gasa elaborated on the strategies used by the women's movement and political parties in South Africa. She underlined that an active and strong women's movement, openness to political contestation amongst women, and a gender responsive culture within political parties are crucial conditions for such success. Once in parliament, women politicians needed to remain active collaborators with the civil society women's movement as well as exert leadership within their various political parties in order to successfully pursue an agenda of gender equity. To provide examples, she discussed a Women's Budget Initiative in South Africa as a case study of women's participation and collaboration.

The opening session was followed by a panel debate on the new gender equity bill by Liberian experts and legislators. Representative Munah Pelham Youngblood, Vice-Chairperson of the Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia, articulated the Caucus' positions in support of the bill. *"Women face more considerable challenges than do men in politics, but once the opportunity is given to women through this legislation they will be able to come forward and contribute to policy making"*. She also pointed to Liberia's treaty obligations to pursue such solutions through legislation, under the CEDAW Convention ratified by

"We need to give women more exposure. If women are given the opportunity to operate within party structures they will get exposed to issues and will be more prepared for political leadership".

Senator Jewel Howard Taylor, Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Independent Agencies and Commissions, encouraged women and their organizations to make their voices heard by legislators. *"I encourage women to be more proactive in calling meetings and inviting Senators and Representatives to attend and listen to their views"*, said Taylor. Senator Taylor also proclaimed the impact she believes more female lawmakers would have on the National Legislature: *"Women will address basic needs such as education, healthcare, and economic benefits, as women can have a positive impact and think about things quite differently than men"*.

Senator Peter Coleman, Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Gender, Health, Social Welfare, Women and Children's Affairs, also supported the bill but shared the following caution: *"Passing the bill is one step but there are many other steps that have to be taken to address cultural, religious, and economic barriers that women face. Women inside and outside the political arena should work together to address these barriers. The bill is not the end of the fight for equality"*.

This final event in the NDI policy seminar series was organized in collaboration with the House Committee on Gender Equity and Child Development, the

the Legislature in 1984.

Former Senator Richard Devine, who argued against a similar bill in the last Legislature, noted that democracy is based on formal equality of rights and privileges and provides for universal suffrage and the selection

Senate Committee on Gender, Health, Social Welfare, Women and Children's Affairs, and the Women's Legislative Caucus. The series was made possible through grant support from USAID to NDI's now-ending Legislative Strengthening Program.

The panel debate on the new gender equity bill was moderated by two prominent journalists:

Mr. Peter Quaqua, President of the Press Union of Liberia

Ms. Mary Williams, the Truth Breakfast Show (Truth FM)

The panel debate on additional measures was moderated by two other prominent journalists:

Ms. Torwon Sulonteh Brown, UNMIL Radio

Mr. Ambrose Nmah, Liberia Broadcasting System

A full report of the policy seminar is available upon request in a digital format. Please contact Nannah Seekey: nseekey@ndi.org, tel. +231(0)886 511 758.

**Workshop for Civil Society Organizations Strengthens Skills for Legislative Engagement
'I intend to make use of the skills acquired'**



NDI Workshop 'CSOs & Legislative Engagement'
1-3 May 2013 - Monrovia - Liberia

“It was a learning experience for us as we increase the scale of our advocacy with policymakers”. These encouraging comments from civil society activists followed completion of the second major workshop in NDI’s new Civil Society Program in May. The new program partners with Liberian civil society organizations to strengthen capacity for citizen-centered political and legislative engagement. The program is supported by the Swedish Embassy in Liberia.

The second workshop included 45 participants from 12 of the 15 counties. It was tailored to participants with previous experience in engaging the Legislature and allowed for cross-fertilization and sharing of experiences

committees. The two sessions followed presentations developed by Thomas Du and Nannoh Seekey of NDI’s program team. Hearings and investigative missions are two of the upcoming activities of this new NDI program and each session included an exercise on the actual roles CSOs will play.

Next, participants learned about the national budget cycle and related lobbying and heard from Othello Tarbah of the Legislature’s Budget Office and Jasper Cummeh of Action for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (Agenda) about the potential impact and tactics of CSOs.

Two in-depth sessions heard from several experts on the use of both new media

between Liberian CSOs. Participants came from diverse organizations, including community groups, religious bodies, women and youth organizations, specialized NGOs, unions, human rights groups, and others. In addition to NDI's staff, other presenters included topical experts as well as former and current legislators who have worked with CSOs on past legislative initiatives.

The workshop began by exploring the odysseys and lessons learned from two past bills on women's empowerment; one that was a success and another that failed. The session focused on the successful women's inheritance bill and the unsuccessful gender equity bill. Lena Cummings, a women's rights activist from WIPNET, who played a leading role in those campaigns, joined former Senator Gloria Scott and Senator Jewel Howard Taylor in a discussion about the role of civil society in those efforts and the lessons learned for future CSO engagement with the Legislature.

The second session explored the Legislature's role of oversight and the various roles CSOs can play in that regard. It began with a presentation by Samson Tokpah of the Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI). The next session heard from Representative Josephine Francis about practical aspects of her representation function and reporting to her constituents. It also included guidance from Eddie Jarwolo of NAYMOTE, a CSO that has organized and published on "town hall meetings".

This was followed by two hands-on

(cell phones and the internet) and traditional media (radio and newspapers) in advocacy and public awareness campaigns. These included presentations by Isaac Redd of the House Press and Public Affairs office, Lawrence Randall of the Liberia Media Center, Carter Draper of iLab, John Kollie of Liberia Media for Democratic Initiatives, and Varnetta Johnson of the Liberia Women's Media Action Committee.

In a session on legislative monitoring and report cards, CSO participants learned about the tactics used by two organizations, through presentations made by Augustine Toe, formerly with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, and Matthias Yeanay of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development.

The energy and collaboration amongst CSOs in the workshop was exciting! Participants were clearly motivated to learn, to share views and experiences, and to put new insights and skills into use. In each session discussion was facilitated to demonstrate how CSOs can mitigate or better address the challenges they face while taking advantage of entry points in the legislative process.

Resource packets were distributed to all participants, which will serve as future reference tools and will assist CSOs to share the information learned with others as they replicate components of the workshop training in their own constituencies. As expressed by one participant in a letter received after the workshop, *"I would like to express my most well-meant gratitude (...) for the quality of information received (...) and I*

sessions by participants in developing hearing testimony and planning investigative missions for legislative

intend to make use of the skills acquired”.

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Skill Building with Legislative Drafters

Both the House and Senate Legislative Drafting Services (LDS) took part in a follow-up training over ten days last month. The second training built upon topics and skills addressed with drafters in previous sessions earlier this year. The role of those two offices, and the skills of its drafters, is growing in importance as the National Legislature pursues its modernization goals and evolves as a co-equal branch of government. As Representatives and Senators pursue their policy agendas in the interest of their constituents, it is critically important that drafters in the LDS continue to refine skills to manage the drafting process and to develop clear and accurate laws that facilitate proper implementation and interpretation by other branches of government.

To conduct this follow-up work with the LDS, NDI was fortunate to secure the services of Attorney Warren Burke, an experienced drafter from the U.S. House of Representatives, who brought a wealth of experience drafting complex legislation and serving the interests and needs of legislators in a system similar to Liberia's. Burke taught about the requisite neutrality of drafter's and shared tips on effective legislative research and writing. He also offered sessions on statutory interpretation, drafting bills to pursue the Legislature's spending power, and writing amendments after hearings and committee mark-ups. The drafting of ratification instruments for international treaties was another area of interest to staff of the LDS. The sessions were interactive and used case studies, practical exercises and mock sessions.

NDI's two collaborations with the Legislative Drafting Service, and its recent support to help establish the Committee Support Service, follow similar work with other staff bureaus of the Legislature. In earlier years, NDI helped to pursue other aspects of the Legislature's Modernization Plan, by providing training and equipment for the Press and Public Affairs offices, the Legislative Budget Office, and the Legislative Information Service, which includes the research service, library and archives. These activities were made possible by a grant from USAID, which comes to a close in June 2013.

Participants from the LDS were enthusiastic and identified numerous ways their offices could be of greater service to members the National Legislature. They now plan to proactively promote greater use of their skills and expertise amongst the Legislature's leadership, committee chairs and members.



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