

You are receiving this monthly E-Newsletter as a partner of the National Democratic Institute - Liberia Office.



NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter

Working for democracy & making democracy work

Number 15 | August 2013

With Support of NDI's new Civil Society Program

Liberian Legislature Holds First-Ever Hearing on Gender Responsive Budgeting

In order to ensure that Liberia's proposed National Budget for 2013-14 is gender sensitive, the House Committee on Gender and Child Development and the Senate Committee on Gender, Health, Social Welfare, Women and Children Affairs for the first time conducted a hearing on gender responsive budgeting. Five civil society organizations joined ministries and other government institutions that presented testimony at the joint hearing, which was held on July 10th.

In his opening remarks Senator Peter Coleman, Chair of the Senate Committee, pointed out that the Legislature's passage of previous budgets did not require government agencies to defend or scrutinize budget proposals using a gender lens.

House Speaker Alex Tyler lauded the new dynamism introduced by this public hearing and the awareness it was raising; as he cautioned public entities to



Participants at the Public Hearing on Gender Responsive Budgeting, held in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building in Monrovia.

The testimony of the Southeastern Women's Development Association (SEWODA), presented by its program officer George Weah, pointed out that most of the proposed budget is for administrative and infrastructure costs. He argued that the budget should include the costs of gender mainstreaming in national policy plans and should show clearly which allocations support gender equity and how.

consider gender as they prepared and implemented budgets. He promised to continue this drive in the Legislature's consideration of all future budgets.

Jasper Cumme, representing Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives (AGENDA), was the first CSO witness to testify. He gave concrete examples of issues that should be taken into consideration to make the national budget more gender responsive. He showed figures on the most vulnerable groups, illiteracy among rural women and girls for example, and argued that the national budget should address the condition of such groups with concrete and measurable targets and results.

The Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) was represented by its Executive Director Marpu Speare, who asked lawmakers to pay attention to the fact that almost US\$9 million in the 2013-14 budget donated for gender projects by international organizations was unspecified. How could the Legislature conduct effective oversight in that situation, she asked. Like other CSO witnesses, she also challenged legislators not to accept the severe cut in funds for the prosecution of gender-based violence from US\$800,000 down to zero in the proposed budget.

Similarly, Lena Cummings of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) testified that while the salaries of civil servants would increase by 21 percent in the proposed budget, there is a downward trend in the allocation of funds for the unprivileged and vulnerable girls. She advocated for the budget to acknowledge gender patterns in Liberia and allocate money for policies and programs that move towards a more equal society.

The Secretary General of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL), Chris Wleh Toe, showed the joint committee that government's contribution to gender projects was being reduced from US\$659,000 to US\$250,000. He asked the Legislature to support gender programs at all ministries and not to rely solely on international support.

In closing the joint hearing, Representative Mariamu Fofana, Chair of the House Committee on Gender Equity and Child Development, applauded the five CSOs for providing pragmatic testimony based on empirical evidence. "I believe that from across the country, civil society organizations have developed and produced productive analysis, which we as legislators have found useful and can be used in this process", said Fofana.

NDI works together with CSOs and the Legislature to promote public hearings

From NDI's past program focused on strengthening the legislative branch, both legislators and NDI recognized the need for Liberian civil society to be more involved in the legislative process. Committee hearings that include testimony by

CSOs are good tools for such involvement, because they bring expertise and experiences from the grassroots into the legislative and policy making process.

In July, the Legislature conducted two committee hearings that included CSOs. Please read about them in this e-newsletter. NDI assisted the CSO witnesses to prepare oral and written testimony and to present it effectively. Additionally, NDI worked with the chairs of the committees, their staff and the Legislature's Committee Support Services (CSS), to prepare invitations, develop agendas and witness lists, and secure venues, as well as to implement other logistical arrangements.

The hearings and our work with the CSS and CSO witnesses are supported by NDI's new civil society program. The civil society program is funded by the Embassy of Sweden and it builds on the lessons learned in our legislative strengthening program that was funded by USAID.

Liberian Senate Committees Hear Civil Society Views at Electoral Reform Hearing

On July 5th the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Human Rights and the Committee on Autonomous Commissions and Agencies held a public hearing in Gbarnga on electoral law reform. Several civil society organizations (CSOs) working across Liberia presented legislative testimony toward amendments to the country's 1986 elections law.

In her opening remarks, the Chair of the Senate's Committee on Autonomous Commissions and Agencies, Senator Jewel Howard-Taylor, emphasized the importance of the hearing to gather views of Liberians outside Monrovia before any new law is passed. The Senate's July 5th hearing in Gbarnga, Bong County, has been its only hearing to solicit ideas from the Liberian public. Senator Taylor's position was buttressed by Bong County Superintendent Selena Polson-Mappy, who also proposed

Organizations of the Disabled (NUOD) among other things called for the amended law to mandate tactile ballots, to address the problem of the visually impaired waiting in long queues, and to improve upon the current inaccessibility of voting locations.

The Elections Coordinating Committee (ECC), represented by Oscar Bloh, recommended that the new law establish an independent tribunal, to include the Chief Justice, which would investigate complaints filed against the National Elections Committee (NEC) by political parties. Presently, unless a complainant ultimately resorts to the courts, the NEC is the only body that probes and resolves election grievances.

Other CSOs that provided testimony included the Women's NGO Secretariat

continued voter registration to enable Liberian youth turning 18 before the next elections to exercise their political franchise.

Among the CSO witnesses, Mr. Fallah Boimah (below left) of the National Union of



(WONGOSOL), the National Youth Movement for Transparent Elections (NAYOMOTE), and the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL). CSOs from Bong County that testified were the Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L), the Bong County Women's Organization, the Bong Students Union, the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) Bong Chapter, and the Bong County Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church.

The bill to amend the Elections Law is currently pending in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Tips for Testifying at Legislative Hearings

Here are a few 'golden rules' on preparing yourself and your organization to serve as a witness at a legislative hearing:

- Confirm your invitation to testify
- Prepare written testimony and submit it to the committee in advance
- Arrive on time, present yourself to legislative staff, and be polite and respectful
- Speak within the given time limit, be concise, be concrete and stick to the content of the hearing
- Mix factual information with personal and grassroots-level experiences that support your testimony
- Be specific, give evidence and include recommendations
- Bring enough extra copies of your testimony to the hearing site, to distribute to all committee members and the press

With Partial Support from NDI and USAID, the Liberian National Legislature makes itself Internet Ready

The National Capitol Building is now set up with the necessary equipment to receive dedicated internet. NDI contracted the Mwetana Consulting and Technology Group that completed installation of the infrastructure, which provides cable access in the office of each Representative and Senator, as well as a Wi-Fi signal that reaches every part of the Capitol Building. The achievement is the realization of a goal set out in the Legislature's Modernization Plan and was accomplished through funds dedicated by both the Legislature and USAID.

On July 15th officials of the Legislature, the U.S. Government and NDI, attended a ceremony in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building marking the handover of the new infrastructure. Speaking at the event, NDI's Resident Senior Director Aubrey McCutcheon emphasized that the technology further supports the Legislature's effort to operate in a transparent, efficient and accountable manner, through enhanced communication and information sharing with the media and the public, as well as among its members and staff.

In her remarks, U.S. Ambassador Deborah Malac reaffirmed her government's continued support to Liberia's reconstruction process. The Ambassador said that the new system will aid in enhancing the Legislature's documentation processes and expressed optimism that the technology will enhance each lawmaker's work to serve as a link between the Legislature and the public.



Seated from left to right, Clarice Jah (Senator), Alex Tyler (Speaker of the House), Deborah Malac (US Ambassador), John Winfield (USAID Mission Director) and Edwin Snowe (Representative) listen to Aubrey McCutcheon (NDI Resident Senior Director).

acknowledged that technology use at the first branch of government had been substandard and cited how Wi-Fi would enable greater research by the legislative branch.

Because the House of Representatives is currently considering its budget for the 2013-14 fiscal year, Chairperson Edwin Snowe of the House Rules, Order and Administration Committee also acknowledged the timely opportunity the moment provides for the Legislature to now invest in internet service and related maintenance of this new capability.

Before the recent closure of NDI's program of support for modernization of the Legislature, it also assisted the institution to establish and operate its own website, digital bill tracking software, and a system for issuing free recorded press notices by cell phone. In addition, the program assisted lawmakers with policy formulation,

For their parts, House Speaker Alex Tyler and Senator Clarice Jah, representing the Senate President Pro-Tempore, congratulated their legislative colleagues, NDI, USAID and Mwetana for the collective achievement. They

staff training, establishment of its library, archives and research service, the Legislative Budget Office, the Committee Support Service, and the rebuilding of the Legislative Drafting Services, among other projects.



NDI-Liberia Launches Facebook Page

Social media is becoming more and more important as a tool for sharing information, as well as for social and political organizing. Facebook is a good example of that. Although in Liberia internet access is still not widespread, it is to be expected that this will happen sooner or later, like elsewhere in the world. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are pioneers in this development. NDI’s new program, funded by the Embassy of Sweden, enhances the advocacy skills and legislative engagement of Liberian CSO’s and works together with the Legislature to give space to citizen voices. That is why NDI has launched a Facebook page where we share information with our partners and supporters, including information from other organizations and institutions that are promoting good governance and citizen participation in Liberia. But it’s not a one-way street! *You* are also invited to share information and thoughts on these topics. Take a look at our new page, give it a ‘Like’ and offer a comment or a post. As the motto on our page says: Working for democracy and making democracy work, also in Liberia!



This publication and the activities described were made possible through the generous support of NDI’s donor partners. We are thankful to the Embassy of Sweden and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of NDI’s donors.

© NDI, All rights reserved.

Visit NDI's website: www.ndi.org

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

