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NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter

Working for democracy & making democracy work
Number 16 | September 2013

“Consider Me Your Ambassador in the Legislature” A Lawmaker Tells CSOs

“From this day onward, consider me your ambassador in the National Legislature and I will also use my influence to ensure that you meet any lawmaker to get your work done”. Representative George Mulbah made this welcomed pledge to civil society organizations (CSOs) at a three-day legislative advocacy skill-building workshop sponsored by NDI. From August 28-31, 2013, over 40 CSO activists assembled in Gbarnga under the auspices of NDI’s *Citizen-Centered Political Engagement Program* funded by the Embassy of Sweden.

Representative Mulbah, Senator George Tengbeh and Alton Whitnies (Chief of Office Staff to Rep. Corpu Barclay) expressed delight over the demonstrated willingness of CSOs to engage the Legislature and its staff on national



Representative George Mulbah of Bong County

In one of the sessions during the workshop, CSOs presented their advocacy plans to lawmakers on the subjects of water, sanitation and hygiene, women’s empowerment and gender equity, and extractive industries. Lawmakers and CSOs exchanged views on developing influential advocacy roadmaps.

policies. *"We make the laws for the people, so it will also be good that you bring your thoughts and recommendations, especially on laws you feel will not be in the interest of the common people"*, said Lofa County Senator George Tengbeh.

In many instances, CSO interaction with lawmakers in Liberia has taken the form of demonstration, rather than consistent and constructive advocacy and policy engagement.

Amongst other things, the CSOs discussed basic do's and don'ts of legislative advocacy, shared tips with each other on their respective advocacy plans, and reviewed successful practices for working at the grassroots level to directly enhance the voices of citizens.

NDI's legislative advocacy partners at the workshop were WASH, SEWODA and NRM. You will read a further description about these three CSOs below.



Participants of the August 29-31 workshop held in Gbarnga, Bong County

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NDI is currently implementing a three-year program to strengthen Liberia's fledgling democracy by

several other active members.

The Liberia CSO WASH Network

fostering greater interactions between citizens and the Legislature. This program, which is supported by the Embassy of Sweden, aims to increase citizens' political organizing and legislative advocacy as well as to enable the Legislature to create more opportunities for citizen access. While many CSOs will be invited to take part in the workshops and other events of this program, NDI will partner most closely with two coalitions and one regional CSO. Those three advocacy partner groups are:

The CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM)

NRM is a platform of ten CSOs founded in 2012-2013. Its purpose is to increase citizens' participation in the governance and management of the extractive industries (mining, logging, oil and other natural resources). NRM believes that having all stakeholders work together to review progress and identify challenges in the governance of extractive industries will avoid conflict and contribute to peacebuilding. The NRM coalition brings together many groups that are working across Liberia on natural resource governance issues both at county and national levels. Founding members of NRM are the Rights & Rice Foundation (RRF), New Africa Research and Development Agency (NARDA),

(WASH)

In 2012 six Liberian CSOs strengthened their collaboration by developing a joint advocacy platform and created the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Network. The objective of the network is to mobilize civil society and citizens to engage public officials to take appropriate action for improving Liberian's access to water, sanitation and hygiene. The WASH secretariat is managed by Citizens United to Promote Peace and Democracy in Liberia (CUPPADL). Other active members are the Liberia NGO Network (LINNK), the WASH Reporters and Editors Network (WASH R&E), and the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), among others.

The Southeastern Women Development Association (SEWODA)

SEWODA is a regional CSO founded in 1996 that focuses on empowering women and girls in the remote south-eastern region of Liberia, where communities lack access to many vital resources. The organization works to foster women's participation in peacebuilding and decision-making processes by providing trainings on human rights and women's rights and on combatting gender-based violence. SEWODA is also engaged in agriculture, community development and health related

and the Platform for Dialogue and Peacebuilding (P4DP), among

programs. SEWODA works in Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Sinoe and Grand Gedeh counties.

A range of activities

Each of the three advocacy partners will conduct a range of activities from October 2013 thru September 2014, with sub-grant and technical support from NDI. They will organize grassroots-level consultative forums, field visits and town-hall meeting where citizens engage lawmakers and other government officials. They will also develop tools such as citizen observatories and drama and community radio outreach to engage citizens in policies and laws. And at the Capitol building, they will work together with lawmakers in public hearings, citizen lobby days, and preparing investigative missions. We look forward to keeping you informed about their successes, challenges and upcoming activities through this monthly newsletter.



The Women's Legislative Caucus of Liberia Establishes a Secretariat in the Capitol Building

As calls for women's participation in national decision making is again high on the legislative agenda, the WLCL has set up a secretariat to advance its goals. The secretariat was inaugurated on August 6th. Back in 2005, all 14 women lawmakers then in the 52nd Legislature, with support from NDI and other international partners, organized the WLCL to promote its lawmaking agenda. But the 2011 general elections saw a drop in the number of women

to institutionalize the Caucus that will further enhance its partnership with other women groups.



“The Caucus is not just here to serve female and male legislators. For

legislators. The Gender Parity Bill recently introduced by the WLCL now seeks to ensure that political parties field no less than 30% and no more than 70% of any one gender for elected offices.

At the well-attended dedication ceremony of the new secretariat, WLCL President Representative Josephine Francis described the office as a boost

example, this will serve as a connection between the Caucus and CSOs”, said National Coordinator Marayah Fyneah. In complimenting the WLCL at the dedication of its first secretariat, Speaker of the House Alex Tyler said: “You are much more organized now. You are a much more powerful force within the Legislature”.



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.

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