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Affordable and Adequate Housing: a Social Right and a Stable Future

"The work of the Mission has convinced me and the other members that there is no option but to lobby and advocate for affordable housing". These were the words of Senator Peter Coleman during NDI's Policy Seminar on Affordable and Adequate Housing. The seminar took place on the 16th of January in Monrovia to accommodate a discussion between lawmakers and housing-experts on the draft report of the earlier Study Investigation Mission on Affordable and Adequate Housing. That Mission was composed of six lawmakers and was assisted by NDI and two experts. It consulted a number of stakeholders and made fact-finding visits upcountry to collect information about the housing conditions suffered by a majority of Liberia's population. The draft Mission Report makes recommendations for law- and policymaking.

During the policy seminar, the Managing



Investigation Mission in breaking this silence. The seminar was also attended by civil society activists and representatives of city government and international donors.

The recommendations in the draft report for law- and policymaking were fully supported by the participants. Most underlined the need for concrete steps to be taken. Some of the suggestions heard called for the introduction of bills by lawmakers, such as one to regulate rental rates. Others emphasized the need for prioritization of housing in the national budget and the convening of a national housing policy conference by the President of

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Director of the National Housing Authority, Samuel Thompson, highlighted for the Legislature the urgency of a new and assertive housing policy. He underlined the basic human right of every Liberian to have a decent house. But he also made it very clear that building houses for low- and middle income households contributes to a stable future, improves security in Liberia, and is a major engine for economic growth and job creation.

With legislative, executive branch and regional experts, the seminar turned out to be a very interactive in-depth meeting. The seminar facilitator Ohene Sarfoh, the mission's international housing policy expert from Ghana, took the participants on a journey through three hours of recommendations -- challenging them to express their views and share their knowledge, while at the same time concentrating on a roadmap for legislative follow-up. Some participants expressed their wonderment, while others expressed anger, that until now both society and politics have been so silent about the very poor housing conditions faced by millions of Liberians. Everyone lauded the initiative of the Legislature's Study

the Republic.

Mission member Representative Munah Pelham advocated for enhanced oversight by the Legislature. Her colleague Representative Larry Younquoi, after hearing from the Mission's members, stressed the responsibility of legislators to sponsor bills that would contribute to affordable and adequate housing. Senator John Ballout called upon government to collaborate with private investors and to accommodate housing investments in the National Budget.

In his closing remarks, Senator Coleman characterized the Mission and the seminar as first steps. Many more steps have to follow. *"The Legislature, the Executive, Civil Society Organizations and the media should all play a pivotal role in setting the stage for a comprehensive, adequate and inclusive national policy on housing", he said.*

After finalization of the Mission Report, based on deliberations at the seminar, members of the Mission will take ownership of drafting the most urgent bills proposed in the report. Both the Study Investigation Mission and the Policy Seminar were made possible by NDI-Liberia's legislative strengthening grant from USAID.



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<p>Study Investigation Mission: a Tool that Works</p> <p>In 2012 NDI-Liberia launched Study Investigation Missions as tools for Liberian lawmakers to deepen knowledge on high priority issues of national interest, to analyze contexts while considering legislation, and to strengthen their oversight of the executive branch. Such Missions investigate best practices and urgent needs in the field and make recommendations for policy- and law-making on selected issues.</p> <p>NDI-Liberia’s methodology is to pair international experts with local experts in supporting the National Legislature in these missions. Legislative staff are involved to enhance their skills and media outreach is conducted to keep citizens informed about the work and results of the Mission. In this way the Legislature can strengthen its role, position and visibility. In addition to the Mission on Affordable and Adequate Housing, a Study Investigation Mission has been launched on Extractive Industries.</p>		<p>Bad Governance -- Bad Housing</p> <p>“Presently, not all stakeholders are involved in housing. The state is not involved adequately as a facilitator, leaving the market (or whatever remains of it) to stimulate production and allocate outputs, albeit inequitably and unsustainably. The absence of a spatial development framework and a structured housing system is opening the land market to excessive speculation, poor use and high levels of invasion. Furthermore, the lack of regulations in the rental housing sector is leaving room for abuse and conflicts. The cities and counties are also not benefitting from property taxes to recover any investments done for the provision of (limited) municipal services. Lastly, civil society organizations and policy research institutions do not engage the state and other strategic actors in debates on affordable and adequate housing.”</p> <p><i>Source: Draft Report - Study Investigation Mission on Affordable and Adequate Housing, 2012, page 19</i></p>	

Staff Training in the Art and Skill of Legislative Drafting

Adopting and amending laws is the core

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business of the Legislature. But those laws first need to be drafted - and drafted well. In January, just as the National Legislature reconvened, some twenty staff members of the House and Senate began the 2nd Session of the 53rd Legislature by participating in a four-day NDI training on the art of legislative drafting. The training has helped to strengthen existing capacity in the legislative drafting offices of each body.

While drafting is often done by ministries and commissions of the executive branch, it is critically important that the legislative branch has equal capacity to support the legislative ideas and drafting needs of its committees and individual members. Consider these numbers: in 2012 there were 63 bills introduced in the Senate and 46 were passed. In the House, 126 bills were introduced and 24 were passed. But how many of those bills were drafted in the Legislature?

It is important that laws are written in a clear, consistent and readable way. The Legislature must have the staff skill and capacity to do this, if elected lawmakers are to truly fulfill their role of representing the needs and views of their constituents. Clear and consistent laws are also essential to their proper implementation by the executive and accurate interpretation by the courts.

Legislative drafting expert Tobias Dorsey led this training for House and Senate staff in January. Dorsey is author of the book entitled "Legislative Drafter's Deskbook: A Practical Guide (2010)".



followed by definitions of terms used, and finally the core text of the bill and its enactment clause. A well drafted bill is divided into clear sections, each section addressing a specific topic.

The second skill area for drafters targeted bill tracking. Because a bill is walked through many stages and amendments, it is very important to track and make clear which version of the bill is the current one, which changes were included in earlier versions and by whom.

It is also important for legislative drafting staff to collaborate with other staff of the Legislature, such as the Legislative Information Service. That is because the writing of a draft-bill starts with a concept, a legal or a policy idea and demands related research on the topic as well as existing law. This collaboration with other legislative staff was the third area of the training curriculum.

The last topic dealt with the art and skill of working professionally with members. Legislative drafters work for the Liberian Legislature and its members. It is very important for them to have good relationships of trust, confidentially and political neutrality

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The training curriculum focused on four principal skill areas. The first was the format of a bill. He taught the skill of composing every bill in a clear and uniform way; starting with the title and a preamble (why the bill is needed),

when working with lawmakers. A good drafter must ascertain and pursue the bill the legislator wants, and must work for them in a professional and independent manner.

The training was very participatory and House and Senate staff learned tremendous amounts from each other. They were eager to learn how they could contribute to a stronger National Legislature as a co-equal branch of government.

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20th of February: Policy Seminar on Extractive Industries

On Wednesday the 20th of February the draft-report of the second Study Investigation Mission of the Legislature will be debated during a policy seminar in Monrovia. The Mission and its follow-on Policy Seminar focus on Extractive Industries. The Mission began a series of consultations and site visits last December that will be completed just before the upcoming February seminar.

If you are interested in the diverse national issues affected by the extractive industries, and in strengthening the related role of the Legislature, you are most welcome to join lawmakers and other experts at this policy seminar. To register, please contact Nannoh Seekey at nseekey@ndi.org or by telephone at 0886 511758. If you register you will receive in advance the seminar program and the draft-report of the Mission.

Upcoming Events

- Policy Seminar on Extractive Industries
- Training for Legislative Staff on how to support the committees of the House and Senate in their work
- Workshop for members of the House and Senate committees on Elections Law Reform (financed by UNDP)

Legislative Spotlight

In February the Legislative Spotlight programs touched issues of Investments and Concessions, Post & Telecommunications, Health Reform, the Legislative Code of Conduct and Affordable and Adequate Housing. This NDI-sponsored program has ended, but NDI hopes to bring it back on the air

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within the course of this year.

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