



Leo Platvoet <lplatvoet@ndi.org>

# Successful National Issues Forum and Lobby Day

1 message

NDI E-Newsletter <lplatvoet@ndi.org>  
Reply-To: NDI E-Newsletter <lplatvoet@ndi.org>  
To: Leo Platvoet <lplatvoet@ndi.org>

21 March 2014 17:32

CSOs Meet with Lawmakers | NDI and CSOs Organize Successful National Issues Forum | WASH Network Holds Meeting with Stakeholders in Margibi County

[View this email in your browser](#)



## NDI-Liberia E-Newsletter

Working for democracy & making democracy work

Number 22 | March 2014

### WASH Investigative Mission Leads to Legislative Action

The full plenary of the Liberian Senate on February 18, 2014 instructed two of its statutory committees to probe poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) conditions and service delivery in the slum communities of West Point and Clara Town in Monrovia. The Senate's action is a direct outcome of a January 29 investigation mission by the Legislature, that was organized by NDI and its advocacy partner the CSOs WASH Network. In addition to West Point and Clara Town the mission toured the White Plain Water Treatment Plant in



Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation's Treatment and Supply Engineer James Kendor explains to Senator Sumo about water distribution to her constituents.

over low water supply to their community. "West Point has a population of over 70,000 people but

Johnsonville outside of Monrovia. The mission involved a 17-member delegation of legislators, legislative staff, the media, and government officials. In West Point, a community of over 70,000 residents, WASH Network Chairman Prince Kreplah highlighted the large proportion of Liberians who lack access to clean water and sanitation. He recommended that legislators improve the WASH sector's budgetary allocation to match the government's expressed national policies and its international obligations in the sector. "WASH globally is considered a human rights issue, and as such it needs all attention like has been done with electricity provision," Kreplah pointed out. He also expressed willingness to assist lawmakers with necessary briefings on WASH conditions, in order to accelerate policy formulation to improve the sector. Several West Point residents expressed dismay

interestingly, we receive 5,000 gallons daily. Children are still drinking well water in this day and age," one resident, Michael Doe, asserted. Doe also claimed that residents benefitted from the White Plain's Treatment Plant water supply for only three hours a day.

During the investigative mission, Montserrado County Senator Joyce M. Freeman-Sumo expressed strong regrets about the deplorable water and sanitation conditions and promised to call for intervention by the Legislature.

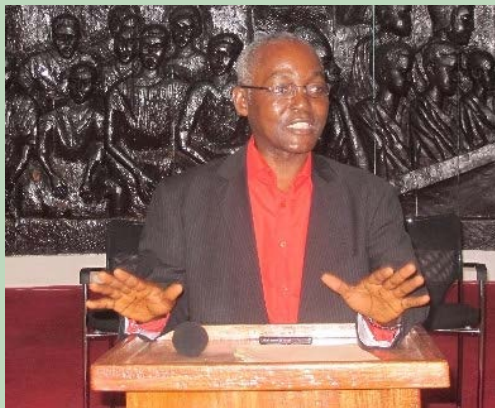
By February 3<sup>rd</sup> she had written a letter to the Senate describing her findings during the mission organized by the CSOs WASH Network and NDI and urging legislators to take immediate action to improve the provision of WASH services. After a discussion among Senators in full plenary session, the Senate charged two statutory committees with responsibilities for further oversight and bringing recommendations back to the body for further action.

## National Lobby Day: Civil Society Activists Engage Constructively with Lawmakers

"I see all kinds of activists walking around. Oh, is this the National Lobby Day? I'm ready to meet one of these civil society

The Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG) emphasized the need to improve prison conditions for both guards and prisoners, and

organizations!” This willingness was enthusiastically expressed by a lawmaker on Friday, February 14, when a diverse group of CSOs moved through the Capitol Building to meet lawmakers in their offices.



Deputy Speaker Hans Barchue

In a speech to welcome citizens to the Capitol and to kick-off the first national civil society Lobby Day, the House of Representatives' Deputy Speaker, Hans Barchue, encouraged lobbyists to visit him and his colleagues, because “both the Legislature and civil society should work, each from its own responsibility, to improve the living conditions of the ordinary citizens of Liberia”. The CSOs met with a total of 41 Representatives and Senators on that day.

In engaging with lawmakers and legislative staff, CSOs were able to present their views on specific policy issues and pending legislative bills. The CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM) outlined its position on proposed land rights

called for enactment of a more efficient policy to curb increasing rates of illegal drug use. The group also illustrated how such measures would contribute to national reconciliation efforts.

The Southeastern Women Development Association (SEWODA) lobbied the Senate and the House for passage of the pending Gender Parity Bill, which intends to achieve a minimum of 30 percent representation of each gender in public and political institutions. The parity provision was ultimately approved by the Senate only a few weeks later as an amendment to the Elections Law.

The National Lobby Day provided a good opportunity for constituents and CSOs to exchange views, arguments and information with key legislators on issues of national importance. At a press conference to conclude the day, the activists stated that their engagement with legislators had been constructive the occurred at an opportune time at the start of a new legislative session.



SEWODA's Head Helena Torh-Turo briefs fellow lobbyists before the start of the

policy reforms and advocated for a mechanism through which citizens' voices could be heard and taken into consideration. The CSOs Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Network (WASH) underscored the urgent need for a national WASH board or commission, which would integrate, streamline and strengthen the efforts of the Liberian government to provide access to clean and safe water for citizens.

lobby

They observed a growing willingness from legislators for productive collaboration with civil society groups. Liberian CSOs will continue to organize lobby days at strategic times in the Legislature's sessions and its constituency breaks, at both the Capitol and in the districts, to provide citizens with a platform to contribute to the policy and lawmaking processes.

## NDI and Nine CSOs Organize Liberia's First Ever Civil Society National Issues Forum

Just ahead of the National Lobby Day, over 130 civil society activists on February 12 and 13 joined a two-day National Issues Forum organized by nine CSOs and convened by NDI at the Monrovia City Hall. The forum addressed multiple national issues in eight substantive sessions planned by civil society groups. It provided an opportunity for civil society and others to discuss priority policy issues, shortly after the President's Annual Message and the reconvening of the National Legislature.

define who is responsible for funds government allots for WASH. Senator Tengbeh, decried the acute scarcity of clean water in Zorzor and Salayea in Lofa County, particularly during the peak of Liberia's dry season.

In a session addressing problematic issues of land rights and policy, organized by the CSO Consortium on Natural Resource Management (NRM), Ali Kaba, Executive Director of the Sustainable Development Institute pointed out that customary land rights in Liberia are informal and weak. Consequently, many rural



Participants at the National Issues Forum

The forum is intended as an annual event for a diverse range of stakeholders (legislators and their staff, executive branch and county government officials, political parties, academics, the media and civil society actors) in order to raise awareness and deepen collaboration on issues. The forum also helped to prepare CSOs for the Lobby Day.

Speaking at the Constitutional and Electoral Reform session, the Deputy Executive Director for Programs at the National Elections Commission (NEC), Nathan Garbie, termed the electoral process as a cycle with lessons to be learned from every step. According to Garbie, electoral reforms are necessary after every election to prevent the recurrence of irregularities. Citing some complaints from the 2011 elections, where trucking of voters to other districts was a problem, Garbie stated that the NEC is taking steps such as disqualifying political aspirants caught trucking mass numbers of citizens to register and vote in districts where they do not reside.

citizens are trapped in legal tussles over land ownership. He asserted that private investors, wealthy nations, and local elites are acquiring large tracts of land for large scale agricultural investment at the expense of local populations. Entire communities are being displaced, and due to documentation challenges for land that is owned in customary title, these communities often have very little bargaining power to avoid displacement or to demand compensation for their losses.

The session on women's rights and gender equality was organized by the Southeast Women Development Association (SEWODA) and included both male and female women's rights activists. Among other panelists, Frances Greaves, Lena Cummings and Teplah Reeves addressed efforts to combat rape and strengthen existing rape laws. Greaves noted the importance of statistics, and highlighted the need to visit communities to gather information on rape cases for better decision-making by policymakers and law enforcement. She noted that many lawmakers have little knowledge of the existing law. She also reminded participants that when the existing law was first passed there was some criticism that its penalties for rape were too harsh. Lena Cummings acknowledged successes achieved since enactment of the existing rape law,

On the process of election complaints, Garbie stated that past election guidelines required complainants to come from a political party. This disadvantaged independent candidates. In the ongoing electoral review process, it is proposed that any candidate who is a registered voter can submit a complaint. Complaints should be filed with a NEC Hearing Officer who will then forward the complaint to an Election Magistrate. He noted the NEC has a quasi-judicial power that empowers Commissioners to review election complaints.

Advocating for the provision of better water, sanitation and hygiene services, in its session the Liberia CSOs WASH Network articulated a demand for the establishment of an independent board or commission to regulate the WASH sector. Presenting the group's advocacy position, Chairman Prince Kreplah noted that the fragmentation of WASH service delivery amongst the ministries of Health, Public Works, and Lands, Mines and Energy, as well as the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation (LWSC), is a grave impediment to the efficient management of the sector.

Representative Munah Pelham-Youngblood also expressed reservations about WASH sector fragmentation. She further emphasized that the LWSC should not serve as both regulator and

but stressed the need for a review process to identify loopholes and adapt the law to current realities.

On the topic of women's representation in public and political institutions, Representative Munah Pelham-Youngblood stressed that gender inequality remains a serious problem in the country.



Participants at the National Issues Forum

She emphasized that as a signatory to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Liberia has an obligation to bring the requirements of the convention into its domestic laws, which includes the requirement for a national gender parity law. The campaign for passage of the Gender Parity Bill has suffered immense challenges. Those challenges have included: lack of sufficient sensitization to eliminate the perception among men that the bill intends to marginalize them or create competition; insufficient consolidation among groups advocating for the bill's passage; lack of adequate resources to assist civil society

service provider and she suggested that another method be found for supervision of the quality of water supplied by the LWSC. Lofa County Senator George Tengbeh stressed how pertinent WASH is to every citizen's livelihood and he underscored the urgent need to

activism for the bill; insufficient support from women in influential positions; media bias fueled by poor understanding of the bill and its goals; and poor timing as the bill was introduced in the previous Legislature too close to an election year, which diverted attention from its merits.

## CSOs WASH Network Holds Consultative Meeting with Stakeholders in Margibi County

The Margibi County chapter of the CSOs Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Network (WASH) recently completed a county stakeholders meeting to discuss steps for improving WASH in their local areas. Representatives, Senators and local county authorities participated in the consultation with citizens. County consultative meetings of this sort are a method used in the WASH Network's advocacy campaign, to draw greater attention to the need for legislative action to revamp the sector. The Margibi County consultation particularly sought to highlight the role of legislators.

Margibi Representative Ben A. Fofana used the opportunity to discuss his legislative action plan on WASH. He outlined how his plan would improve WASH service delivery in Margibi. Representative Fofana also emphasized the crucial role of CSOs in national decision making and offered to assist the WASH Network to achieve its objectives. Specifically, he committed to help civil society groups get access to relevant national laws and international commitments made by Liberia, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the eThekwini Declaration, which commits Liberia and other signatories to allot 0.5% of GDP to sanitation.

WASH National Chairman Prince Kreplah appealed to legislators to address WASH conditions in rural areas and to generally exercise more oversight on state action related to water, sanitation and hygiene. He encouraged continued collaboration between the Legislature and civil society in finding workable

solutions.



Facebook

Website

Email



This publication and the activities described were made possible through the generous support of NDI's donor partner the Embassy of Sweden. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of NDI's donor.

Copyright © 2014 NDI, All rights reserved.  
You are receiving this E-New sletter because you are a partner of NDI - Liberia

Our mailing address is:  
NDI  
Payne Avenue, 16th Street, Sinkor  
Monrovia 1000  
Liberia

[Add us to your address book](#)

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

