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Working for democracy & making democracy work
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Gisela Strand (Embassy of Sweden) and Aubrey McCutcheon (NDI, right) sign the agreement. Left: Hans Barchue, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Embassy of Sweden Signs Agreement with NDI to Increase Engagement between Civil Society and the Legislature

“What you say today comes to us tomorrow”. With those candid but authoritative words, Hans Barchue, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, gave his view on the potential influence of Liberian civil society organizations on the National Legislature. The Deputy Speaker’s remarks were received at the launch and

signing ceremony of the new NDI program, which is designed to increase

amendment, passage or defeat. They have the power to monitor as well as to assist the Executive Branch. They have the power, and arguably the legal standing, to assert the rights of Liberian citizens and groups of citizens in the courts. In a word, they have the power to help make Liberia’s young democracy work”.

Gisela Strand, Head of Development Cooperation for the Embassy of Sweden, reminded participants that “an elementary aspect of democratic governance is a pro-active,

representative and pluralistic civil society” Speaking on behalf of her

program, which is designed to increase engagement between civil society and the Legislature, to build Liberian CSO legislative advocacy skills, and to support the Legislature in its ongoing efforts to provide greater public access. The program was formally launched on April 17th with the support of the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia.

The new program is part of the Sweden's Democratic Culture Program in Liberia.

The program will see NDI-Liberia using its democratic development experience to work with local CSOs to build their capacity in citizen-centered political and legislative engagement.

The signing ceremony and program launch were the start of an introductory workshop on 'CSOs and Legislative Advocacy'. Before they got down to work, some fifty CSO activists from counties throughout the country heard remarks from the Deputy Speaker, as well as from representatives of NDI and the Embassy of Sweden.

Aubrey McCutcheon, Resident Senior Director of NDI, looked back as he recalled Liberia's gratitude to CSOs for the critical leadership role they played in bringing peace back to Liberia - "...right up to the advocacy they led to force the peace agreement in Accra". But with NDI's new program in mind he looked forward: "CSOs are citizens - citizens organized. And as such, they have tremendous power. They have the power to influence the legislative process from start to finish -- from the introduction of bills to their

society . Speaking on behalf of her government she expressed "...great pleasure that Sweden engages with the National Democratic Institute to promote sustainable democracy in Liberia through improving the interaction between the citizens of Liberia and the legislature as well as other public institutions. The program is well aligned with the priorities of the Government of Liberia as emphasized in the Agenda for Transformation and the New Deal", she said. Ms. Strand also underlined the relationship between citizens' participation in policymaking and human rights: "...Sweden's basic position is that all development cooperation must be human rights based. This means that all Swedish support aims at empowering the individual by strengthening his/her right to control his/her development and situation in life. In practice it is a matter both of pursuing the state to guarantee the rights of the individual as well as to heightening people's awareness of their rights and improving their chances of claiming them themselves".

For his part, Deputy Speaker Barchue also thanked NDI for the past five years of assistance to the Legislature in providing skill training to staff and legislators and in building up institutions like the Legislative Budget Office and the Legislative Information Service. In his words of support for the new NDI program, he underlined the need for good cooperation between the Legislature and civil society organizations, as voices that should be heard.

Introductory Workshop Focuses to Legislative Advocacy by Civil Society Organizations

Following a foundational baseline study, NDI launched its new civil society program with an introductory training activity in collaboration with CSOs from counties throughout the country. The three-day workshop focused on CSOs and legislative advocacy. In twelve sessions participants learned about the roles and responsibilities of the Liberian Legislature, the processes of lawmaking, oversight and representation, and entry points for civil society input and influence. The interactive training program included presentations by experienced advocates, videos, group discussions and working groups, interviews with former Liberian legislators, a guided tour of the Capitol Building, and tips on the art and practice of legislative advocacy.



Participants were motivated to learn, to share their views and to reflect on the experiences of their organizations. In one session, after studying legislators' roles of lawmaking, representation and oversight, and after watching an in-depth Al Jazeera interview with the President on water and sanitation in Liberia, participants stepped into the shoes of legislators to devise appropriate legislative action. In another session, working groups were challenged to develop action plans for CSO advocacy, including goals, a strategic approach, messages and relevant lobbying tools. Several participants described the session on 'The Diary of a Lawmaker' as an eye-opener, in which they learned about the activities of legislators outside of their two session days on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the diverse

legislators outside of their two session days on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the diverse opportunities those activities provide for citizens access and influence. The tour of the Capitol building, which included a visit to each chamber while in session, was also highly appreciated by the participants. As one CSO activist put it: “Now I have really seen how the Legislature works and that the House and the Senate are really two different entities”.

Participants went home with new resource materials and knowledge, and expressed eagerness to organize trainings in their own communities on topics that were addressed in NDI’s introductory workshop.

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May 29: Policy Seminar on Gender Equity in Politics

On Wednesday the 29th of May, NDI will organize the last event in its policy seminar series for legislators. The final event in the series will explore policy options for Gender Equity in Politics.

The last Gender Equity Bill died in the 52nd Legislature in 2011. The 2011 elections were also a setback for women’s electoral representation, when the total number of elected women declined in the National Legislature. But the 53rd Legislature is sure to see both a bill to amend the Elections Law to pursue women’s representation as well as a newly introduced Gender Equity Bill calling for a minimum and maximum percentage of any one gender in Liberia’s political institutions.

In the middle of last year, at NDI’s policy seminar on gender responsive budgeting and the installation of the Women’s Legislative Caucus of Liberia, President Sirleaf announced her strong support for a reintroduced Gender Equity Bill.



These include actions by political parties and women’s organizations, among others. These topics will be addressed at the upcoming NDI Policy Seminar where legislators, the executive branch and civil society organizations will be invited to discuss options for policy- and lawmaking. The seminar will be informed by an expert from the Africa region who has recent experience with gender equity legislation.

We hope you will join us. If you would like to participate, please register by contacting Nannoh Seekey at nseekey@ndi.org or by phone at 0886511758. One week before the seminar

A wide range of policy measures and activities are necessary to raise women's inclusion and participation in politics.

registered participants will receive the program as well as the seminar Reader with background information.



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