



**sustainable
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See Page 5



**SDI WINS LONGSTANDING
CASE FOR
DISMISSED GVL WORKERS**

See Page 8



**Stakeholders at CSOs-OPWG engagement
meeting Strategized Ways in Mitigating
Challenges**

See Page 9



**Bomi Citizens Extol Sustainable
Development Institute**

GENDER POLICY OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (SDI)

INTRODUCTION

This SDI Gender Policy seeks to ensure the attainment of gender equality in the development process by addressing the existing gender imbalances within the Sustainable Development Institute. It also provides for equal opportunities for women and men to actively participate and contribute to their fullest ability and equitably benefit from development within the SDI.

The development of this Policy has been necessitated by a number of developments at national level and global best gender practices; research findings; gender disparities in positions of decision making among others, as well as the present gender gaps within the SDI. The Policy examines situations in various Programs of the SDI from a gender perspective in order to provide appropriate guidance, strategies and interventions for its successful implementation.

The policy is an internal document that guides the SDI. It outlines strategic priorities and processes for integrating gender perspectives throughout the office of the Sustainable Development Institute. This policy applies to all SDI staff members led by the Board of Directors and gives a broad strategic orientation for implementation, including institutionalizing gender equality in the organizational culture of the SDI, and advancing gender equality throughout all areas of the SDI mandate by promoting and protecting the human rights of all people.

The policy has been developed in response to the abovementioned mandate, gender responsive needs assessment of the entity, and results of the internal evaluation on gender mainstreaming conducted recently as part of the overall reform process of SDI. In addition, the SDI Human Resource and Administration Policy Strategic Plan, not only flags gender issues as paramount but also highlights concrete steps to address the gender gaps going forward.

Already the SDI has established a Committee / Gender Working Group to work with and SDI's Administration to amongst others ensure gender considerations in all of SDI's program and activities and staffing. Members of the SDI Gender Working Group will be trained in this area and will help develop workable strategies for gender mainstreaming as well as to advice SDI on the integration of gender throughout its programs, policies and administrative activities.

THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

This Gender Policy borrows from international human rights frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In general, the policy aims to create an environment and shape a culture conducive to promoting women's human rights and to advancing gender equality most especially to vulnerable minority groups. Primarily, the focus of this document will look holistically at the mainstreaming of gender into the activities of the SDI. Understandably, gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or program, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women and men concerns and experiences, an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs; and this in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally. It goes hand in hand with the promotion and protection of women's human rights and the elimination of discrimination against women. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality which needs to be felt in every facet of the SDI. In the promotion of women's human rights and gender equality, SDI seeks to address the indivisibility, and interrelatedness of human rights by ensuring that programs, policies and activities are mindful of this principle for men and women despite their race, sexual orientation and creed.

It is worth noting that although the SDI is an NGO, its Gender Policy considers the WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT APPROACH borrowed from the Liberia Female Empowerment (LiFE) analytical work program which will be used to guide the design of certain project activities targeted at female beneficiaries for the implementation of its projects going forward. To Be Continued

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Global actions on World Environment Day underscore urgent need to protect the planet



Stockholm, 5 June 2022 - Individuals, communities, civil society, businesses and governments around the world today marked World Environment Day under the theme #OnlyOneEarth, with official celebrations held in Stockholm and host country Sweden announcing a ban on issuing new licenses for the extraction of coal, oil, and natural gas from 1 July this year to protect people and planet. Announcing the ban at the official World Environment Day celebrations in Stockholm, Sweden's Minister for Climate and the Environment, Annika Strandhäll, said, "Making the green jobs of the future by accelerating the climate transition is one of the top priorities for the Swedish

government. As part of our efforts to implement our climate ambitions, we must take actions against activities that have a negative impact on our health and our environment."

"Our message to the global community is clear. The winners in the global race will be the ones that speed up the transition, not the ones that lag behind and cling to a dependency on fossil fuels," she added. Tens of millions of people around the world joined global conversations on social media demanding urgent action to conserve and restore the environment. Tens of thousands organized their own activities, including the planting of millions of trees, cleaning trash and taking actions to highlight that there is #OnlyOneEarth.

2022 marks the 49th time World Environment Day has been celebrated. It was established following the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, and is celebrated annually on 5 June, with a different country hosting it each year. This year's theme – #OnlyOneEarth – mirrors the theme of the first World Environment Day in 1973. It calls for collective, transformative action on a global scale to celebrate, protect and restore our planet. "Fifty years ago, the world's leaders came together at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and committed to protecting the planet. But we are far from succeeding. We can no longer ignore the alarm bells that ring louder every day," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in his World Environment Day message.

"The recent Stockholm+50 environment meeting reiterated that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals rely on a healthy planet," he added. "We must all take responsibility to avert the catastrophe being wrought by the triple crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss."

The official event, held at the Tekniska Museet in Stockholm, included a discussion between Ms. Strandhäll, Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, and young people.

"The triple planetary crisis is accelerating, and why? Because we consume 1.7 planets a year. We have only one Earth. We have to accept that we're not doing enough to protect it," Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said at the event. "I stand before you because we have to do better. We know what to do. The science has told us we have to end fossil fuels. We have to restore nature to its full glory. We have to transform our food systems. We have to make our cities green." Around the world, countries and communities acted

on World Environment Day to make a real difference to their environments. Religious leaders came together to sign a landmark appeal on climate-responsible finance. These organisations will only engage with financial institutions that are aligned with the Paris Agreement objective of limiting global warming to 1.5° C.

Source: www.unep.org

ED Wilfred Gray-Johnson Celebrates One Year in Office with Enormous Achievements



Joining the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) in June 2021, everyone connected or positively impacted by the SDI knew that the new Executive Director (ED), Mr. Wilfred Gray-Johnson was the real deal for the organization judging from his rich credentials and overwhelming years of hand on experience.

After serving as lecturer, with high degree of professionalism and coming with solid foundation in Human Rights, advocacy, peace building, and coordinating other affairs in the world governing peace body [United Nations], expectations were high and the enormous achievements of Mr. Gray-Johnson in one year at the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) is celebrated by his staff, partners and those connected with the organization with open arms.

In his inaugural remarks in June 2021, the result-oriented, dedicated and workaholic boss assured his staff and everyone that collectively, they will achieve a lot in his short, medium and long term plans.

Holding such commitment to his chest and knowing the magnitude of works ahead of him, Mr. Gray-Johnson embarked on vigorous internal and external engagements to further enhance and spread the work-

ings of the SDI as an organization that serves as the voice of the voiceless in the country.

Following a comprehensive review of the workings of the SDI, the new Executive Director and his staff immediately embarked on their duties looking at several issues ranging from administration, advancing strategic plans, policies and building relationships with line ministries and agencies, other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) among others.

The Achievements:

Due to the vulnerable nature of the organization's compound coupled with encroachment, the Executive Director and team are currently fencing the compound to ensure security.

He said "We are fencing the compound as a way of protecting because there have been encroachment on the land, burglary and some theft especially some time at night. So, we want to protect the properties by putting fence."

At the same time, Mr. Gray-Johnson recounted that in his first year, one of the things they needed to focus on was to put in place the necessary measures to guide the institution.

According to him, there were few sets of policies or guidelines the SDI used, but some lacked a number of key policies and structures.

In conversation with the SDI Bulletin, Mr. Gray-Johnson said "For instance, SDI used to have interns, but never had the clear cut internship policy to articulate how to run the program. We managed to develop an internship policy. SDI was undertaking Monitoring and Evaluation in the field and they were done half, we didn't have the coherence M & E policy that clearly articulates M & E and how we can be accountable and how we can also learn from the work we have done and how we can be accountable to ourselves, country, donors and the Liberian people."

Speaking further, ED Gray-Johnson stressed the essence of such initiative taking into consideration the credibility of the organization at home and abroad.

"You know when donors support you with funding; those projects are intended to improve the living conditions of the ordinary citizens. So, the M & E policy needed to clearly articulate how these projects were implemented. We put in an M & E policy, we have to review and revise the Administration policy which includes a comprehensive Human Resource Management, a staff code of conduct to guide

staffs. We are also part of the global framework; SDI is one of the partnering institutions under what we call “Friends of the Earth International. We are obligated to be in compliance with different rules and regulations, some of which include having certain policies and frameworks to follow,” Mr. Gray-Johnson said as he outlines his achievements in one year.

The Executive Director also outlined the modification and development of the Sexual Harassment Policy, Safeguarding Policy among others.

He added “We are now developing the Child Protection Policy. We are also concluding on “Comprehensive Financial Policy” that looks at fleet management. We will be operationalizing most of these policies after a comprehensive review, and understanding by the rest of the staff.”

On cementing relationships with the Liberian Government, CSOs and other partners, Mr. Gray-Johnson said “We strengthened our relationship with the government through the various institutions and all those key institutions that are responsible for the different sectors/ sectoral areas of the country. They include the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Forestry Development Authority (FDA), National Bureau of Concession (NBC), Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), Ministries of Justice (MOJ and Agriculture (MOA), National Investment Commission (NIC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) among others. We are also working very closely with other CSOs. We work a lot in term of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the extent to which companies are living up to their commitments in the MOU, to ensure that these companies are living up to their promises made.”

Our next edition will look at the long term and capacity building

SDI Wins Longstanding Case for Dismissed GVL Workers As Company pays US\$35,541



Life of sixteen dismissed workers of Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) since 2015 was a complete misery and inhumane situation as they legally battled the multimillion dollars oil palm company for their just benefits following illegal dismissal.

They were jailed for over a year without trial, a member of them died in jail and spent all of their resources to legally fight a multimillion dollars company, but they kept pushing looking for messiah until they landed in the gracious hands of the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI).

Prior to the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) picking up the case for the aggrieved workers after five years of strangulation by GVL without hope, it was clearly noticed that the situation was becoming extremely harmful and problematic. This happened after other CSOs had previously tried to help the victims, but failed.

It can be recalled that they were wrongfully dismissed by GVL for allegedly participating in riot that destroyed the company’s properties in Butaw, Sinoe County in May 2015. The aggrieved workers were really agitated and as a result; the community members considered the company as curse for their blessing [land].

However, through the intervention of the SDI as a leading CSO and an alliance member implementing the Forests for a Just Future, the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) 2.0 program looking at advocacy, policy, laws and standards, the sixteen aggrieved workers were paid their just benefits amounting to US\$35, 541.00. Milieudefensie-Friend of the Earth-Netherlands, SDI Donor partner funded and played a strategic role as well.

It was a history as it was the first time that a civil society organization took on such tasks against a well-grounded multimillion dollars company and become successful.

One of the beneficiaries, Adolphus Tarpeh said “When the people were fighting our case, for me I was not expecting that I will get this money.”

Speaking during the payment, Sampson Williams, the National Program Assistant for SDI said “We at SDI didn’t plan to prove to you people or GVL that we are strong. We decided to do so because we wanted to set a precedent that will serve as deterrent to investors now and investors to come that we have laws in Liberia that will guide their operations.”

Many Liberians now believe that aggrieved workers in Concession Companies need to start relying on the CSOs with their issues. The intervention of SDI had made the workers to recover what they lost for

the past six years and they are now able to regain life. It wasn't an easy task as the SDI convened series of meetings with the company, workers union, Heritage & Partners Associates law firm, Ministry of Labor, local authorities, community members, all parties involved through face-to-face discussions and telephones to ensure the successful climax of the situation.

While in queue, the excited workers were singing songs of victory in their vernacular as they received their benefits from the company.

Receiving her late mother's benefit, Felecia Karwell, daughter of the late Beatrice Koon, former worker of GVL said "I feel sorry because my mother is not alive today and if she was going to be alive, she will be receiving this her long term benefit today and do what she suppose to do with it. I want to use it to complete the house she left behind."

Also speaking, Ojuku Sackor, Spokesperson of the affected GVL workers said "I am signing for over US\$2,111.00. It's like a dream to me."

"To SDI and GVL, we say thank you. To the victims, from 2015 to now, you still remain patient. You were victimized, you went to jail, especially the speaker, you went to jail for one year where there was no trial, your liberty was seized, you came out and stay remained patient," Darwin Berry, Acting Superintendent of Sinoe in 2021 said during the payment.

Cllr. Abraham Sillah, Lawyer from Heritage and Partners Associates, a firm hired by SDI to represent the legal interest of the workers reminded the company that Liberia is a country of laws. He said "when people rights are tempered with by a multimillion dollars company, people think nothing will come out of it, but we are glad that something had come out of it and they are being paid. I think it brings hope to the people in the communities that when their rights are tempered with, they are guaranteed relief in the legal system as it reinforces their faith."

Making further assurance to Liberians through SDI, the Assistant Labor Minister for Regional Labor Affairs, Wilson Dumoe said "In as much we need the investments; we need the interests of our people. The Ministry of Labor, when you have right, we will give it to you. We will not bend your rights."

SDI Extends Support under the Liberia Forest Sector Project to Southeast Communities in Managing Their Customary Land



The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) has intensified efforts in customary land formalization process in the southeast under the Liberia Forest Sector Project. The Liberia Forest Sector Project came into being through a letter of intent signed between the Governments of Liberia and Norway in 2014, but actual implementation of the project started in 2016.

The objective of the project is to improve the management of forest landscape and increase benefit sharing for communities. The LFSP is a REDD+ project. REDD+ is Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks and it is an essential part of the global efforts to mitigate climate change. It is also a climate change mitigation mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for addressing climate change in countries.

The Liberia Forest Sector Project is phase two of REDD+ and under phase two, the Liberian Government and partners are doing some investments in the landscape. Part of the implementation of the strategies is to build capacities, policy and legal reforms and put in place all of the key things that are required to build capacity, but also to reduce pressure on the forest as a way of reducing emission. The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), Fuana& Fora International (FFI) and Pro Forest through the coordination of IDH are jointly acting in the role as

consortium in implementing the LFSP in the south-eastern cluster. They are working in the landscape implementing for FDA a package of LFSP flagship activities, an implementation strategy called cluster approach.

Focusing on Livelihoods Development and Land Use Support to Cluster Communities in the South-east Landscape” the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and Pro Forest are implementing the component on customary land rights, while FFI is implementing the livelihoods component with the coordination being provided by IDH.

It is intended to provide alternative livelihoods for communities so that their focus is removed from activities that damage the forests. This will ensure protection of biodiversity, conservation of the forest and reduction of carbon emissions which will be another source of revenue for communities and government.

The SDI is assisting five of the targeted districts in formalizing their customary land in line with the Land Rights Law; an effort which is laying the foundation for implementing other components of the project. The SDI is helping the communities by facilitating Community Self-Identification (CSI), setting up of governance processes including developing community bylaws and Community Land Development Management Committees (CLDMCs), Boundary harmonization and GIS mapping among others.

The project is implemented within three counties. They include Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and RiverGee and expected to formally bring under customary control an estimated 430, 147 hectares land.

Madam Nora Bowier, the Program Coordinator of the Community Land Protection Program (CLPP) at the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) said those communities were selected because they are heavily forested and they host significant amount of biodiversity and also right outside the Sarpo National Park.

Outlining the progress achieve thus far, she noted “these communities have documented their profiles, established interim committees and each has signed a Memorandum of Understanding declaring itself as land owning units. The communities have also initiated the process of drafting their bylaws by col-

lecting town rules intended to inform development of their first draft bylaw for discussion.”

Also speaking, the Deputy National REDD+ Coordinator at the REDD+ Implementation Unit (RIU) at the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Atty. Roland J. Lepol said the Liberia Forest Sector Project (LFSP) is identifying gaps and supporting relevant reforms of various laws relating to the forest and land use in order to reduce emission.

Atty. Lepol further said they are also doing actual investments in forest landscape, improving management of forest landscape, providing livelihoods for communities through innovative enterprises alternatives that communities can engage into for income generation and job creation as a way of sustaining themselves.

Atty. Lepol said “The main idea is at the end of this project, we should be able to calculate some reduction in emission, deforestation, forest degradation from the baseline that was done in 2018. Currently as I speak to you, we have the figures in terms of what was deforestation rate when the project started; forest degradation rate and we already know the amount of hectares from the forest (6.6million hectares). So, at the end of the project, we can be able to go back and see when we started how many protected areas we had, number of total land areas, how many protected areas the project has been able to support or increase. The bigger picture is to see at the end of this project, there has been reduction in emission.”

The REDD+ Deputy National Coordinator further said “It is happening under the sustainable agriculture, land use planning, land formalization, livelihood supports to communities and social infrastructure and all of those things under phase two improving communities’ forest management, helping to reach and increasing the protected areas networks. Under the law, Liberia needs to conserve 30% of the remaining forest.”

The Forestry Development Authority is implementing the LFSP along with other government ministries and agencies selected based on their respective roles with land and forest in the country.

They include the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) respectively.

Responding to the concerns of the forest communities over their sustainable livelihoods as part of efforts in protecting the forest, Atty. Lepol said “The key things the forest communities want to see is tangible. You can talk about all the theories like climate change and others. We need to stop cutting the forest, mining the forests and what are the alternatives; this is where we had a slow start. Our livelihood activities started lately around 2021. This was due to lots of interruptions because when we started, there were lots of assessments done, but there were political transition, Coronavirus delayed livelihood activities in the communities and it affected community perceptions.”

“They took REDD to be some kind of mechanism that just want to stop people from logging and other things they think is good. So, we been trying to increase the message to say REDD did not come to stop logging or farming, but we need to do it sustainably. REDD+ is an opportunity that government can tap into for both sustainable forest management and for smart revenue generation. It is a mechanism for generating revenue from forest; while it is still standing at the same time helping you to have environmental sustainability and it is a long term income generation once you are reducing emission,” he added.

Stakeholders at CSOs-OPWG engagement meeting Strategized Ways in Mitigating Challenges



As part of efforts in mitigating the numerous challenges confronting stakeholders in the Oil Palm sector and other human rights issues, participants at a one day Civil Society Organizations Oil Palm Working Group (CSOs-OPWG) meeting through the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) under the Green Livelihoods Alliance 2.0 (GLA) program agreed on several strate-

gies to work with in making the sector better.

The one day event on Thursday May 5, 2022 was the first edition of the quarterly information sharing and engagement meetings with Technical Departments of line ministries, agencies, and civil society organizations.

The interactive round table discussion at the Corina Hotel in Sinkor was meant to build and strengthen a multi-stakeholders platform and inclusive partnership and cooperation of state and Non-state Actors for effective implementation of business and Human Rights in the Natural Resource Sector of Liberia.

The line ministries and agencies in attendance include: Ministry of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Liberia Land Authority (LLA), National Bureau of Concession (NBC), and Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INHCR), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), & National Investment Commission (NIC).

The CSOs include Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), ARD, Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI), Liberia Forest Media Watch, Journalists for the Protection of Nature (JPN), Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment (RICCE), Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev), Youth Focus Center, Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU) among others.

During the meeting, the participants outlined several challenges ranging from lack of community benefits or social agreements, destruction of sacred places including ancestral gravesites, Human right violations, long period of service as casual laborers, sexual and other abuses, pollution, low wages among others.

Others include unsafe working environment, illegal process of acquiring land/land grabs, interference of state actors in community rights issues, monitoring fatigue, lack of funding, and policy formalization, lack of proper transition for new companies taking over previous ones, limited powers for regulatory agencies, low manpower, lack of information sharing, logistic, limited capacity, political influence among others.

During the meeting, some state-actors complained over lack of understating of the Land Rights Act by judicial actors, lack of prosecutorial powers, lack of updates and coordination, overlapping of functions and responsibilities, poor communication system, lack of independence from CSOs monitors among others.

However, the stakeholders at the end of the meeting agreed to among others things ensure effective information sharing, resource mobilization to aid smaller organizations, cement relationship through an active platform, strengthen integrity and trust between Government and CSOs by giving credits to institutions, regular routine meeting through networking, establish a result-oriented team and organize technical and policymakers team as well.

They also planned to focus on capacity building and training, create more awareness on Business and Human Rights (BHR), coordinate in resolving issues, improving coordination and collaboration among others.

Giving the overview of the meeting earlier, Richard N. Sam, Regional Program Officer at SDI reminded his colleagues that addressing most of these challenges confronting them require well-coordinated and concerted efforts, collaboration, and partnership with government, CSOs, experts and local communities.

Mr. Sam further said partnership and coordination had not been strong and proactive to address these challenges in the natural resource sector.

At the meeting, the National Program Assistant at SDI, Sampson M. Williams who outlined the workings of the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) since its inception said the organization was previously accused of being anti-government due to the nature of its work. He however said following numerous engagements with government institutions with such belief, they are now considered serious partners.

The Director of Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Justice, Kutaka Divine Togba who made a presentation on Business and Human Rights (BHR) said the roles of CSOs should never be underestimated.

“We have a platform where we all can sit together and discuss. Government needs to take the lead and ensure businesses respect human rights and best practices. Businesses need to be respected and they too need to respect the customary communities,” he said.

Also speaking, the Executive Director of SDI, Mr. Wilfred Gray-Johnson called for concerted efforts in working together. Mr. Gray-Johnson reminded his colleagues that CSOs need to be advocates, amplify their voices, engage in research and inform policy actions.

Also speaking at the well-attended meeting was Commissioner, Pindarous Allison. He serves as Commissioner for Resource Mobilization at the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. In his remark, he urged participants not to only monitor human rights abuses and violations in concession areas, but should also look at big businesses operating in Monrovia, but foreign nationals.

At the end of the meeting, the policy makers in attendance pledged their unflinching supports in working with Civil Society Organizations Oil Palm Working Group (CSOs-OPWG) in ensuring that concessions wouldn't be a curse for the communities and Liberia, but a blessing.

Bomi Citizens Extol Sustainable Development Institute



Citizens of Bomi County have extolled the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) for educating them on the importance of their customary land and how to manage land related conflict.

The SDI through the Community Rights Support Facility (CRSF) has been working in seven clans in two administrative districts in Bomi County educating citizens on the importance of their community land and how to collectively work in managing issues that have the proclivity to create conflict in their communities because of land.

The project is funded under the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA 2.0), forest for a just future program through the SDI.

In implementing the project, the Community Rights Support Facility (CRSF) has been focusing on Community Self-Identification and the establishment of governance structures which are the initial processes for the legal recognition of the land rights of customary land-owning communities. This also seeks to ensure that a community has self-identified, determined its boundaries, established legal entity, re-

corded and registered its deed.

It also looks at governance which involves the full participation of all community members and citizens irrespective of status coming together to discuss and decide the status of community land. The project is at the same time looking at boundary harmonization which ensures that all boundary issues are resolved harmoniously and the total co-existence of all communities. The overall goal is that these customary land-owning communities' lands are formalized in accordance with the Land Rights Act of 2018.

However, to assess the impacts of the project, the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), A. Morris Nyain as head of the assessment team visited the project communities where the citizens extolled the SDI through the implementing partner, the Community Rights Support Facility (CRSF).

The CRSF has since been working setting up the Community Land Development Management Committees (CLDMCs). The role of the CLDMCs is to work internally with the community in managing land and other natural resources and playing the role as liaison officers between the communities and concessionaires.

The two days assessment was also meant to measure the effectiveness and achievements so far of CRSF's interventions in the various communities and know whether the project is on track or not. The assessment was done in six of the seven clans in Senjeh and Klay Districts in Bomi County. The clans include Zepoh, Mana, Gorblah, Manoah, Upper Togay and Lower Togay respectively.

Speaking to the assessment team, the chairman of the CLDMCs of Lower Togay, Sando B. Coleman said they have now been trained in identifying their customary land to effectively and collectively work to manage land conflict.

"I have now learned the importance of our community land, how to work together, ensure the full participation of women and how we all can work together in protecting our land for the benefit of all. We never knew this before, but the CRSF has really helped us to understand the rights and protection we have over our land," Coleman said.

Also speaking, Madam Hawa Quaye of Bola Town in Senjeh district recounted that unlike in the past, women in her clan are now greatly involved in the discussions of their land as well as their rights in land matters.

"In the past, women never used to attend meetings of such, but this time we all are involved in discussions involving land and we are also allowed to speak and hold positions in the CLDMCs because the organization has trained us to know our rights and speak our

minds."

At the same time, John E. Varney, General Town Chief in Lower Togay added that the training from the organization has been extremely important for them as community members. "Now, all of the meetings are participatory unlike in the past when women and men never used to gather in discussing issues pertaining to their land," he said.

For Foday Kuteh, a 89 years old man of Barmo Town, Manoah Clan expressed total excitement for CRSF and SDI in improving their lives.

"We now know our rights as customary community landowners; nobody will just come and start surveying our land. We know our land should benefit every member of the community. Now husbands and wives can sit together and discuss the status of their land," Mr. Kuteh, Dean of Elders of Barmo Town.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Mr. Morris Nyain stressed that under the Green Livelihood Alliance 2.0 forest for a just future program, monitoring and evaluation is very critical for all partners.

Mr. Nyain said "Monitoring and evaluation will help the alliance member [Sustainable Development Institute] to track the implementation, outputs, and outcomes of the Community Rights Support Facility (CRSF) customary land formalization intervention in Bomi County. This will also guide further strategic planning regarding the most valuable and efficient use of resources and reallocation of resources in a better ways.

SDI Commended for Educating Communities on Land Rights Act, Setting Up CLDMCs



The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) has

been commended for educating rural communities on land rights, especially Customary Land Rights through the setting up of the Community Land Development Management Committees (CLDMCs).

Article 9 of the 2018 Land Rights Act gives serious consideration to customary land which solely belongs to the communities for their use. As an organization working to transform decision making, the SDI through its Community Land Protection Program (CLPP) has setup the Community Land Development Management Committees (CLDMCs) across different communities.

The CLDMCs helps communities implement the Land Rights Act, particularly the component on Customary Land. The law requires customary communities to setup and go through the Customary Land Formalization (CLF) process. This includes conducting the Community Self-Identification (CSI), which involves communities coming together as a unit to declare themselves as one land owning body.

The CLF also involves the formation of governance system which includes setting up bylaws and setting the CLDMCs to manage their land. The process also involves mapping their land and also harmonizing boundaries where there is conflict, the communities engage with their neighbors to resolve boundary conflict. The SDI with support from partners is working with CLDMCs in Rivercess, Grand Cape Mount, RiverGee, Maryland, Lofa, Sinoe, Grand Gedeh counties with Nimba County soon to be added.

Speaking on behalf of some CLDMCs, the chairman of the CLDMCs in Gbarsaw Clan in RiverCess County, Samuel Vonziah commended the SDI for opening their eyes as community members. Mr. Vonziah said through the intervention of SDI in educating them, members of the CLDMCs are playing the role of guiding the resources of the community and also advocating on their behalf for their land, creating awareness and holding meetings to inform the people to know the importance of their land, and how to manage their resources.

Vonziah said “I must thank the SDI for the hard work because since SDI came in, changes had been made. Before, the local authority ranging from town chief, paramount chiefs will decide our fate and negotiate our land on our behalf without our knowledge and receive any amount. Later, group of people will only

come and start using our land.”

Mr. Vonziah recounted that since the coming in of the SDI in their community in setting up the CLDMCs, they are really educated in conducting the affairs of their land and community. The CLDMCs had ensured the holding of regular meetings, proper management of the land and community collective discussion with any individual or company having interest in the land, involve each community into every meeting and ensure the proper identification of every community member and avoid dissatisfaction.

“Now we are educated in discussing with investors who are coming to meet with us directly, CLDMCs and no more going to local authorities to singlehandedly discuss our fate. Our team members are collaborating very well and relaying to our communities and protecting our land,” Vonziah said.

According to the Land Rights Act, Community cannot sell land until after 50 years from the date which the law was passed, but can only lease land. The Gbarsaw Clan CLDMCs Chairman further said “The Land Rights Act is our guide and the bylaws and constitution of the community is our guide. We also prioritize boundary harmonization and if there are issues, we find common ground as people and document resolution.”

Gbarsaw Clan in RiverCess County has 13 towns and each town has four members on the CLDMC.

Also Speaking, the Program Coordinator of the Community Land Protection Program (CLPP) at SDI, Madam Nora Bowier said the SDI has facilitated different processes and also worked with more than sixty communities, helping them to go through these different processes and setup the different systems required by law which allow them to use their land and benefit from it.

Madam Bowier maintains that when communities have all these different processes, they can actually engage into transactions on the land. The CLPP boss further said “They cannot sell the land, but they can lease the land, they can get into an understanding with business partners to use the land and then get proceeds from that. Long standing conflicts can be resolved through these processes and they can clearly understand and map their boundaries setting the stage for undertaking community survey and acquiring their land deeds.”

“We go into these communities and organize series of different activities that bring communities together to have discussions and reach agreements. As we engage, we do a lot of awareness for them to clearly understand what the law says, their different rights and responsibilities. We use different mode of engagement outreach including radio programs, open theater activities, special capacity building event for women, trainings for community leaders and CLDMCs,” she said.

Speaking of challenges, Madam Bowier said “The law is new, therefore the vast majority of the communities did not know what it says, and many of them did not have access to it. Before our intervention in these communities that was the situation. They didn’t even know their rights and responsibilities as provided by the law.”

“After our entry, the communities are beginning to have access and understand the content of the law; women are taking key role in the process of implementing the law. In the past, local chiefs and traditional leaders were the ones influencing decision making in land governance, now more people are engaging and there is inclusive and participatory decision making process about land. There were reported cases of land grabbing involving internationals and locals, but with the setting up of the CLDMCs, there are some checks and balances and some CLDMCs are registering complaints about land grabbing and bringing it to the national CSOs’ attention and LLA for redress,” she added.

Also speaking, the Program Assistant of the CLPP at SDI, Daniel B. Wehyee recounted that since the passage of the Land Rights Act using it, and working with communities, some of the harmful traditional practices concerning youth and women participation in land governance are reducing at a very rapid speed.

“In some of the communities women are playing key roles on the CLDMC structures. For example in Lofa and River Counties, there are female serving as Chairpersons for of the communities’ CLDMCs we established. These are things that weren’t allowed easily in the past,” Wehyee said.

Kpayarquelleh Gets New Maternity Center



However, commenting further, Mr. Wehyee has explained that there are still challenged with completing of the regulations framework for implementing the Land Right Law which supposed to strengthen the functioning of those CLDMCs. “We want the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) to ensure that completion of the regulation are given priority and the voices of the community people be reflected in the final regulations. To the communities and CLDMCs, the “take advantage and in the absence of funding complete processes especially unresolved boundary conflict so that once the regulations are completed the process confirmatory surveys and deeds will not be delayed” Wehyee concluded.

Residents of Kpayarquelleh community in Salayea District, Lofa County have benefited a new maternity annex to the Kpayarquelleh community clinic. This is a result of funds received from the Alpha Logging operations in their communities.

Liberia has two of the most progressive forestry laws in sub-Sahara Africa. The 2006 National Forestry Reform Law and the 2009 Community Rights Law provide clear provisions for communities to participate in the governance of sustainable forest management and to directly benefit from the logging revenues generated. Communities affected by FMCs receive two streams of revenues including 30% Land Rental Fees and a minimum of one dollar per cubic meter of logs harvested annually. These benefits to the community are derived from its Social Agreement with the Alpha Logging in Forest Management Contract (FMC) “A”, logging company.

Ten towns comprising the affected communities that are part of FMC “A” that lies in Lofa County agreed to run a medical clinic with medical staff, a dispensary and a delivery unit. The annual running costs are US\$13,620.

The investment in the clinic and the construction of a midwifery annex has reduced the risk of maternal mortality, thereby also contributing to the country’s development. It has also provided jobs. Kpayarquelleh is centrally located in the district allowing for residents, including pregnant women, from adjoining communities to easily access its basic health services. Community residents expressed relief that the clinic has reduced the risk of traveling long distances to access health-care services, specifically for pregnant women. Logging funds have been used to pay volunteer teachers, build a multi-purpose CFDC Resource

Center, construct a midwifery section beside the clinic containing two rooms and a bathroom equipped for providing delivery services, pay salaries to clinical staff and establish a revolving fund for drugs at the clinic. The Liberian Government has not started supporting the clinic since 2020 as expected and due to the declining income from logging; the challenge now is to find the funds to maintain the clinic. Community members are charged fees for their drugs, thus helping the clinic to purchase replacement drug stocks.

The clinic provides outpatient services and performs delivery services for pregnant women. “We used to catch hard time carrying pregnant women in pain to the nearest health center which is far from here and sometimes no car during emergencies,” an elder in the town said. Accessing funds is a legal process for communities of Forest Management Contract areas. By 30 April 2021, the CFDC had spent US\$63,176 on building and running the clinic, with the expectation that the Ministry of Health support for the clinic running costs or regular income from logging would enable the clinic to function sustainably. Each community affected by logging is expected to undertake ‘projects’ to improve community infrastructure. Ten towns are represented in the CFDC for Lofa County in FMC “A” (in addition to another CFDC for the portion of the concession in Gbarpolu). The CFDC should be receiving US\$47,420.77 every year as its share of Land Rental Fees. There are several projects these towns have implemented in the period 2014 to 2019 and most decisions have been made through participatory processes during series of mass meetings. However, the reality is that communities are not receiving all the funds owed to them from logging funds and central government has not indicated a preparedness to pay for the operations of the clinic. Alpha Logging and the government are not paying the US\$47,421 annual Land Rental Fees regularly. With less money coming to the communities from logging activities, new funds have had to be found; otherwise the clinic will shut down, with dire consequences for community health. A case study shows that when communities receive the benefits owed to them from logging and are able to make informed consensus decisions about how best to use the funds, they can effectively execute development projects.

The study was done with financial support from the European Union, under the project “Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society for the implementation of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) coordinated by Fern. The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI), Civil Society-Independent Forest Monitors (CS-IFM), National Union of Community Forestry Development Committees (NUCFDC), National Union of Community Forest Management Bodies (NUCFMB), and Liberia Forest Media Watch (LFMW), implemented the project while Fern (UK & Belgium) coordinated.

SDI and Partners Strengthen Capacities of Forest Communities with Legal Knowledge at Ganta Forum



The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and partners at the close of the just ended Second Regional Forum held in Ganta City, June 28-29, 2022

provided knowledge on legal foundations and remedies available to three of the eight communities located in Nimba, Lofa, Gbarpolu and Grand Bassa Counties.

“Building legal foundations for sustainable forests and livelihood” is a five-year project that is being implemented by a consortium of four partners, including Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), the National Union of Community Forest Management Body (NUCFMB), Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) and Heritage Partners and Associates (HPA).

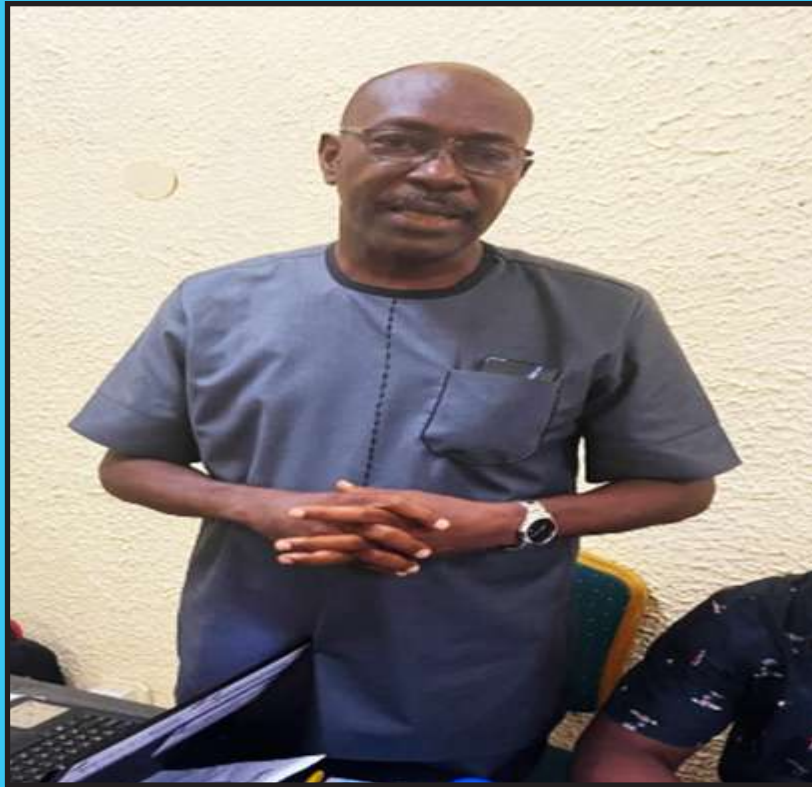
The forum brought together three project communities from Blei, Boe-Quilla from Nimba County, and Sablima Authorized Forest Community, located in Lofa County, and local authorities from the mentioned communities.

Key topics deliberated at the forum included, Community Forest Governance Structures with emphasis on the Community Assembly, and the Community Forest Management Body, Reconciling the CRL and the LRA – Customary Land, A panel Discussion: How can the FDA & local authorities support communities to promote good governance and get their land rental and cubic fees? Gender mainstreaming in community forest; Challenges & prospects.

This year’s Forum was attended by three Client Earth representatives from the United Kingdom, and the Forum was attended by 10 females and 25 males.

**One day information sharing and engagement meeting with
Technical Departments of line ministries, agencies and
civil society organizations held on
Thursday May 5, 2022 at
Corina Hotel in Sinkor, Monrovia.**

A PICTORIAL:



**SDI Executive Director
Mr. Wilfred Gray-Johnson making remarks**



Participants posed for a group photo



Participants at the meeting



Participants paid keen attention as Mr. Sampson N. Williams, Assistant National Program Officer @ SDI made presentation



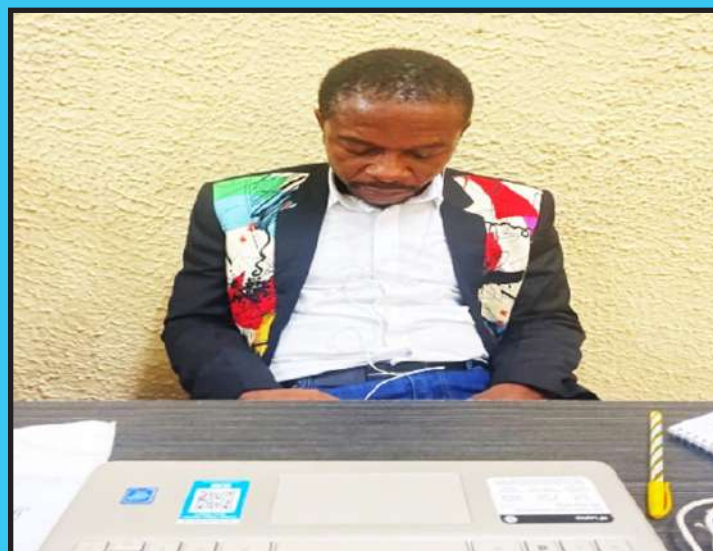
Mr. Kutaka Divine Togbah, MoJ Division of Human Rights & Mr. Richard N. Sam, Regional Program Officer @ SDI



Sampson Williams of SDI making presentation



Madam Nornor Bee Timby Expert @ SDI



Commissioner Panderous Allison of INCHR

[See Page 4](#)



ED Wilfred Gray-Johnson Celebrates One Year in Office with Enormous Achievements



[See Page 6](#)

SDI Extends Support under the Liberia Forest Sector Project to Southeast Communities in Managing Their Customary Land