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National Development Summit: An Evaluation of National Vision 2030 & the AFT Midterm Review

The National Development Summit was held on April 25, 2016 at the Administrative Building in Gbarnga Bong County. The Summit's theme was **"Liberia Rising 2030: Taking stock of a shared vision, and Mid-Term Review of the AFT "**, and served as an assessment of progress made so far since the 2012 National Vision 2030 Conference wherein the Liberian people, through their delegates, announced their "Vision" for their country, Liberia. The people's "Vision" code name "Liberia Rising - 2030" identified issues to be addressed and achieved to ensure that Liberia reaches middle income status by 2030.

The objective of the National Development Summit was to formulate a Liberian national development strategy based on the National Vision 2030. Such a document would serve as reference point, a compass and guide to the identification of concrete national policies, and the analysis of key constraints that need to be overcome in the short and medium term in order to operationalize the Vision.

In remarks, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf gave a brief background on the process that led to the actual holding of the National Vision Conference on 12 December 2012. The President gave recognition to members of the National Vision 2030 Steering Committee, some of whom were present at the National Development Summit. The Vision 2030 Steering Committee membership included Dr. Togbah Nah Tipoteh, Ms. Gladys Beyan, Dr. Baron Tarr, Mr. Ezekiel Pablo, Dr. Evelyn Kandakai, Dr. Henrique Tokpah, Yah Gono, and Zan Zan Kawa, among others.

President Sirleaf expressed gratitude to the many Liberians, at home and abroad, who participated in the National Vision, noting *"the aim of Vision 2030 was to make Liberia a middle income country, and the Agenda for Transformation was a product of that Vision"*.

There were two major presentations made at the National Summit – the first was by Dr. Amos Sawyer (Chair of the Governance Commission) on the theme "LIBERIA RISING 2030: Taking Stock of a Shared Future, and the second by out-going Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Amara Konneh on the theme "Mid-term Review of the implementation of the Agenda for Transformation". The AfT is a product of National Vision 2030.

In his presentation, Dr. Sawyer described the Vision 2030 process as "scientific" involving rigorous consultations with women, chiefs, and superintendents in every district and county. He said the end product of those consultations, the Vision 2030 document, and the Vision 2030 Statement were discussed at the National Vision Conference and adopted on 12 December 2012. The final documents were presented to the National Archives Center. Formal copies of the Vision documents have been presented to President Sirleaf, and available for wider distribution.

Dr. Sawyer reiterated that National Vision 2030 is the People's Vision adding *"it is not a vision of the politicians or the government. It was adopted and handed over to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf by the people on 12 December 2012"*.

Dr. Sawyer conceded that more needs to be done to popularize the National Vision Statement – "One people, one nation, united for peace and sustainable development". He promised that the Governance Commission, which he heads, will redouble efforts to support the ministries and youth groups in popularizing the Vision Statement so that it becomes part of the National consciousness.

Dr. Sawyer spoke of other documents that came out of the Vision 2030 process, namely: the National Reconciliation Roadmap and the Agenda for Transformation. He said the Reconciliation Roadmap has three program categories including accounting for the past; managing the present; and planning for the future. The National History Project, he said, was a critical component of planning for the future with the potential of forging national unity.

Dr. Sawyer reported that responsibility for implementation of a number of Vision 2030 projects were assigned to both the Governance Commission and the Independent Human Rights Commission. Many of the Vision 2030 projects including the history, citizenship education, and political dialogues (to name a few) are already underway.

The Governance Commission Chairman spoke on a number of other issues including the interconnectedness of the AfT and the holding of peaceful credible transparent elections come 2017. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning is currently engaged with the National Elections Commission to provide necessary mechanisms and support for the holding of credible and transparent elections in Liberia next year.

Dr. Sawyer emphasized the importance of the passage of key legislation required for the establishment of the Ministry of Local Government and making decentralization irreversible and hopes that it will be passed before the political season begins in earnest in 2017. Decentralization is important because it brings services closer to the people, ensures their participation in the development process, and reduces the struggle for leadership at the top, hence the importance of passing the Local Government Bill.

In his evaluation of Vision 2030, Dr. Sawyer gave an update on progress made thus far on the constitution review process, describing the process as on-going, and that a presentation had already been made to the Legislature making the case for the amendment of certain provisions of the Constitution. He looks forward to a debate in the Legislature with a view to advancing the review process, bringing it to its logical conclusion through the holding of a National Referendum. He also looks forward to the holding of the National Referendum during the elections year but was quick to note that this may not be realistic taking into consideration the very tight political schedule. *"If the Legislature passes the propositions which constitute the first stage of the constitution review process, then the referendum could very well take place after the elections"*.

On the issue of public sector reform, Dr. Sawyer maintained that the reform process was at a crossroads due to the risk of institutional memory loss that could occur during the transition. To mitigate this risk, the Governance Commission, in collaboration with the Civil Service Agency and the Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA), proposed the replacement of the office of Assistant Ministers with the creation of the position “**Principal Administration Officer**” (PAO), to serve as the highest civil servant, and positioned to retain institutional memory within government ministries.

In his progress report on the Agenda for Transformation, **outgoing Finance Minister Amara Konneh** noted that Liberia was still in the “red” and that there was still serious work to be done in terms of realizing the goals set in the document.

Minister Konneh gave an historical analysis on Liberia’s statistical growth since the 1960s, stating that Liberia came from growth in the 1960s to collapse and then rebirth, and is now beginning to climb up what he described as the “growth ladder”. *“Every time we begin to make progress something happens in the world beyond our control in Liberia”*. The Minister emphasized that this trend has to change. *“For example, “if something unfavorable happens in countries that grow rice, Liberia is affected and, similarly when the price of rubber or iron ore is affected we are affected”*. Liberia, he said, needs to consider being self-sufficient in rice production.

Minister Konneh’s presentation/progress report was divided into several categories:

1. Security and the Rule of Law

According to Minister Konneh, the key indicators for national security and rule of law include the land issue, access to police, the military, and judiciary. Minister Konneh said the land issue is being addressed and was no longer a key national security issue. He reported steady progress regarding the issue of policing, meeting 63% of its training target, with 5,000 of the 8,000 police officers trained.

Mr. Konneh pointed out that threat to Liberia’s national security is far reduced in 2015/16 as compared with 2006 but still below the continental level; and that the national peace and reconciliation conference planned for the near future will further improve national security and the rule of law in Liberia.

2. Economic Transformation

Minister Konneh noted governments efforts at improving sub-standard road infrastructure, inadequate electricity supply being addressed though some of such projects were either on track or stalled, and a contract signed to complete a new runway for Roberts international Airport. According to him, although \$152 million have been spent on agriculture, that sector is still sluggish. Minister Konneh suggested a relook at Liberia’s rice importation regime so that profits made from rice importation are reinvested to increased agricultural production.

The outgoing Finance Minister disclosed that government’s contribution to the entire Agenda for Transformation budget was 48% while the international community, mainly the United

States, World Bank and the European Union contributed 52%. He said that to achieve middle income status, Liberia needed to prioritize agricultural development, and improve on health and education programs.

The National Development Summit was graced by members of the Legislature, the diplomatic corps, UN family, and ordinary Liberians representing all fifteen counties of Liberia.

Governance Commission Discusses New Strategic Plan 2016-2021 Making GC more relevant in the face of 2017 Elections and Transition

The Governance Commission recently held a three day retreat at the Thinker's Village Hotel (April 13-15, 2016) to discuss the implementation of its first 2 years of the new five-year Strategic Plan (2016-2021). The Commission's new Strategic Plan hopes to situate the Commission in a better position to address emerging issues such as the electoral process and 2017 national elections, and transitioning of political power. The retreat also discussed the GC's previous Strategic Plan and unfinished business including the Liberian people agenda - National Vision 2030 – Liberia rising; the History project, decentralization, public sector modernization, Liberia's integrity system, and the completion of its Annual Governance Report, AGR.

Day one of the retreat focused on the Commission's five Mandate Areas making presentations covering activities, achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the past three years, and identifying strategies necessary to addressing future plans and possible challenges of emerging activities/projects. Executive Director Stephen Manley did the overview and lessons learned from the previous strategic plan (2012-2015). According to Mr. Manley, the heavy reliance on donor funding and the absence of a mechanism to fully monitor and evaluate GC projects are major challenges to the implementation and finalization of projects' activities undertaken by the Commission. He hoped that National government will increase funding to GC to help the Commission put mechanisms in place to address adequate staffing, and an extended monitoring and evaluation team to ensure that projects (and related activities) are fully covered as mandated by the new Strategic Plan. Government support to the Commission mainly covers salaries with a little left for operations.



Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the Governance Commission, for his part, focused more on the Commission's strategic involvement in Liberia's electoral process including the 2017 elections and the transitioning of political power to be realized within the next two years. According to Dr. Sawyer, GC views as an issue of priority its role (as think tank of government) including guiding the delicate transition process, especially as the president will be leaving the stage, and the multiple implications inherent in her exit, transfer of political power and UNMIL's drawdown.

The Chairman's remark was followed by presentations from the Mandate Areas. This session was moderated by Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey, the UNDP-seconded Consultant to GC who was earlier introduced by Dr. Sawyer.

Mandate Areas Presentations and activities for the next 2 years

a. Civic Engagement, National Identity & Visioning Mandate Area recorded as accomplishments the training of 136 people from civil society organizations, the completion of a GOL-CSO Partnership document, and the civic education curriculum. Dr. Kpangbala Sengbe said future activities of his Mandate Area include the printing of the Second Edition of the CSO Directory, the national history project, production and propagation of the Citizenship Education textbook, and the final copy of the National Vision 2030 document.



Key issues raised during the discussions were doubts about the possibility of printing and circulating of the citizenship textbooks in time for the next school year; Sufficient engagement with civil society on benefits of the National Vision 2030 so that politicians do not stray from it during and after the 2017 elections but rather make the document a part of their political platform; and a re-classification of civil society organizations in the Second Edition of the CSO directory.

b. National Integrity Systems Mandate Area - Attorney Bornor Varmah is Program Manager of the National Integrity Systems Mandate Area. He noted his Mandate Area's achievements to include printing of 8,000 copies of the Code of Conduct; active participation in the National Integrity Forum (NIF) - a multi-agency working group on the implementation of the Code of Conduct (CoC); the development of a national policy on law reform done in collaboration with the Law Reform Commission and other stakeholders; completion of an assessment of the anti-corruption strategy; and organizing and implementing the holding of several Policy Dialogues in 2015.



Planned activities for 2016 include the printing of more copies of the National Code of Conduct and training for at least one thousand people in the fifteen counties to assure of its implementation; the holding of more Policy Dialogues in 2016 on emerging national concerns; and the development of the National Integrity Forum's strategic plan/direction.

The shortage of staff and the lack of progress in establishing the office of the ombudsman who should enforce the National Code of Conduct were cited as main challenges of this Mandate Area. Suggestions made by plenary included that an anthology be prepared for all the policy dialogues held each year; that the private sector be co-opted in the promotion of national integrity; that ways be found to overcome the turf struggles that prevent effective collaboration within the National Integrity Forum; and that the Policy Dialogues be decentralized to incorporate local views and issues affecting local people.

c. Political and Legal Reform Mandate Area:

The Program Manager of the Political & Legal Reform Mandate, Area Ibrahim Nyei, named their key accomplishments as overseeing the production of a decentralization manual; Revising the draft local government bill so that it forms part of the proposed Constitutional amendments that were agreed upon at the 2015 Constitution Conference; and developing the capacity of civil society organizations on decentralization.



Future activities of the PLR Mandate Area include the training for local officials on the use of the newly produced decentralization manual; working with political parties to ensure that decentralization is a major component of their political platform; mobilizing the citizenry to vote for decentralization during the forthcoming referendum on proposed amendments to the Constitution; piloting a framework for assessing local government performance; and holding a 2016 summit on decentralization.

Comments from plenary included that much of this Mandate Area's presentation focused on de-concentration (the first phase of decentralization) and not much said about delegation of certain powers (the second phase of decentralization), and that the newly produced decentralization manual needs to be made more user-friendly because of Liberia's low literacy rate; engage with political parties to lift issues related to public sector reform so that same can be placed on their platform/manifestos; and engage the Legislature so that GC gets a buy-in from that body on some public sector reforms, and champions the enactment of a Transition law for Liberia.

d. Public Sector Reform Mandate Area - In their joint presentation, Mr. Dusty Wolokolie and Herron Gbidi, senior policy analyst and policy analyst, respectively, within the Public Sector Reform Mandate Area said their key accomplishments for the period under review were the completion of the first phase of mandates and functions review of the ministries, agencies and Commissions (MACs); the enactment of two bills into law; Staff skills assessment data collection for 14 ministries; and the completion of the Scoping Study on Liberia entrepreneurs' participation in the Liberian economy.



Their future plans include retaining three national consultants to continue the conduct of mandates and functions review of MACs; undertaking mandates and functions review for 11 line ministries; completing recruitment of an international Consultancy Firm to build capacity in conducting mandates and functions review; the holding of roundtable dialogues to discuss benefits of reforming government institutions; working on legislation for the establishment of the office of **Principal Administrative Officer**; and Drafting a legislation on the establishment of a **Public Service Commission or Civil Service Commission**.

Challenges experienced include but not limited to slow procurement process; the need to strengthen collaboration among the tripod (GC, CSA and LIPA); and frequent changes of leadership of MACs.

Comments on the presentation from plenary included that there was no linkages or collaborations with other mandate areas; no indication of impact on public services; no mention of interaction with civil society; no mention on preparedness in managing political transition; and that there was a need for creating public sector reform champions. It was suggested that for maximum impact, GC should be represented at the Cabinet level or have champions at the Cabinet level of the Executive branch of Government.

e. Monitoring, Evaluation, Research & Publications Mandate Area – Policy Analyst McNeil Wilson noted the following as their key achievements: The holding of three policy dialogues on Liberia’s electoral system, and support for the planning of citizens’ perception survey to be implemented in collaboration with the PLR/decentralization mandate area.

MERP future activities include but not limited to the production of the Annual governance report, and advocacy plan for implementation of key recommendations in the document; the promotion of an effective monitoring process for all MACs; the establishment of a document repository on governance issues; and the use of GC’s website as an online repository on governance issues. The lack of a national policy on Monitoring and Evaluation, and a Monitoring and Evaluation funding strategy were cited as key mandate area challenges.



Plenary comments on the presentation noted that there was no mention of why the theme of the 2015 Annual Governance Report (AGR) focuses on Liberia’s electoral system and/or the importance of getting the AGR out now to focus on preparedness for 2017 elections at least 18 months in advance. The response to that was to refute the thinking that GC should not monitor itself; that internal monitoring is a result of the implementation of the (new) Strategic Plan in a formal way. It was also noted that the policy cycle is incomplete without monitoring and evaluation to review the impact of GC’s policy recommendations.

Plenary proposed that MERP should expand beyond its presentation of GC’s Complementarity Plan; that NIS, CENV, PLR should collaborate to conduct sensitization campaigns to inform and prepare citizens for the national referendum on Constitutional amendments; and that all mandate areas get more involved with the holding of policy dialogues. It was also recommended that Mandate Areas engage the media for coverage on the teaching and implementation of the Code of conduct. All mandate areas are also expected to working to develop a government-wide monitoring and evaluation framework.

The 2 year strategic Work Plan code named “Strengthening Liberia’s Democratic Stability, Peace and Transformation” plans to:

- Measure progress against strategic objectives;
- Work with focal persons to come up with quarterly reports to support data collection.
- Implement key activities to be supported/accompanied by indicators, outcomes, assumptions and key risks;
- Will be result focused.

Communications Strategy Presentation

A robust Communication strategy was presented at the retreat. The strategy included, among other things, a proposal **for the Commission to initiate a weekly 30 minute radio program on ELBC** to showcase GC’s policy recommendations and strategy implementation works; erection of bill boards to showcase messages on the National Vision 2030, and the middle income country goal – 2030; use of secular music to spread key messages; engaging civil society organizations to serve as champions of the National Vision; collaborate with Talking Drums Studio, Legislature, MICAT, and other MACs to work toward assuring that Liberia reaches Middle Income status by 2030.



The Communications Unit has already put together a Brochure to showcase the works of the Commission and is working on enhancing media relations between the Commission and media institutions, as well as working on a proposal to solicit funding to financially support the proposed GC Radio program on ELBC.

Day two of the GC retreat covered presentations from Administration including the Grants and Finance Units highlighting, among other things, funded and non-funded projects of GC and sourcing for funding to address emerging issues/projects.

The immediate priorities of the Commission are making GC more relevant by positioning the Commission for maximum participation to address:

- a. Emerging issues relating to the Electoral process and 2017 elections;
- b. The transition process which follows the holding of the national elections come 2017 (transfer of power, and formation of the new government); and
- c. Propagating the Liberia rising National Vision 2030.

The Commission identified its on-going and/or outstanding programs to include the production of the first volume of the Liberian new history book by 2017: following-up on government’s pledge of \$1.1 million for the history project, and getting civil society to follow through on vision 2030 propagation; re-engaging the legislature to re-introduce the local government bill; fast tracking data collection process on compliance issues on the electoral process; developing an advocacy plan for implementation of recommendations emerging from the Annual Governance Report (AGR); fast tracking an “online and offline knowledge repository; and fast tracking plans for the establishment of a national monitoring and evaluation mechanism to monitor and evaluate governments service delivery to the people.

UNDP Consultant to GC Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey observed that the Commission's work will highly influence the context of the upcoming electoral process, and the transitional period that follows, and should therefore plan for "before, during and after the elections" taking into considerations the following issues - Political platforms and rallies, Civic and voters education, Campaign and elections financing, Elections security and Elections management, Voters' registration and trucking, Voter



expectation management, decline of women's participation in the electoral process and the need for advocacy on this, Political party registration, Political party mergers/alliances/coalitions, Electoral fraud and dispute resolution, Temporary employment, i.e. poll workers, Political party carpet crossing, Communications, Engagements of National Elections commission, Voting dates and multiple voter registrations, Elections monitoring and vote counting, the holding of a national Referendum; continue advocacy for implementation of Code of Conduct and the issue of the office of Ombudsman, elevating troublesome issues such as how courts can accelerate the disposition of electoral appeals, and conduct of a barometer survey before the pending 2017 elections on the electoral process.

Transitional issues that could impact GC's workload in 2017 include but not limited to Transition from peace to conflict, transfer of political power, and declaration and acceptance of election results. GC maintain its neutrality by being truly non-partisan, engaging key actors such as the National Elections Commission, political parties, the media, and civil society to ensure acceptance of election results. (GC's mandate makes the Commission the convening authority in such matters). Other Transitional issues could include democracy education, transitioning to a new political culture, transition from distrust to trust of electoral institutions, mobilization of the people to achieve desired results, and the need to heighten advocacy during campaign periods.

GC also plans to conduct risk analysis on the electoral process and transitioning of political power over the next two years. It is believed that donors, over the next two years might focus more on funding Liberia's 2017 elections, but **there was consensus that non -acceptance of the 2017 election results, a sharp drop in donor funding, and UNMIL's withdrawal from Liberia all pose the greatest risks.**

Internal Risks discussed at the retreat include fear of winner takes it all, new government throwing out Vision 2030, GC losing its convening power, and risk of losing institutional memory; while **external Risks** discussed touched on job insecurity within current Cabinet, upholding existing policies, and trucking of voters from bordering countries.

Gaps & Challenges of the Commission

The Commission identified a number of gaps/challenges which continue to undermine its full potentials. Key among them are funding gaps, technical support, and study and work tours to update skills.

Mainstreaming Natural Resource Governance in Liberia

A Liberian specialist in Natural Resource Governance Mr. Konah Karmo has identified a number of gaps within the current legal framework which need to be bridged in

order for Liberia to achieve what he calls “impact-driven resource governance process”. Mr. Karmo noted that “the current legal and certain fundamentals must evolve to allow inclusive dialogue and enhance consultations with citizens in the granting of concessions and other rights within the natural resource sector”.



Mr. Karmo’s remarks were part of his presentation at the Governance Commission’s April 7, 2016 Policy Dialogue on **Mainstreaming Natural Resource Governance: the need for effective, transparent and accountable Management of natural resources** held at the Bella Casa Hotel in Sinkor. Mr. Karmo, head of Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives (LEITI) Secretariat served as one of two Presenters at the Dialogue. He pointed out that while government has made commendable efforts to improve natural resource governance in Liberia, the “contradictions of relevant Liberian laws” pose a challenge to a unified approach to addressing effective governance process in the natural resource sector.

Mr. Karmo maintained that the lack of harmonization of relevant Liberian laws with sub-regional standards to address current issues of illicit cross border mining activities have resulted to loss of needed revenues, and deprivation of local communities of trade and commerce. He identified challenges to natural resource governance in Liberia to include:

“weak legal environment; weak or non-enforcement of existing laws, regulations, policies, and agreements; lack of citizens involvement in decision making process relative to allocation of rights within the natural resource sector, especially affected communities; absence of or failure to implement a proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism; and the lack of proper coordination among entities to present a common front to contending issues”.

In conclusion, Mr. Karmo put forth 7 recommendations to government including:

- a. That government should harmonize relevant Liberian laws taking into consideration regional standards to curb illicit cross-border activities/mining, smuggling of precious minerals;
- b. Review existing laws to remove contradictions and inconsistencies;
- c. Formulate legal framework on local content policy that will mainstream and institutionalize participation of Liberian citizens in investment and other trade opportunities in natural resource sector;
- d. Formulate a policy framework for the establishment and improvement of mechanisms for community representation at local level to discuss governance issues and articulates citizens engagement strategy;

- e. Undertake sustained awareness campaigns to promote better understanding of governance as it relates to natural resource management among communities, officials and partners;
- f. Review and revise current policy measures on accessing and managing social development funds in order to give greater stake to affected rural communities to identify, implement, and monitor projects to ensure equitable use of said funds provided by extractive investors;
- g. Leverage and build upon the platform of LEITI to sustain the inclusive engagement mechanism which brings diverse people and stakeholders together.

The Dialogue’s second presenter was another Natural Resource Governance specialist Dr. Ali Kaba. He spoke on **Natural Resource Governance: Opportunities and Challenges**.

Like Mr. Karmo, Dr. Kaba observed that Liberia’s natural resources and the policy formation around them are based on public assumptions and what he described as “short term objectives”. These assumptions include:



“If you can centralize our resources in the hands of government, these are things you can get from it. If you have oil in Nimba, you can take some of that money and provide services to people in Grand Kru. Those people that live near these resources don’t have the necessary capacity to efficiently manage and negotiate contracts therefore, to increase the effectiveness and to get more value, government should manage it”.

Dr. Kaba noted as challenges Liberia’s poor institutional arrangements, weak regulatory enforcement regime, poor profit sharing mechanism, political will, and corruption. He said Liberia needs to establish and empower government institutions to manage the mining and forestry sectors to adequately address demands/inquiries and benefits as they relate to these sectors. He mentioned the need for a well thought out structured framework to guide, regulate, outline, monitor and evaluate government’s responsibilities, revenue collections, and residents’ benefits to minerals found beneath communal and/or private/public land, concession agreements, and plantations related policies in Liberia.

Dr. Kaba stressed Liberia’s prowess in crafting good laws but reluctance in their implementation, therefore urging government to put in place proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that assure proper implementation, monitoring, and protection of our laws, country and people’s interests. He recommended the proper management of Liberia’s natural resources through the re-visitation and harmonization of our laws on natural resource management to engender transparency and integrity in the industry; and taking advantage of the reform process to develop policies that support and protect citizen’s rights, protection and participation in the process.

GC’s Chairman Dr. Amos Sawyer gave the vote of thanks paying particular honor to the African Development Bank for its continuous support to the Commission’s effort to providing space, bringing stakeholders together, and making it possible to hold such discussions and policy

dialogues on pertinent contentious issues. He equally thanked all discussants for their participation in the dialogue.

Grand Bassa County Senator Jonathan Kaipay and Representative Gabriel Smith both attended the policy Dialogue, commended GC for holding such debates and promised to serve as champions of policy recommendations coming out of the discussions.

GC Holds Policy Dialogue on “Enhancing Citizens’ Access to Services

The Governance Commission on April 27, 2016 hosted a one-day policy dialogue under the theme **“Enhancing Citizens’ Access to Government Services: Lessons from the Grand Bassa County Service Center.”** The policy dialogue’s venue was the Buchanan City Hall. Key stakeholders discussed broadening of a national strategy on emerging issues in decentralization and deconcentration implementation, and challenges and prospects for coordinating government’s service delivery at the County Service Centers (CSC).

The dialogue also discussed management and local coordination issues between the office of the Superintendent (on one hand) and the ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs) working in the county (on the other), lessons learned, as well as citizens’ demands and perception of service delivery at the CSC.

The Grand Bassa Service Center, launched in June 2015, has been a bastion of service delivery where citizens can access numerous government services including marriage certificates, land deed registration, business registration, birth certificates, adjudication of labor cases as well as psychosocial support to victims of domestic violence and other sexual and gender base violence related cases, all at one location. The service center has also increased government revenue in the eight months of its existence raising millions of Liberian dollars and over twenty nine thousand United States plus dollars (\$29, 000 +).

Through the CSC, numerous local businesses migrated from the informal to the formal sector in Grand Bassa County thus providing security and secured environment for local businesses to access loans and participate in microfinance programs. The CSC has also facilitated the documentation of numerous births through the issuance of birth certificates for children



between the ages 0 – 12 years old, among others.

Grand Bassa CSC Coordinator Mr. Sagacious Gardor was the policy dialogue’ Speaker. His presentation highlighted successes, constraints and quantitative analysis of ongoing services provided at the CSC and other services in demand at the services center. Mr. Gardor emphasized citizens turn out and appreciation of the services provided at the CSC as achievements. The County

Service Center (as at April 27, 2016) disclosed that it had provided the following services to the people:

Birth Certificate: 0- 12 years = 2,617; Married Certificate: Statutory - 35/ Traditional - 273; Psychosocial services - 865; Business Registration - 304; Letter of administration - 43; Land Deed- 66; Labor inspection - 43; Contractor license - 2; Labor cases - 60; Agreements – 11; Other legal instrument - 19;

Citizens' demands for additional services are said to be high and or yet to be deconcentrated or process completed in Grand Bassa County. MACs responsible to roll out such essential services are yet to complete arrangement for their full deconcentration and integration at the County Service Center. These are some of the highly demanded services yet to be rolled out completely:

- Issuance of Driver's License
- Issuance of License Plates
- Vehicle Registration
- Registration of transport related businesses
- Import & Export Declaration
- ECOWAS Biometric Identification Cards
- Adult Birth Certificates
- The Commerce Ministry signed Liberia Business Registration Form

MACs operating under the County Services Center lack equipment, adequate funding for daily operations of the center and utility vehicle to facilitate staff movement and/or transporting documents in support of Liberia Decentralization Support Program (LDSP), and the timely delivery of other logistics, all of which have the propensity to undermine effective service delivery.

Recommendations

To improve service delivery at the County Service Centers, Mr. Gardou put forth several recommendations including:

- a. increased awareness of the County Service Center in the Districts in both English and the local dialects;
- b. Prioritize community radio discussions;
- c. Distribution of posters in key transit areas and check points with high passenger traffic; public buildings in the districts, video clubs, and bill boards, bank buildings, school buildings, Attayi centers/shops, stadiums, restaurants, hotels, hospitals & clinics to enable people in Bassa County understand the objectives of the County Service Center.
- d. Operational funds be disbursed to facilitate maintenance and logistics of the County Service Center;
- e. Utility vehicle be provided County Service Centers to facilitate staff movement, transport documents and aid the daily logistical operational needs of the Center; and

- f. The Ministry of Transport is encouraged to deconcentrate its services. An increasing number of persons continue to make inquiries about the different services offered by the Ministry of Transport.

Levi Demah is the Superintendent of Grand Bassa County. He commended President Sirleaf for her numerous comments and commitment toward decentralization, and assured of county officials' determination to the development of their communities.



The coordination role of the superintendent over line ministries in the counties is becoming more prominent through the CSC as staffs of Ministries now regularly report to a coordinator who in turn reports to the Superintendent. This development makes it possible for the Superintendent to keep track of activities of the MACs in the county.

According to superintendent Demah, there is need for budgetary support to the CSC either through the central ministries or appropriations to the local authority for daily operational expenses and long term sustainability; human resource management at the county level and the supervisory role of the superintendent over local staffs of the ministries; and the need for massive awareness and sensitization of the citizens on the workings of the county service center.

Mr. Demah said despite all of the difficulties on the ground, the coordinative effort between the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs will go a long way in engaging the appropriate stakeholders to develop the necessary policy frameworks to address all policy concerns emanating from the Service Center, while lessons learned from Buchanan will guide the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other partners in the roll out of new service centers across the country.

In remarks, **Dr. Amos Sawyer** noted that Grand Bassa County Service Center was the pioneering



experience and has proven to be successful over the last several months, as confirmed by users. Dr. Sawyer observed that commendation regarding the successes of the County Service Center (*CSC) has redoubled government's effort at wanting similar centers built across the country before the end of Madam Sirleaf's leadership, and engendered County leaders' interests in the establishment of such centers in their localities.

"We at the GC as part of the group of institutions that are working to advance decentralization, we are not into the implementation business... Ours is working with all of the agencies and listening to the people and observing how they use the center".

Part of the County service center and the whole idea of coordinating decentralization are to build synergy that can make service delivery easily accessible to the people. Under the de-concentration phase of decentralization is the establishment of CSC across the country. So far,

four CSC have been established in four of the fifteen counties. The first was established in Buchanan Grand Bassa County followed by one in kakata Margibi County, and the third is in Gbarnga Bong County. The fourth CSC has been built in Sanniquellie Nimba County and is expected to be open soon. President Sirleaf has assured that before the end of her administration there will be at least one CSC in every county.

The passage of the Local government act is important to reinforce the effort to make decentralization process irreversible. Dr. Sawyer maintained that *“if we can pass the Local government Act then the provision of services at county level, the operating of county councils, the strengthening of the hands of the superintendent, all of these will become statutory, and not depend on the president, who can use his or her discretion.”*

Dr. Sawyer urged civil society to enlist the support of our Legislators so that before their term ends the Local Government Act would have been enacted into law. He said the Act will accelerate the development process including revenue sharing opportunities, and identify those things that the county can do to raise local revenues to boost economic development.



Deputy Internal Affairs Minister Augustus ZayZaY, and Chairman on House Committee on Governance Representative Larry Yanquoi attended the dialogue and promised to support government’s efforts to providing service delivery throughout the fifteen counties, and the passage of the Local Government Bill to support development initiatives in Liberia.

For his part, GC Commissioner with oversight responsibility over Political and Legal Reform Dr. Yarsuo Weh-Dorliae emphasized the need for increased awareness regarding decentralization, and the benefits of the Local Government Act, when passed into law.

“You didn’t elect your senator or representative to give you money or build bridges, you elected them to make the laws that will make bridge fixing permanent, so the president doesn’t have to do it because she wants to do it but because she has to do it”.



The policy dialogue brought together 70 national and local stakeholders including government officials, ordinary Liberians and representatives of the European Union, USAID, UNMIL and UNDP, and heads of civil society organizations in Grand Bassa County.