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## NPA Managing Director urges Women to Prioritize Education

Women of Liberia celebrated International Women's Day on March 8, 2016 with the usual pomp and pageantry. This year's program was held in Buchanan Grand Bassa County under **the national theme "Pledge for parity by 2030: Step it up for gender equity"**. The Global theme was **"Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality"**. Women from many of the government Ministries, Agencies and Commissions based in Monrovia attended the Buchanan program, which started with a parade through the principal streets of Buchanan.



N.P.A. Managing Director David Williams

The keynote speaker was National Port Authority (NPA) Managing Director David Williams. Mr. Williams urged women "to prioritize education as a catalyst to their growth and development", noting that the clarion call for gender parity in Liberia will be difficult to achieve if women lack the necessary qualification for leadership roles. Liberian women have been pushing a bill calling for at least 30% representation in national leadership positions but the bill is yet to be passed into law. Mr. Williams

supports the women agenda but wants them to be equipped and able to compete with their male counterparts for said positions. He was however quick to add that it was about time that Liberia ensures gender parity and equal participation in decision making activities in every sector of our society by 2030.

There are fears and mounting debates on the issue of gender equity/equality, discrimination, and women contribution to peace, security, and social and economic development across the world, though at varying levels. However, Mr. William maintained that those (nations) against the increase in women participation in all spheres of economic and political activities are shrinking because women continue to advance themselves and are contributing immensely to national growth and development. This comment runs true to the fact that research shows that women across the world contribute immensely to national development but their works are under-reported.

In keeping with the national theme for this year's celebration – **"Pledge for parity by 2030: Step it up for gender equity"** - Mr. Williams wants government to:

- a. Prioritize the passage of the Domestic Violence law;
- b. Enforce the Rape law which denies bail to rapists; and
- c. Guarantee, as a national priority, women's full participation in national leadership, the Economy and other state affairs.

According to him "In order to enhance efficiency and deliverability of the global "sustainable development goals" by 2030, gender equity must be a priority feature on the national agenda of every nation.

In a related development, the NPA Managing Director, David Williams has called on United Nations member countries to elect a female Secretary General to replace the current Ban Ki-Moon in 2018. This, he believes, will reflect gender parity at the global stage. Mr. Williams, described as a "He for She champion" also urged other countries around the world to make specific commitments to addressing challenges that restrict women and girls from reaching their full

potentials. Williams recalled that for decades now men have and continue to lead and direct activities toward achieving global peace, security and development yet incidents of war, murdering of innocent women and children by extremists have increased, while starvation in some places continue unabated.

Meanwhile Mr. Williams has emphasized the need for mechanisms to be put in place to meet the needs of both men and women, particularly “traditional” women living in difficult circumstances. He noted that to correct the gender imbalance and reverse the marginalization of women, it is the government’s responsibility to ensure that women, particularly traditional women are treated as future leaders, giving them similar opportunities and societal responsibilities as their male counterparts.

Concluding Williams paid homage to women that have contributed immensely to global peace, security and development including Liberia’s Angie Brooks – Randall(Liberia’s first female permanent representative to the United Nations (1954-1977) who later became the first woman to chair the UN General Assembly as president in 1970); Madam Hanna Abedou Bowen Jones (another Liberian permanent representative to the United Nations who served as Vice President to the UN General Assembly (1983-1984); Dr. Antoinette Sayeh, former Director for Africa of the International Monetary Fund); Madam Ruth Sando Perry, former Chair of one of Liberia’s Transitional Governments (under whose stewardship the first post war elections were held in 1997); and most significantly Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – Liberia and Africa’s first elected female president whose leadership brought a final end to years of civil conflicts and violence in Liberia.



Vice President J. Boakai

Also making remarks at this year’s International Women’s Day program was Vice **President Joseph Boakai**. Ambassador Boakai commended the role of women in our nation building process noting that they continue to demonstrate the highest level of leadership in our democratic governance. The Vice President urged Liberian men to help create the political and economic space that will ensure equity and mutual coexistence. Vice President Boakai, last year, declared his intention to contest the presidency come 2017 elections. In a

Statement read at the program, the women urged Ambassador Boakai and others contesting the Presidency to think about choosing a female running mate in the pending elections.

### **Liberian Women put forth Names of Vice Presidential Nominees**

The United Nations on May 8, 1977 passed a resolution to observe International Women Day in recognition of the numerous achievements and sacrifices women had and continue to make as custodians of global peace, justice, happiness and development. In observance of this year’s celebrations under the national theme “**Pledge for parity by 2030: Step it up for gender equity**”, the women of Liberia issued an official statement laying emphasis on their plight and recommending solutions to this age old problem. The statement was presented by human/women rights activist Madam Etweda Cooper.

The statement began by acknowledging the many achievements of women in the face of what they described as “violence, multiple, troublesome injustices and inhuman treatment” meted out to women across the country. According to the statement, Liberian women “*one way or the other, in one form or the other suffered and continue to suffer unequal rights, and deprivation of opportunity*”, and that the foundation or root cause for this gender imbalance or injustice emanates from limited understanding,



Liberia is signatory to a number of national and international instruments/policies, protocols and actions critical for the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. These include but not limited to Liberia’s revised rape Law (2006), the Inheritance Law (2006), the National gender Based Violence Plan of Action (2006 and 2011), the National Health Policy (2007), the policy on Girls Education, the HIV Strategy Plan of Action, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008 -2011), the convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women, CEDAW (2003) as well as the National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan. In addition, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has coordinated efforts to mainstream gender into all government Ministries, Agencies and Commissions, MACs.

Despite numerous challenges related to gender equity, Liberian women prefer to be seen and described as **victors not victims** of gender based violence, rape, denials, and excluded from leadership roles in a male dominated world. The Statement maintained that “*it is women who have now put in place the policy instruments needed for our activism. We have not been mute we have not been idle, we have examine our challenges and we have sought solutions. We will continue to serve as beacon for our children and we will continue to educate our sons and show our husbands that we will not accept the label of victims*”.

The women also see themselves as conquerors and promised to continue the fight for their rights, adding “*we have been deprived of equal opportunities for far too long and therefore the time for action is now*”. Liberian women therefore urged all compatriots to work toward developing national policies that empower and protect women and girls, and provide the much needed opportunities that assure development. “*We want to learn how to drive, maintain and repair the tractors that will plant our fields. We want to be the doctors, nurses, and counselors we need; we need teachers who mold the minds of the young in the right behavior in this country and show Africa and the world that a woman president is a formidable agent of transformative change*”.

Meanwhile Liberian women are themselves planning to feature highly in the 2017 presidential and general elections. Women Activist Etweda Cooper who read the statement at the International women Day Program disclosed that the women will be putting forward several names of those interested in vying for the Vice Presidency. These include but not limited to Senator Jewel Howard Taylor, Counselor Gloria Musu Scott, Julia Gono, and



Partial view of participants at the IWD celebration in Buchanan

Madam Ruth Caesar as possible choices for the vice presidency. In some quarters Etweda Cooper herself is being considered as a possible presidential or vice presidential candidate.

Observers noted that some of the women mentioned had planned to run for the Presidency but probably because Vice President Joseph Boakai who also plans to contest the presidency, was seated in the hall, the women therefore opted for the Vice presidency with expectation of being his running mate.

Also making remarks at this year's International Women Day program in Buchanan Grand Bassa County was the Minister of Gender, Children and Social protection Julia Duncan Cassell.



Minister Cassell noted the international women Day was put aside to specifically recognized the social, political, economic and social achievements of women on a global level. *“It is a day to celebrate the courage and determination of ordinary women who have played extraordinary roles in the history of their counties, countries, communities and society at large. In 1977, the United Nations Security Council adapted Resolution 34142 proclaiming March 8 of each Year as International Women Day”* in observance of women rights.

Women groups and organizations in observance of the International Women Day reflected on women's struggle for equality, justice, peace, and equal participation in national development programs and initiatives of their respective countries and communities. The Gender Ministry honored twenty (20) people in support of its *“He-for-She initiative”*. Minister Cassell pointed out that Liberian women have good reasons to celebrate the day because they have produced the first female elected President of not only Liberia but in Africa and will continue to produce more female leaders.

*“Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stood the test of times, ran twice and won twice; we are here to celebrate Mary Brownell, we are here to celebrate our women doctors, our women lawyers, our women in security, women teachers, women paramount chiefs, superintendents, and our women legislators”*. She said the women were also celebrating adolescent girls who say no to sexual abuse, want to go to school, and want a place in society.

At the same time Minister Cassell has urged women to exercise caution in Liberia's peace building, 2017 elections/political, and the decentralization processes, and enhance their participation in the education and security sectors. She also warned that people should not underestimate the strength of women.



Women groups marching in photo

The Global theme for 2016 International Women Day was **“Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality”**, whilst the national theme read **“Pledge for parity by 2030: Step it up for gender equity”**.

## Women Position Statement Delivered at IWD 2016

Fellow Liberians; As the world marks International Women's Day today March 8, 2016, we, the women of Liberia, celebrate our many achievements in the face of violence, multiple, troublesome, injustices, and inhumane treatment we have faced across the country.

Women all over Liberia, one way or the other, has in one form or the other suffered and continue to suffer from unequal rights, and deprivation of opportunity. The foundation or root cause for this gender imbalance or injustice emanates from limited understanding, interpretation and practice of



Madam Etweda Coope

culture, tradition and religion where women are understood to be less than men and therefore subject to men in a male dominated world. But Liberian women have made strides in the vacuum to overcome these challenges.

In December 2003, Liberia signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW. Liberia has accepted or adapted policies and actions critical for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. These include the revised Rape Law in 2006, the Inheritance Law of 2006, the National Gender Base Violence Plan of Action of 2006 and 2011, the National Health Policy (2007), the policy on Girls Education, the HIV Strategy Plan of Action, and the Policy on Poverty Reduction 2008 -2011, as well as the National Gender Policy and the National Action Plan. In addition, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has coordinated efforts to mainstream gender into all agencies and ministries. In 2010, Liberia was presented with the Millennium Development Goals 3 (three Award).

Fellow Liberians, distinguish citizens, I want to say to you that a Liberian woman is a conqueror, she is not a victim. Yes, we continue to experience direct consequences and suffered excessive abuses of all forms; we are victims of gender based violence, rape, denials, exclusion from primary roles in a male dominated world; but it is women who have put in place the policy instruments needed for our activism. We have not been mute, we have not been idle, we have examined our challenges and we have sought solutions. We will continue to serve as beacon for our children and we will continue to educate our sons and show our husbands that we will not accept the label of "victims". We, the women of Liberia, will continue to fight for our rights. We have been deprived of equal opportunity for too long, and cannot sit there any longer to watch us suffer.

Fellow Liberians, distinguish Ladies and gentlemen, we are aware that the policies we deem necessary to foster gender equality will require people to implement them. These policies will require Liberians, these policies will require women. We know what needs to be done and we intend to be in the lead to make sure it is done. We want to learn how to drive, maintain and repair the trackers that will plant our fields. We want to be the doctors, nurses, and counselors we need; we need teachers who would the minds of the young in the right behavior in this country, and show Africa and the world that a woman president is a formidable agent of transformative change.

We want to build the factories and industries that will move our country firmly into development. And now as we march firmly into 2017 for presidential and general elections, we the women of Liberia are prepared for the race. And to tell you how prepared we are, we are putting forward the names of Hon. Jewel Howard Taylor, Counselor Gloria Musu Scott, Madam Julia Gono and Hon Ruth Caesar as possible choices for "Vice Presidential candidate. Liberian women have refused to

be victims. On this International Women's Day, March 8, 2016, our statement as women is captured in this thought: "Liberian women are the leaders who will create the world we want to live in". Thank you

## **ILO and UN Women hold Training on Gender Mainstreaming in Italy**

The International Labor Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Women in November 2015 held a two-week training at the Gender Academy 2015 Exchange Event on Gender, work and development in Italy. The training ran from November 16 – 27, 2015 on the theme "**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development**". The World Conference held September 2015 in New York was under a similar theme: "**Sustainable Development Agenda 2030**".

The training exposed participants to advanced international knowledge and best practices in areas related to gender mainstreaming and development. It brought together 158 gender specialists and practitioners representing 71 countries, including those working in public and private institutions, Labor Ministries and other government institutions, Equal Opportunity Commissions and organizations, development agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities and research centers, private consultants, community mobilizers, UN staff, policy advisors and project managers.

The ILO/UN Women training provided a space to facilitate free discussions on a number of gender related concerns including equal opportunity, dignity, and decent jobs to bridge gender gaps and ensure transformative thinking and mindset of both men and women, as well as provide knowledge, techniques and tools that support changes in attitudes and behaviors. The Gender Academy training placed more emphasis on Gender Equality and empowerment of women through awareness raising, networking, skill development and impacting knowledge.

Although empowering females (women and girls) was a priority of the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), much more still needs to be done to bridge the gaps between the genders on empowerment related concerns.



Participants in the Forum Theater on Gender Based-Violence

Many Countries have signed international protocols and treaties committing to efforts that assure of respecting, perfecting and protecting women's rights, and wider prosperity issues, but are yet to give same the priority it deserves.

Governance Commission staff, Mrs. Youngor Johnson-Nah participated in the training and tells us that the training program also highlighted "**economic and social dimensions of gender equality**" including the right of all women to work and decent wage, safe working conditions, adequate pension scheme, health care, safe drinking water, rights to socio-economic status, geographic location, race or ethnicity.

On the issue of preventing and responding to Gender-based Violence at the Workplace, it was discussed that Gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces inequalities between women and men.

**At least one in three women around the world is estimated to have been coerced into sex, physically beaten and/or abused in her lifetime.**

For women aged 15 to 44 years, such violence is a major cause of disability and death. Gender-based violence not only causes pain and suffering but also devastates families, undermines workplace productivity, diminishes national competitiveness and stalls development. Although the majority of victims of sexual harassment are women, some groups of men are also vulnerable to such harassment. Violence against women was defined in 1993 by the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices.

Other abuses to women are non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking of women and forced prostitution; forced sterilization and forced abortion; Coercive or forced contraceptive use; Female infanticide and prenatal sex selection; women’s human rights violations in situations of armed conflict-particularly murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.

### **Gender Statistics and the Empowerment of Women**

In the wake of Liberia’s Middle Income goal come 2030, Gender Statistics should feature highly in order the gage level of empowerment, identify challenges/gaps, and/or needs to ensure gender parity. Lack of accurate statistics has the propensity to result to weak, under-resourced statistical systems, particularly in developing countries. However, **gaps in gender statistics also arise from failure to prioritize the collection of data.**

In 2013, a global review of gender statistics programs in 126 countries found that only 37 percent of them had a coordinating body for gender statistics at the national level whilst only 13 percent had a regular dedicated budget for the production for these data. Review of the Beijing Platform for Action found that besides technical and financial constraints, lack of political will and limited awareness of the importance of data collection on gender equality are critical barriers to progress.

### **CSOs, NGOs, and AEL issue Statement to Enhance Water and Sanitation Policy**

The Liberia CSOs Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Network in collaboration with the Liberia Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) Network, and the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia (AEL) has petitioned the Governance Commission to review all existing WASH policies, protocols, and related operations with the intent to formulate and/or establish new policies and protocol for the cohesive governance of the WASH sector in Liberia.

The WASH-Network team petition identified a number of concerns which they claimed need urgent attention including:

- a. an increase in the availability of safe drinking water for all citizens;
- b. An improved hygiene policy and practice:
- c. A better and coordinated approach toward assuring the availability and improvement of the WASH sector of Liberia.

The WASH-Network team observes that over 30% of the population of Liberia does not have access to safe drinking water, 83% lack safe sanitation facilities, 1.7 million people defecate in the open due to lack of latrine, and that less than 1% of the national budget is allotted for water, sanitation and hygiene in spite of huge social and economic problems caused by the lack of proper sanitation and hygiene.



WASH-Network team noted that the Liberian government had promised the people of this country improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation to be implemented through.

- The establishment of a National Water resource and Sanitation Board;
- the Issuance of Executive Order to establish a Water and Sanitation Commission by 2013;
- the allotment of 0.05% of the country GDP to Sanitation as agreed upon by the African Ministerial Conference on water in 2008;
- Upgrade the Community Services and Rural Development Program Department of the Ministry of Public Work to a bureau status by 2013;
- Increased Water and Sanitation budgets annually by 15% in real term; Disaggregate the structure of the budget line for water and sanitation;
- Establish a WASH sector pull funds mechanism before the end of 2013;
- Deliver Wash services as human development and human right issues;

Accepting the petition on behalf of the Governance Commission, Vice Chair Elizabeth Mulbah expressed thanks and appreciation for the effort made by the petitioners (WASH activists) and promised to convey the message to Chairman Amos Sawyer and the body of GC Commissioners. She noted that *“as a professional nurse, I am aware of the importance of water and also in the studies of science or biology we learn the percentage of water used by humans, and that without sufficient water, one can easily die”*. She commended the WASH team for dedicating the month of March to tour the country to talk about the importance of water,



Vice Chair Elizabeth Mulbah making remarks

its usage, sanitation and hygiene. *“We are told that you visited several communities including Peace Island where you demonstrated the practices of safe hygiene and the treatment of safe drinking water for our citizens. This action demonstrates the ways in which we can all be part of the solution”*.

Commissioner Mulbah also noted the need for communities to chlorinate their wells and hand pumps. *“If by any chance a member of your community uses a dirty or infected bucket or drawer in that well, that will render it unsafe and dangerous for your health and will make no difference to using water from the creek.”* Commissioner Mulbah assured that the team’s petition will be attended to.

The WASH-Net Work team petitioned and paraded the principal streets in Monrovia and counties capital displaying placards this in March 2016 in observance of a month-long World Water Day with Sit in Action and petitioning ceremonies. The day was first observed in 1993 when the United Nations General Assembly declared March 22 each year as World Day for Water. The day was first formally proposed in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Observance began in 1993 and has grown significantly ever since.