

Human Rights Defenders Of Liberia Embarks On A Process To Draft A National Human Rights Defenders Policy Document

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The session hall was very quiet as Human Rights Defenders from Nimba, Lofa and Grand Gedeh Counties divided into two separate sessions for two days each due to the COVID-19 health protocols but with one focus and goal gathered in Ganta, City Nimba County to brainstorm , share ideas and experiences as well as putting pen to paper aimed at drafting a policy document intended to protect themselves as they go about their work in their respective communities for the direct interest of the people.

The direct beneficiaries, Human Rights defenders of Liberia embarked on a campaign through a four day interactive and intensive session which started on February 23, 2022 and ended on February 26, 2022 to chart a new course which is expected to serve as a landmark history for the sector upon full completion.



According to the lead facilitator of the sessions and the Secretary General of the Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy platform of Liberia Adama Dempster, Human Rights issues are border on laws as such those who advocate for those issues also need laws including policy to protect them.

In his combine opening and closing statements at the two separate sessions, Mr . Dempster commended the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Liberia for the support to what he described as a meaningful initiative.



Adama Dempster , Lead Facilitator At One Of The Sessions

The exercise, Adama stated which is continuing until its finalization, is expected to capture a holistic approach focusing on risk experiences on Human Rights work in Liberia as well as instrument , documents and international protocols that protects Human Rights defenders including their ongoing challenges.

“The process of drafting this key Human Rights policy document is for ourselves as such we need to strategize well, bring our best to the table and put forth concrete ideas which will eventually be formulated into a practical policy document to protect us”, he encouraged his colleagues.

Speaking as the official organizer of the session was the United Nations Human Rights Officer at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Liberia Melvin Nyanway who represented his boss and underscore the need for a Human Rights policy document in Liberia.

“On behalf of my boss, the Country Director of the OHCHR Dr. Uchenna Emelonye, we are with you in this endeavor, put forth your best, share experiences as well as practical recommendations to protect you in doing your work “, he urged the Human Rights defenders.

The experienced and seasoned Human Rights activist pointed out that while they at OHCHR observe the process including providing their technical expertise in drafting the policy, they will be hopeful and happy to see a document that will be appreciative and welcoming by the Liberian government after the finalization from the actors themselves.



Melvin Nyanway Conducting One Of The Sessions

Melvin who also served as one of the facilitators of the session informs the participants about the work , role and importance of the United Nations office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights in Liberia including the Independent National Human Rights Commission of Liberia.

Representing the office of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights at the session was Kpana D. Watson who encouraged the participants to implement what they learn and to as well be an agent of change.

As for the participants especially Emmanuel Bangalie , National Program Manager of CHES-Liberia and Laura Bee Kiekpo , Executive Director of Women Empowerment forum of Liberia both highlighted the importance of the policy but stated the prolonged delay of the document.

“We have been in the vanguard over the period championing the cause to advocate and defend the rights of our people in a risky manner and form but with this policy formulation and completion, it will go a long way for us”, they added.

Both Emmanuel and Laura assured the gathering that upon the finalization of the policy , it will help further strengthen them and give them added motivation as well as energy to do their work void of fear, intimidation and harassment.

It can be recalled in 2015, the Liberian government signed the Human Rights defenders resolution but since then, the coming into force of the Human Rights defenders policy document has been lacking as such the completion of the draft policy will set a new record thereby bringing out what to be known in the coming days, weeks and months as the National Human Rights Defenders Policy of Liberia.



Some Of The Participants From Lofa and Grand Gedeh Counties Post For Photo

About sixty participants from host Nimba, Lofa and Grand Gedeh Counties actively form a part of the four days sessions with women playing a key role as well as men .



Participants From Nimba County

Meanwhile, the program officially organized by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is sponsor by the European Union under the spotlight initiative.

A five year program among other things is intended to counter violence against women and girls in Liberia.

At the same time, the Montserrado County component of the session is expected to take place in the first week of March, 2022.

According to research , Some countries in the world including Liberia do not provide protection measures to guarantee the personal security of Women Human Rights Defenders or if they do, they portray WHRDs as a vulnerable group requiring protection rather than as capable agents of change within their own rights.

Varieties of legislations directly impacting women, (be there laws influencing village economy and culture, or laws on marriages and divorce, or inheritance and custodial rights, etc.) are drafted sometimes with little or zero women participation.

This being so, especially in areas dealing with crucial human rights issues that border on violence against women and girls, maternity and child rights. Women's absence in drawing up, or helping to amend, such critical legislations complicates their eventual understanding and appreciation of such laws.

Additionally, it is pertinent to note that respect and support for the activities of human rights defenders contributes to the overall enjoyment of human rights.

In Liberia, capacity building of WHRDs is core to empowering them to play cardinal role in approaches to their protection and the protection of others including women and girls concurrently enabling them to know, claim and assert their rights.

In said regard, WHRDs in Liberia need the relevant tools to support their efforts to transform their communities, and to hold states and other powerful entities accountable under national and international human rights standards.

Consequently, it is in the interests of rights holders specifically women and girls where women human rights defenders have enhanced capacity to actively participate in their work; and to widen their involvement in advocacy for women and girls rights, drafting or amendment of national action plan, legislation and policies.

Accordingly, the most effective way of protecting WHRD is to empower them to protect themselves and protect other women and girls.

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