



SNAPSHOT

Women's Land Rights Task Force Established

LIBERIAN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY JOIN FORCES TO ENGAGE ON WOMEN'S PROPERTY RIGHTS ISSUES



Photo: Landesa

Liberia Women's Land Rights Task Force holds inception workshop.

Task force provides significant and detailed input on women's land rights to ongoing policymaking and future legal drafting processes.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Liberia's Land Commission, three and a half years into its five-year mandate, is working steadily towards finalizing a general land policy for the country. Among the many challenges confronting the Land Commission are a customary landscape and a governance framework that provide uneven protections for women. The existing framework is plagued by serious gaps and inconsistencies that frustrate the administrative and equity aims of the current laws. The Commission has expressed interest in effectively engaging on these women's property rights issues, and needs help in creating a strategy for doing so. It also has not yet adjusted its policy development process to embrace recommendations from an earlier women's land rights study performed under USAID's Land Policy and Institutional Support Project (LPIS). In order to assist the Land Commission in laying the groundwork for an equitable and effective governance framework for land, the Land Commission and LPIS have established a Women's Land Rights Task Force to engage on the issue of women's property rights, and to help to inform the Land Commission's efforts.

Last week, LPIS staff members from Landesa (Tetra Tech's gender consultant on LPIS) facilitated a 2-day inception workshop in Monrovia to launch this Women's Land Rights Task Force. The workshop was an important first step in creating and empowering a group of stakeholders to provide significant and detailed input on women's land rights to the ongoing policymaking and future legal drafting processes. Task Force members include representatives from government (Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Energy, Forestry Development Authority, National Land Commission, and others) and civil society (Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, Green Advocates, and Women Journalists of Liberia, for example). As gauged by both internal and external measures, the inception workshop was great success, and provided the needed clarity and institutionalization of the Task Force to serve as a solid foundation for the large task ahead.

At the workshop, members were briefed on the context for their engagement in the land policy reform process, were provided an overview of some of the most pressing issues for women's property rights, and discussed best practices for task force



Photo: Landesa

WLRTF members engage in discussions to strengthen women's property rights.



Photo: Landesa

Participants discuss the WLRTF work plan.



Photo: Landesa

As commitment to the task force is high, the WLRTF established multiple sub-committees.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

inception and formation. Members created a governing charter and a work plan, which include tasks that would send task force members to regional consultations on the draft land policy, generate a formal summary of women-related technical recommendations for the Land Commission, and, importantly, establish a "Land Desk" within the Ministry of Gender. The Land Desk would serve as a technical resource for both the ministry and the Task Force, contributing to the detailed legal and regulatory development process that will follow adoption of the broader land policy. By institutionalizing the Land Desk within the Ministry of Gender, important buy-in is obtained, and the impact of the Task Force will be sustained over the longer-term. This will permit the Task Force to not only inform the policy process, but also to help shape the legislative and administrative reforms that are to follow.

It is through focused attention to the nuanced details surrounding women's land rights that they can effectively be addressed by the forthcoming legal regime. All twenty-one of the highly-energized Task Force members are committed to women's land rights and to working to provide input and support throughout the policy-making, legal reform, and implementation process. Towards this end, the Task Force established sub-committees to work through the most pressing issues, and to facilitate effective engagement with the Land Commission and other key stakeholders. Initial committees include a Technical Working Group to lead the drafting of legal and policy recommendations; an Introductory Committee to forge a working relationship with the Land Commission; a Land Desk Coordinating Committee that will coordinate the recruitment and hiring of the Land Desk; and a committee to coordinate Task Force member delegates to the Land Commission's regional consultations. Through the creation of these committees, institutional protocols, and an ambitious work plan, the Inception Workshop provided a strong first step to ensuring that the Task Force can provide well-informed input in a timely, productive, and cost-effective way.

The technical issues surrounding women's property rights in Liberia are many, and there are no quick solutions for the problems that they pose. Sustaining support will be critical to the Task Force's survival and impact. Having successfully launched this exciting and important body, realizing the Task Force's potential for supporting the equity and efficiency aims of the Land Commission will require modest but sustained support. Task Force members are energized and eager to play their potentially important role in the Land Commission's participatory process: the strong momentum generated through the inception activities must be sustained. Landesa is already in the process of seeking private foundation funding for ongoing support of the Task Force, and the resulting public-private partnership to support this critical work is realistic and likely.