



Report: Rural Women Land Rights Day

Gompa city, Nimba county

September 25, 2024

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Cover: Women networking at the Rural Women Land Rights Day. Photo: Snotee Sorbor

Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
DEN-L	Development Education Network-Liberia
FCI	Foundation for Community Initiative
LMA	Land Management Activity
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LNRS	Liberia National Rural Women Structure
MAP Platform	Multi Actor Platform for Land Governance and Responsible Agriculture Investments
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection
NARDA	New African Research and Development Agency
PwD	People with Disabilities
RWLRD	Rural Women's Land Rights Day
RWLRC	Rural Women's Land Rights Conferences
SESDev	Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WONGOSOL	Women Non-Governmental Organization Secretariat of Liberia

Introduction

Rural Women’s Land Rights Day (RWLRD) was held on September 25, 2024, in GOMPA City, Nimba County, as part of the second national land conference. The event aimed to promote women’s land rights following the 2018 Land Rights Act and assessed progress and challenges to rural women’s land rights. Participants included government officials, donors, civil society, and rural women across Liberia.

The event discussed the Alternative Dispute Resolution, access to credit for female landowners, and the need for more substantial financial support from the government for land reform. This report highlights the outcomes of the RWLRD.

The views expressed are those of the participants, not the organizers or funders.



Registration of participants at the RWLRD. Photo: Snotee Sorboh

Executive Summary

Rural Women’s Land Rights Day (RWLRD) was held in GOMPA City, Nimba County, on September 25, 2024, as part of the National Land Conference. The event reviewed gains toward rural women’s land rights in line with Liberia’s 2018 Land Rights Act. It recorded 285 participants from the government, civil society, donor community, and rural women across Liberia.

Representatives of government, donors, and private sector actors reaffirmed their commitment to gender-responsive policies to ensure rural women benefit from the Land Rights Act.

The RWLRD event featured solidarity messages from various national and international actors:



Cross section of women attending the RWLRD. Photo: Snotee Sorboh

Deputy Minister for Gender

Called for actions that ensure women’s access to land, emphasizing their vital role in economic decisions and its connection to food security.

Hon. Richard N. Koon

Emphasized the need for legislation to support the 2018 Land Rights Act and the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

H.E. Gerald Considine

Stressed the need for community engagement and legal compliance in land ownership, reaffirming Ireland’s support for women’s empowerment.

H.E. Kerstin Jonsson Cisse

Highlighted the importance of land for sustainability and encouraged continuous momentum for women’s land rights.

Ingrid Udden Sievert

Emphasized human rights and gender equality, proposing an agricultural bank for rural women and advocating for collaboration.

Anna Scheiber

Highlighted the support for Multi-Actor Platforms on Land Governance and the need for inclusive decision-making.

Erin Star Hughes

Reaffirmed support for rural women’s land rights and called for solidarity and empowerment efforts.

Patrick Kipalu

Highlighted the need to empower rural women facing systemic challenges, including discriminatory norms and limited financial opportunities.

Recommendations

The recommendations below aim to create a holistic framework for advancing rural women's land rights, fostering inclusive development, and ensuring that the objectives of the 2018 Land Rights Act are fully realized.

These recommendations include:

1. Policy and Legal Reforms

Strengthen enforcing the 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA) to eliminate gender-based discrimination and clarify land dispute resolution processes.

Develop amendments to the Gender Integrated Strategy and Customary Land Rights provisions to enhance protections for rural women and People with Disabilities (PwDs).

Finalize and implement the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Act to simplify legal processes and ensure efficiency in community-level land conflict resolution mechanisms.

2. Institutional Strengthening

Allocate increased budgetary support to the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) to decentralize its operations, particularly the Gender Desk, across all counties.

Enhance the capacity of local LLA offices to validate customary land formalization and expedite deed issuance processes.

Promote a synchronized, automated platform for registering and tracking land disputes, ensuring efficient resolution mechanisms.

3. Financial and Resource Support

Establish tailored financial products and services to support rural women's economic empower-

ment, including grants and low-interest loans.

Encourage the creation of an Agricultural Bank to provide accessible loans using land as collateral and support women's farming initiatives.

Expand initiatives like the Ministry of Agriculture's program that covers 70% of capital investments for smallholder farmers, enabling broader access for rural women.

4. Community Engagement and Awareness

Conduct extensive awareness campaigns to educate communities on the LRA, women's rights to land, and ADR processes.

Increase training for community-based legal aid providers focusing on gender-responsive services.

Promote inclusive decision-making processes by empowering women, youth, and PwDs to participate actively in land governance and administration.

5. Collaboration and Networking

Form a National Coalition with clear objectives and an actionable roadmap to advocate for rural women's land rights.

Strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, and donors, to build synergies for achieving rural women's land rights.

Create regional and local structures for ongoing dialogue, monitoring, and evaluation of land rights initiatives.

6. Cultural and Social Advocacy

Engage traditional and religious leaders to challenge and reform discriminatory norms and practices that hinder women’s access to land.

Promote men’s involvement as allies in advancing women’s land rights and supporting equitable land governance.

7. Economic Empowerment and Social Capital

Encourage the formation of women’s cooperatives to pool resources, share knowledge, and engage in collective land-use projects.

Leverage social capital to access credit, technology, and support for sustainable land utilization, including agricultural and entrepreneurial activities.

8. Data Collection and Monitoring

Conduct national surveys to quantify progress on women’s land rights, including the number of communities with formalized customary land ownership.

Develop indicators to measure the socio-economic impact of land rights on rural women, youth, and People with Disabilities to ensure accountability and improvement.



*A rural woman raises her voice and speaks on issues that affect women’s land rights at the community level. She outlines changes since the intervention of land rights actors.
Photo: Snotee Sorboh*

Background

The 2018 Land Rights Act was established with several objectives, including combating the marginalization of customary communities, rural women, and youth about land ownership, management, and governance. Since 2020, ForumCiv has taken the lead in organizing the National Rural Women's Land Rights Conferences (RWLRC). The conferences held in 2022 and 2023 were co-hosted by ForumCiv Liberia and the Multi Actor Platform for Land Governance and Responsible Agriculture Investments (MAP Platform).

Key contributors to these events included various organizations such as Action Aid Liberia, Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L), Foundation for Community Initiative (FCI), Land Management Activity (LMA), LANDESA, the National Rural Women Structure (LNRS), New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), Tenure Facility, FCI, Parley Liberia and Sustainable Development Institute (SDI).

The conferences held in recent years have brought together a wide range of participants from various sectors, including representatives from the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), and the Ministry of Justice. Attendees also included traditional and religious leaders, financial institutions, academic representatives, and numerous civil society organizations from all 15 counties of Liberia. The gatherings were further complemented by the presence of members from the donor community, including the European Union, the Irish and Swedish Embassies, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The resolutions from the 2020 and 2021 conferences emphasized the need for increased budgetary support for the LLA and called for decen-

tralizing its Gender Desk across all 15 counties. Additionally, participants urged the Government of Liberia to create opportunities for

rural women to utilize land for productive purposes effectively. The conferences in 2022 and 2023 acknowledged the necessity of separating traditional leaders from the management and governance of customary land. There was also a significant focus on establishing a national framework for Alternative Dispute Resolution and promoting the development of context-sensitive social enterprise.

As a result of these initiatives, numerous success stories have emerged, highlighting women who have leveraged services from the RWLRC and interventions from various stakeholders to secure ownership of customary land. Many partners have adapted their projects to facilitate opportunities for women landowners to engage in social enterprises while the LLA continues efforts to strengthen its decentralization process.

In 2024, a dedicated day for Rural Women's Land Rights was held at the 2nd National Land Conference instead of a separate conference. This initiative was funded by ForumCiv, SESDev, and Parley Liberia, with additional support from various organizations, including WONGOSOL, UN Women, FCI, LANDESA, ActionAid Liberia, and the Ministry of Agriculture's Gender Unit.

Logic of 2024 Rural Women's Land Rights Day

A new government has taken charge in Liberia. Although rural women have made strides in securing land rights and are increasing their involvement in managing customary lands, they still face considerable challenges. These

challenges are mainly structural and must be addressed so that rural women can fully reap the benefits of their rights under the 2018 Land Rights Act. If these issues remain unaddressed, the potential of this legislation will remain unrealized, leaving many women's rights unfulfilled.

Some of the challenges that continue to impede rural women's land rights are:

- a. Discriminatory traditional norms and practices
- b. Lack of support and the cost of addressing land disputes
- c. Limited opportunities to utilize land that has been acquired
- d. Lack of access to contextualized financial products and services
- e. Absence of a synchronized automatic platform to register land disputes
- f. Weak coordination between actors that support rural women's land rights

The 2nd Land Conference offers a vital opportunity for rural women and their partners to come together and share their stories and experiences since the law was enacted. It is a chance to engage with the new administration and jumpstart advocacy on various themes that have emerged from past editions of the RWLRC. This platform will also help forge new partnerships and encourage collaboration with key stakeholders, which are crucial for advancing land rights for rural women.

Objective

The new administration is engaged in and aware of the status of rural women's land rights, and a new platform has been formed to coordinate and strengthen advocacy for them.

Specific objective

- To highlight the achievements and challenges toward rural women's land rights
- Form a national coalition devoted to promoting and ensuring advocacy on rural women's land rights.
- Present a resolution for achieving rural women's land rights to key stakeholders
- Government and key stakeholders' express commitment to achieving land rights for rural women

Methodology

The Rural Women's Land Rights Day showcased presentations from various stakeholders dedicated to advancing rural women's rights. A particular session was devoted to amplifying the voices of rural women who have successfully leveraged the law to their advantage.

Panel discussions featured diverse participants, including government, private sector, academia, financial institutions, and civil society representatives. Key topics addressed included using the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism to settle land disputes, improving access to credit for rural women's productive land use, and fostering stronger collaboration among key players committed to supporting women's land rights. The event also included solidarity messages from both national and international partners.

Although Rural Women's Land Rights Day did not result in a formal resolution, the issues raised during the event are being integrated into the Second National Land Conference resolutions. Nonetheless, this report includes specific recommendations from the RWLRD.

Synopsis of solidarity messages

The RWLRD included several solidarity messages from national and international actors. The day featured a keynote message from the main speaker of the day. Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, the Deputy Minister for Gender indicated that the RWLRD should be seen as a “Call to action” for the government to make women’s access to land a reality. She said, “Government should take ownership of these different things, and women should have unhindered access to land. “Let us all try to remove obstacles together from the path of women.”

For us, this is a call to action.



Laura Golakeh

Deputy Minister of Gender

She emphasized that women play a crucial role in making economic decisions within families but are still marginalized in terms of access to land. The minister connected food security with the issue of access to land. The minister concluded by pleading with her colleagues in government to give women access, empowerment, and resources to make a difference. She stressed that each sector of Government has a role to play and that together, a strengthened partnership can achieve women’s land rights.

Hon. Richard N. Koon, Representative for District # 2 Montserrado County, said the legislature acts based on information. He indicated that his presence at the event helped him understand women’s challenges and referred to himself as a “He for she” advocate promoting women’s

participation. The lawmakers called for legislative actions to ensure the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) successfully implements the 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA). He further emphasized that Persons living with Disabilities (PWD, should not be denied their rights.

In summary, H. E. Amb Gerald Considine of the Republic of Ireland to Liberia said communities often lack meaningful engagement and “free prior informed consent” in land ownership negotiations, leading to deprivation of natural resources and various issues. He called for collective action to address these issues with women’s participation, ensuring oversight, transparency, and compliance with legal frameworks for human rights and community benefit. The Ambassador reaffirmed Ireland’s support for Liberia’s empowerment of women and gender equality.

In a message of solidarity, H.E. Kerstin Jonsson Cisse, Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden near Monrovia, emphasized the importance of women’s right to own and use land. He stressed that land is essential for sustainability and highlighted why Sweden supports Liberia. “Access to land is crucial, and we acknowledge the significance of implementing the Land

Rights Act.” The Swedish diplomat encouraged participants to use the conference as an opportunity to maintain the momentum for women’s land rights.

Ingrid Udden Sievert, Deputy Secretary General of ForumCiv, reminded participants that the gathering was not only a celebration but also an opportunity to promote human rights and gender equality. She emphasized that the space was

intended for women to share their stories and for stakeholders to celebrate progress in advancing land rights for rural women. Stenvinkel emphasized the need for stakeholders to recognize and celebrate achievements while also acknowledging the challenges of limited access and related issues. She proposed the establishment of an agricultural bank to help rural women access loans using the value of their lands. Stenvinkel recommended collaboration as the strongest tool for stakeholders in implementing the LRA.

Anna Scheiber, the Africa Coordinator for Land for Life (Lfl) in Germany, highlighted Lfl's support of Multi-Actor Platforms on Land Governance in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso. She emphasized the importance of involving relevant actors in decision-making processes related to the land they live on and depend on for their livelihoods. Specifically, she stressed the need to empower and include groups such as rural women, people with disabilities, youth, and other marginalized groups in these discussions. The Lfl Africa Coordinator shared her positive experience from the 2022 National Land Conference in Liberia, where the active participation of many strong women inspired her. She emphasized the importance of continuous follow-up and exchange after such conferences to ensure that commitments are upheld. Anna expressed her hope that the Multi-Actor Platforms can provide a space for ongoing inclusive dialogue and mutual accountability. She thanked everyone for their participation and wished for a successful and lively debate at the conference.

Erin Star Hughes, Chief of Party, USAID's Land Management Activity (LMA/ECODIT), emphasized the importance of women's land rights on both personal and professional levels. She highlighted the critical issue of rural women's land rights in Liberia, calling for solidarity with rural women and offering support for their efforts to secure land rights in Liberia. She highlighted the importance of solidarity among rural women and reaffirmed LMA's support for securing land rights for women in Liberia.

Patrick Kipalu, Africa Program Director for the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) addressed the second national country conference in Liberia on advancing women's rights to land. He acknowledged the importance of empowering rural women, emphasizing land as more than a resource—life, security, and a foundation for future generations. Despite their central role in communities, rural women face systemic challenges, including discriminatory norms, complex land tenure systems, and limited financial opportunities.

Land is more than a resource. Land is life, security, and a foundation for future generations.



Patrick Kipalu

Africa Program Director for the Rights and Resources Initiative

Kipalu highlighted RRI's global efforts, mainly through the Women in Global South Alliance for Tenure and Climate, launched during COP27. This alliance unites women's rights organizations from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to advocate for accessible climate finance and prioritize women's justice agendas. Its mission extends to influencing governments and international entities to implement reforms that directly benefit women and Afro-descendant communities.

He urged collective action to dismantle barriers, foster financial inclusion tailored to rural women's needs, and enhance stakeholder coordination. Kipalu stressed the importance of platforms like the conference for rural women to share their experiences, advocate for justice, and drive systemic change. He called for partnerships across governments, traditional leaders, and civil society to create tangible reforms and ensure women's rights translate into meaningful life improvements.

Keynote speaker



Keynote speaker Cllr. Mmonbeydo N. Joah observes the discussion with keen interest. Photo: Snotee Sorboh

The keynote speaker, Cllr. Mmonbeydo Joah, spoke about the land rights of women in Liberia. She pointed out that Liberia's legal system is a blend of Indigenous African customary practices and Anglo-American laws, with the latter often taking precedence. This dominance has contributed to long-standing inequalities. She further indicated that the establishment of Liberia by formerly enslaved Africans involved complex land negotiations with indigenous chiefs, resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts. She emphasized that initially, private ownership was recognized only forty miles from the coast. Traditional customs prevailed beyond forty miles from the coast and in the interior. Over time, the government acknowledged these customs through regulations and constitutional provisions.

Cllr. Joah quickly pointed out that women's land rights have been historically limited. They were not allowed to vote until 1946; even then, only

property owners could vote. The 1986 Constitution and the 2018 Land Rights Act aimed to rectify some of these issues, but socio-cultural norms still hinder women's access to land and justice. She outlined some of the key challenges that hinder women's land rights:

1. Property rights in presumptive marriages or relationships.
2. Rights of women to property in customary or statutory marriages

Notwithstanding, the keynote speaker proffered key recommendations to enable rural women to own land. Cllr. Joah emphasizes the effectiveness of the Peace Hut model and other Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms in Liberia. She highlighted several key points for improving ADR and women's land rights:

1. ADR Policy: Implement and promote ADR to simplify legal processes and reduce costs.
2. Customary and Statutory Law Interface: Clarify the interaction between customary and statutory laws.
3. Women's Land Rights: Reform legal frameworks to eliminate gender-based discrimination and clarify land dispute enforcement.
4. Jurisdictional Integration: Recognize local customary land governance bodies and ensure their resolutions align with anti-discrimination laws.
5. Gender-Responsive ADR Policies: Support and implement policies that address women's needs in customary settings.

6. Government-Supported ADR: Promote accessible ADR programs for community-level land dispute resolution.
7. Increase ADR Practitioners: Expand the number of ADR practitioners, ensuring gender-equitable representation.
8. Gender-Responsive Dispute Resolution: Integrate gender-responsive mechanisms within customary land recognition processes.
9. Awareness and Education: Raise awareness and educate communities about women's land rights laws.
10. Community-Based Legal Aid: Establish gender-responsive legal aid providers.

In conclusion, Cllr Joah said that securing women's land rights is essential for justice and sustainable development, noting that while the 2018 Land Rights Act is a foundation, more work is needed to address historical and systemic barriers.

Panel Discussions

Panel discussion one

The RWLRD had a total of two-panel discussions. The key topic for the first discussion was:

“Reversing challenges and strengthening the effectiveness of Alternative Dispute Resolution in support of Rural Women, youth, and People living with Disability Land Rights.”

During the discussion, the first speaker, Olivia David, Gender Coordinator at the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), spoke on the sub-topic “Assessing the Effectiveness of Laws and Policies in Promoting Gender Equality and Rural Women's Rights.” In a five-minute discussion, Miss David emphasized the critical role of land for survival. However, she was quick to point out the challenges women, most particularly persons with disabilities (PWDs), face in accessing and owning land. She cited specific sections of the Land Rights Acts, such as Articles 1, 12, and 22, highlighting women's land ownership rights. Additionally, she mentioned that the Gender Integrated Act and Customary Land Rights require amendments. These amendments could increase rural women's and PwD's land rights. Miss David pointed out that communities have the right to a 5% undiluted share of customary land. Regard-

ing the distribution of a husband's property, the law states that women are entitled to 30% of their husband's estate. Regardless of the number of windows, they will collectively share that 30%.

Mr. Goba Anderson from the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Unit at the Ministry of Justice delivered a presentation on “Enforcing Land Rights for Rural Women via Alternative Dispute Resolution.” He emphasized the strategic importance of land ownership and management while highlighting the significance of the conference.

Mr. Anderson provided a historical overview of the Land Commission, which later evolved into the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), and discussed the role of the National Conference. He noted that land conflicts were traditionally resolved through Statutory and Customary Systems of Justice. The government tested the ADR process for four years and found it to be effective.

He outlined the four primary goals of the ADR and explained that, due to the complexities involved in resolving land conflicts through the LLA, customary, and legal systems, the government has developed a Draft ADR Act.



A rural woman from Bomi County speaks about the challenges people with disabilities, especially women, face in accessing and owning land. Photo: Snotee Sorboh

To demonstrate the practical application of ADR, two community leaders from ForumCiv and the Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev) shared their experiences. Chief Mary Larteh, former Paramount Chief of Jorquelleh Chiefdom, highlighted that ADR has been instrumental in achieving peace within her community. She emphasized that ADR is valuable for ensuring women's inclusion in land matters. Chief Morie Varforay, Town Chief of Ducorgboundo in Vahun District, Lofa County, expressed that the ADR training has given them hope for achieving and maintaining peace at the community level. He proudly mentioned that the town has acquired seventeen certificates through the ADR method. Chief Varforay also noted that men benefit more when they support women in utilizing ADR.

Panel discussions two

The second panel discussion focused on **“Enhancing Land Ownership and Utilization for Rural Women, Youth, and People Living with Disabilities through Social Capital Investments.”** The objective was to address the challenges rural women face in accessing capital to invest in land they have acquired. The discussions highlighted how social capital can be leveraged to obtain resources, favors, or information from networks and how it can enable groups to collaborate effectively toward achieving common goals.

A rural woman from Vahun, Lofa County, shared her experience on how social capital from SESDev helped her group acquire land and cultivate rice. From the proceeds of the rice, the group was able to purchase a rice mill, which now generates income and makes rice processing

less labor-intensive. She further explained that working in a group has been effective and free of challenges so far. She encouraged other women's groups to engage in social capital investment and work hard for sustainable results.

Esther Carngbe, standing in for Dr. Cheryl Williams of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), spoke on the topic: **“Role of government and policymakers in addressing challenges relating to credit, technology, and inputs.”** Miss Carngbe highlighted the ministry's efforts to support farmers across Liberia. She explained that the MOA has decentralized its operations across all fifteen counties of Liberia. Unlike loans, the ministry provides grants to smallholder farmers. Under these grants, the MOA covers 70% of the capital investment, while the farmers or group contribute the remaining 30%.

Ms. Carngbe informed the audience that the MOA supplies all farming equipment and inputs specified in an individual's proposal. The farmers' 30% contribution can include local materials and labor. She also mentioned that the MOA guides individuals or groups in developing proposals to access these grants.

Additionally, rural women are encouraged to form groups and secure land ownership to qualify for these grants. This initiative is part of the Ministry of Agriculture's strategy to boost food crop production and support smallholder farmers, particularly empowering rural women to take advantage of these opportunities.

Mr. Victor K. Boyah, representing Jonathan Balah, Programme Manager at BRAC Liberia, and Mr. Marvin Samuel, General Manager of ELILI Social Microfinance, Liberia, both addressed the sub-topic: “Challenges and Prospects for Addressing Limitations Surrounding Social Impact Investments.”

Mr. Boyah from BRAC Liberia discussed programs specifically designed for women and girls. He highlighted the first program, which empow-

ers adolescents through financial management education, encouraging them to engage in business and prepare for adulthood.

The second program, a loan initiative, has faced criticism from women due to high interest rates. Mr. Boyah explained that women are informed of the loan requirements before applying, but some disregard these terms and proceed to sign for the loans. He urged women to encourage their daughters to join the adolescent program, emphasizing its significant benefits.

Marvin introduced his organization, ELILI Social Microfinance, which focuses on supporting rural women. He informed participants that ELILI Liberia provides financial literacy training through its Human Institutional Capacity Development program, which offers loans to rural women without collateral. Currently, the program targets two counties, Lofa and Bong, and women from these counties are encouraged to apply for loans.



Mm Loretta Pope Kai chairperson of the Civil Society Council of Liberia leads a session during the RWLRD. Photo: Smotee Sorboh

Critical issues arising from the discussions

Women voices

The conference allocated one hour for rural women, youth, and People living with Disabilities (PwD) to share their experiences on land-related issues. Key points highlighted by the women included their participation in decision-making and governance of land, the impact of the 2018 Land Rights Act on women's involvement in land matters, and women's empowerment to utilize the land they acquire entirely. Another significant issue raised was using Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods to settle land-related disputes.

The support of traditional men in land administration was also emphasized. A woman from a community managed by the USAID Land Management Activity proudly recognized a man who

has been instrumental in helping women access land. Overall, the women expressed gratitude to various organizations for the education enabling them to take their rightful places in land governance and administration.

Rural youth

Youth from rural communities praised international and national organizations for making land governance more inclusive. As a result, many young people are now aware of the Land Rights Act (LRA) and their rights to own land. Key highlights from the youth's messages include their increased education and the extent to which they are now involved in land matters. However, they also urged these organizations to intensify their efforts to ensure even more youths are included in land governance.



Rural women speak out on land matters that affect them. Photo: Smotee Sorboh

People living with disability

A key part of the discussions among people living with disabilities highlighted the challenges and discrimination they often face. However, many emphasized that disability does not equate to inability. One individual shared her inspiring story of acquiring land and navigating the necessary documentation despite facing significant obstacles. This experience underscored the importance of resilience and determination.

The speaker urged the audience to commit to the 2030 Agenda's principle of "leaving no one behind," stressing the need for inclusivity in all initiatives. She elaborated on the struggles people with disabilities encounter and called upon all stakeholders to enhance their programming to ensure that it is more inclusive and supportive of this community.

Suggestions for collaboration

Concerning the RWLRD theme, Ms. Mina Beyan, Executive Director of the Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev), facilitated a session focused on "Strengthening Collaboration Among Stakeholders to Enhance Land Rights for Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities." During her presentation, Ms. Beyan highlighted the benefits of collaboration among local, national, and international actors in advocating for rural women's rights. One significant advantage of such cooperation is the increased economic power for women. Access to land enables women to engage more effectively in agricultural activities, which, in turn, boosts household income. Other benefits include improved food security, enhanced family health, greater gender equality, social justice, and achievements in legal and policy frameworks.

Ms. Beyan encouraged participants to share their ideas on collaborating effectively to strengthen the network and partner with local, national, and international stakeholders to ensure that all women in Liberia have access to land.

Suggestions for collaboration included starting at the regional and national levels and engaging at community, county, and other levels. It was agreed to continue discussions beyond the conference to determine whether new structures will be established for collaboration or if the existing structures will be strengthened for ongoing engagement, with a focus on specific outcomes.

Exhibitions and networking opportunities

The Rural Women's Land Day created a valuable platform for rural and urban women to connect and network. Participants had the chance to engage directly with key government officials through one-on-one advocacy sessions. The Gender Advocacy and Communication Coordinator of ForumCiv and several rural women held informal discussions with various lawmakers. The primary advocacy message was for the legislators to commit to collaborating with rural women on the day's recommendations. Another issue highlighted was to request lawmakers to push for increased budgetary allotment for the Liberia Land Authority. The women believe that the Land Rights Act can only be adequately implemented when funds are available to strengthen the work of the Liberia Land Authority. The lawmakers agreed to this request and pledged to remain accessible for further discussions beyond the conference. Rural women were also able to connect and form synergies for more engagement on land rights issues.

The RWLRD organized an exhibition to enhance rural women's access to capital for sustainable agricultural investments on their acquired land. This event allowed women to showcase income-generating activities that benefit their communities and support their rightful land claims. Five women's groups from Bomi, Lofa, and Nimba participated by displaying and selling locally produced items such as Liberian country cloth, liquid and powdered soap, coconut flakes, and fruits.

Conclusion

The conference successfully achieved its primary objective of promoting women's access to land. Key speakers emphasized the importance of land rights for women, with the Deputy Minister for Gender calling for government action and linking land access to food security. Hon. Richard N. Koon advocated for legislative support and inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

International speakers, including the ambassadors from Ireland and Sweden, stressed the need for community engagement and transparency in implementing Liberia's 2018 Land Rights Act. They highlighted women's land rights as crucial for sustainability and human rights. ForumCiv and Land for Life representatives also discussed collaboration and empowerment of marginalized groups, while USAID reaffirmed its commitment to supporting rural women's land rights.

Panel discussions at the RWLRD were interactive and focused on key issues related to women's rights. The first panel addressed resolving land conflicts involving women through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and how it has protected land rights for rural women in Liberia. The discussion also showed the government's efforts to draft an ADR Act. Two community leaders shared positive experiences with ADR, noting its role in promoting peace and women's inclusion in land matters. The discussion concluded by outlining the benefits for men when women have access to land.

The second-panel discussion suggested a multifaceted approach to empowering rural women and advancing economic stability in Liberia's agricultural sector. It underscored the importance of social capital investments in enhancing land ownership and economic opportunities for rural women, youth, and people with disabilities. By leveraging social networks, rural women can overcome capital access challenges.

Women, youth, and People living with disability used the platform to make their voices heard; the women recognized the progress made but called for more engagement to enable other rural women to learn their rights. The youth appreciated the space and inclusion in land governance, and PwD called for everyone to be included in achieving the 2030 agenda.

Participants dance to the popular female Liberian singer Miatta Fahnbulleh's song "Woman oh, this is your time". Photo: Snotee Sorboh



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