

Entity tackles environmental issues in Liberia



Sewage floods the streets of Monrovia with no remedy in sight

By Morris T. Koffa
Bowie, MD

A Washington, D.C.-based environmental organization with registered Monrovia branch conducted a one-day seminar on May 24, 2006 in Liberia. The Liberia Environmental Watch (LEW) collaborated with other institutions in hosting the workshop. Some of the organizations are the Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) Coalition of Liberia on the grounds of the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) in Monrovia.

The Liberian Senate and House of Representative Committees on Natural Resources; Lands, Mines, Energy and the Environment attended the workshop. Other attendees were the Liberia Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Ministries of Transportation, Agriculture, and Health; Monrovia City Corporation (MCC), the University of Liberia (UL), A.M. Zion University, including relevant private institutions and the public.

A typical view of present-day Monrovia



USA OFFICE

ADMINISTRATIVE HEADQUARTERS

4207 Plummers Promise Drive
Suite 100
Bowie, Maryland 20720
liberiaenvironmentalwatch.org
koffamkoffa@aol.com
240.417.2545 | 301.464.1664

Liberian Office

1000 Carey Street
Monrovia, Liberia
West Africa
011.231.770.8900

The environmental workshop was held to create, encourage and teach public awareness through educational capacity-building in communities and institutions. The *train the trainer to train* pilot project initiative was essential to deal with the environmental concerns in Liberia.

During the workshop, the LEW executive director, Morris



Mr. Morris T. Koffa, executive director, Liberia Environmental Watch (LEW), is seen here speaking at the recent seminar at Monrovia City Hall, Republic of Liberia

T. Koffa, acknowledged ENGO members Coalition for their efforts as they engage the public on vital issues affecting the environment. He described the convoluted environmental problems were a result of illicit mining activities, deforestation, and

erosion and sediment control, extinction of wildlife animal. He said the extinction of wildlife threatens ecotourism, adding that the lack of effective disposal of solid and liquid waste undermines the quality of health. As a result, the nation's water bodies, air ways -- including the entire sanitary and hygienic environment -- are compromised to the detriment of human lives and the destruction of the entire ecosystem.

Executive Director Koffa lamented that life expectancy in Liberia is at 48 years. According to the UN environmental assessment of Liberia in 2003, mortality rate is soaring among pregnant women, children younger than 5, and the elderly, who are victims of various environmental problems ranging from water and air-borne diseases.

The LEW boss said good health is a cardinal impetus to any level of human success, particularly in a nation whose social, economic and political attainment depends on its citizens' positive contribution through many attributes to the total development and reconstruction.

Conversely, he added, poor sanitary environment impacts the human health and impairs the human ability to function meaningfully to societal growth.

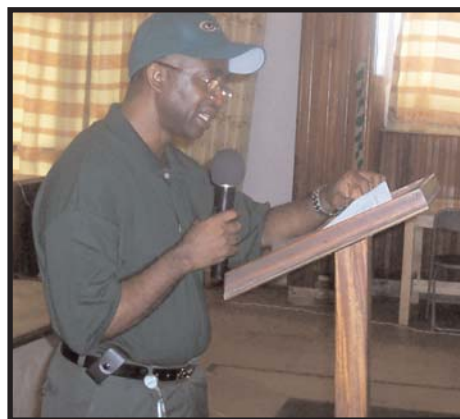
“Additionally, it becomes economically burdensome for government to treat sick citizens as a result of illnesses that are environmentally related, and provoke social and political discontent,” he maintained. Koffa also said

essentially, the negative consequences overshadow everything else.

“The further stressed that the fundamental steps for a sustainable environmental management and the way forward must begin with environmental educational capacity-building through community stewardship and environmental corps and clubs at learning institutions; these communities-based institutions can be the effective bearers of the message leading to sound environmental protection,” he continued.

By such application, Koffa explained, a broad-based community outreach will and can be achieved incrementally. He said orientating the minds toward understanding the danger posed versus the human health attained as a result of filthy environment is very critical to the campaign. Such empowerment to control its environment from a collective approach in a partnership driven approach can only yield result of filth-free communities, which ultimately contributes to good health and longevity.

For his part as program keynoter, the acting executive



Mr. Henry O. Williams, acting executive director, Liberian Environmental Protection Agency, delivers the keynote address at the seminar in Monrovia on May 24, 2006.

director of the Environmental Protection Agency, Henry O. Williams, described the environment as a mixture of the air we breathe, animals, cities, towns and villages that we live in. Williams also outlined some future plans of the

EPA, which include setting up a database, and a green house, among many others. He also said his agency is unable to function due to the lack of funding and workable logistics. He pleaded for national and international assistance to help his agency. The EPA acting boss praised LEW's initiating environmental educational awareness needed at this time in Liberia. He pledged his organization's support to help expand such awareness to other parts of the country.

The LEW executive director said that if the EPA in Liberia must be the lead agency to protecting the nation's environment inclusively as created by an act of legislature

in 1999, then it is constitutional and politically prudent and socially wise for the Liberian Government to take the agency seriously. He said the EPA has a responsibility to tackle Liberia's environmental crisis.

The executive director pledged LEW's support for Liberia's EPA, the ENGOS Coalition and to the unconditional environmental safety of Liberia. He also encouraged participants and appealed to the public to play their part in protecting the environment because the government cannot do it all. He argued that Liberians, too, have equal responsibility to protect their surroundings.

During the workshop participants were grouped into fours and tasked to draft important points to ease Liberia's environmental problems.

The Tasks:

1. Name or prioritize four national environmental problems
2. Discuss and recommend the way forward for the four environmental problems identified

Problems Identified:

- Legal framework of environmental laws and ordinances lack implementation and enforcement;
- Environmental health concerns
- Environmental education
- Contamination of water bodies and airways from poor sanitation
- Research

Below are topics discussed by the groups:

Group I

- Improper disposal of solid/liquid waste
- Inappropriate energy usage
- Lack of effective enforcement of our environmental laws/regulations
- Deforestation

These were the outcomes and way forward to address the various problems facing the environment and the community.

Group II

- Waste management and disposal
- Inadequate environmental awareness program
- Deforestation
- Erosion

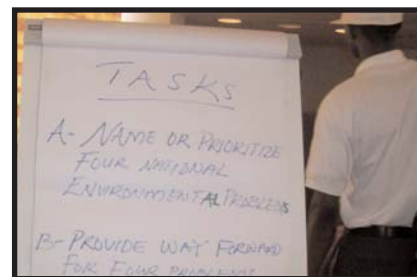
- Those administrative agencies responsible for energy promulgate laws and policies to regulate proper use of energy nationwide.
- Relevant government authorities should adequately enforce laws and regulations.
- Local community awareness and education should play an important role in the enforcement of laws and regulations.



Group I participants at the environmental seminar conducted at the Monrovia City Hall on May 24, 2006.

Group III

- Illegal forest activities
- Human settlement
- Lack of national environmental sensitization program
- Lack of sanitary landfill



- Local community's participation, such as community policing,

Group IV

- Waste management
- Pollution control
- Illicit mining
- Shifting cultivation



The following summary of the way forward as deliberated by the four focus groups:

- Agencies that are responsible for solid/liquid waste should ensure compliance and also put into place health educational programs and awareness in various Liberian communities.

should be featured highly in the implementation for enforcement of environmental laws and regulations

- That relevant agencies of government (Ministry of Agriculture, the FDA, etc.) regulate laws/policing solicit adherence to the implementations of the forestry laws and regulations of the Republic of Liberia.

Possible Solutions gathered for a way forward

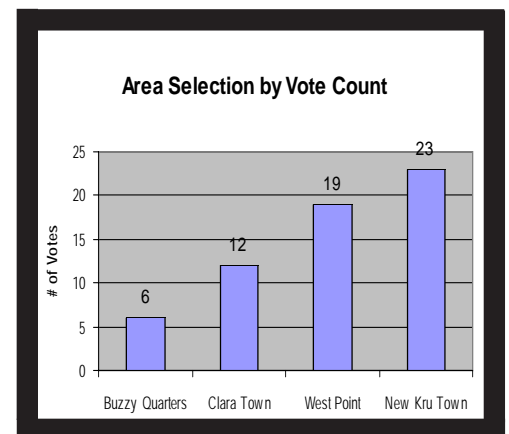
- Provide alternate to subsistence farmers/shifting cultivation
- Build local farm capacities to improve their method of crop production
- Encourage massive reforestation programmed to be encouraged
- Encourage mechanized farming
- Establish of communities sanitary landfill for all cities and major towns
- Embark and sustain national public educational awareness and advocacy
- Embark on intensive re/afforestation and agro forestry program
- Stop beach mining and develop coastal management programs

Recommendations

- Forestry/environmental laws should be reinforced by the national government by putting in place the proper mechanism to empower citizens and train them in forest protection and management

- Environmental educational awareness training through radio drama to include local dialects, workshops and public awareness programs in all communities
- The imposition of fines by local and national government against polluters; those caught violating forest and environmental laws should be punished by national government
- The need to study and incorporate environmental education in school curriculum to guarantee ongoing public awareness
- Perform Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Environment Assessment (EA), Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) and Post Environmental Audits (PEA)
- Establish environmental court for public redress
- Identify proper disposal sites - build sanitary landfill /incineration
- Regulate carbon monoxide from defective cars and machine /emission testing for all vehicles
- Industrial sites/facilities should be discouraged/relocated in proximity of residential areas, example: CEMENCO
- All regulations to control pollution should be enforced
- Communal and mechanized farming should be enforced by the government
- All laws regarding mining should be enforced to avoid illicit mining, diamond/gold

The participants selected New Kru Town and West Point from among the four environmentally sensitive communities for the forthcoming pilot projects.



Trash seen across from the Water Side Bridge in downtown Monrovia



Stores for vendors harbor massive trash downtown Monrovia



LEW's executive director, Morris Koffa, meets with Liberian journalists after the historic seminar on Liberia's environmental plight exacerbated by the 14-year-old.



Liberian Senate and House of Representative Committees on Natural Resources, Lands, Mines and Energy and the Environment attend LEW-held seminar