



Countries rich in natural resources are often those that suffer from extreme poverty. These resources should help reduce poverty and promote economic development. Yet large-scale oil, gas, and mining projects frequently contribute to pollution, conflict, and displacement of farmers from their fields (Oxfam America).

Many Poor Countries face this resource curse; will Liberia be exempted?

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THE ACTIVISTS

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF RHRAP

The Rural Human Rights Activists Programme (RHRAP) is a grassroots human rights and peace-building organization working in Liberia with emphasis on rural communities. RHRAP was established in December 1997 by group of activists who believe that the message of human rights should be spread into the rural areas so as to educate the rural inhabitants on issues of human rights and social development. RHRAP is non profitable, non governmental and non political organization.

For the past three years, RHRAP has worked with concessional communities residents, Government Ministries and Agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and other stakeholders to promote transparency and accountability in the extractive sector of Liberia including efforts to increase concessional communities resident's participation in the extractive process of natural resources.

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE EXTRACTIVE OIL SECTOR OF LIBERIA

This program "Promoting Accountability within the Extractive Oil Sector of Liberia," is an accountability initiatives aimed at strengthening accountability and transparency within the extractive oil sector of Liberia. The program seeks to facilitate citizens' access to information on the extractive oil sector in order to strengthen citizen's capacity to hold their leaders and mining companies accountable for improve democratic governance. Additionally, it contributes to managing the realistic and unrealistic expectations of citizens concerning the extractive oil sector thus helping to reduce tensions or violent conflict between and amongst actors (national government, citizens especially mining communities residents, and oil exploration companies).

The program seeks to promote two aspects of World Bank anticorruption tools, which are: The Beneficiary Assessment (BA) which is a qualitative method of investigating social deliverables; and the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which refers to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasized local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans. The Beneficiary Assessment (BA) involves systematic findings, and consultations with citizens to help them identify and design development activities, signal any potential constraint to their participation, and obtain feedbacks on reactions to companies' operations and government responsibilities to its citizens. The products of these activities are being disseminated through RHRAP's Quarterly Newsletter "The Activists" and distributed to the public on gratis; and that's why "The Activist" is very important to read for democratic consolidation.

KEEPING THE ACTIVISTS READERS ON TRACK

The Activists is an informative quarterly newsletter produced by RHRAP with current focus on the extractive oil sector, which is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary Liberia; and is being distributed on gratis. Technically, RHRAP's program seeks to promote an innovative and sustainable ways of collecting relevant and accurate data to bridge accountability, transparency and trust gaps; as well as support inclusive planning, responsive service delivery and the rule of law within the oil sector focusing on the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) and oil exploration companies in Liberia. During the first year which RHRAP considers as the first phase, RHRAP researched majority of NOCAL's Cooperate Social Responsibility (CRS) projects in both urban and rural communities and provided findings in its quarterly newsletter for the consumption of NGOs, INGOs, Embassies near Monrovia, schools, relevant Government Ministries and Agencies, and interested citizens living in project communities. The first edition (Vol. 1 No. 1, also briefly discussed various oil exploration companies and their backgrounds including contract signed with the Liberia Government. Please see RHRAP website (www.rhrapliberia.org).

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The research on NOCAL's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in urban and rural communities within the political subdivisions of Liberia and making the findings available for our readers still continues. The products of these findings are used by RHRAP to adequately engage relevant stakeholders including the Legislature, Government Ministries and Agencies, and communities to promote transparency and accountability. The program is adding community's participation in identifying and designing CSR projects that will meet the actual needs of communities, rather than being imposed as it is being done currently.

THE NIMBA AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS

In RHRAP's endeavor to ascertain the status and procedures of owning housing units constructed by the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL), in fulfillment of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the Liberian people, the Rural Human Rights Activists Programme on November 25, 2015 visited the provisional City of Sanniquiellie, Nimba County.

During the fact-finding trip, RHRAP team proceeded to the offices of the City Mayor of Sanniquiellie, Madam Mary N. Gonlepa where the Office Assistant in person of Mr. Peter Gbosaye was mandated to take the team to the site where the units are constructed. The location of the housing units is approximately a mile away from the City of Sanniquiellie. At the site, ten yellow modern buildings constructed by the National Housing Authority (NHA) with funding from NOCAL where observed to have an ill function water tower. According to information gathered from community residents, the community residents did not participate in the identification and the implementation of the housing units project. Additionally, community residents were never given any awareness about the criteria of benefitting from the units. The housing units are absolutely abandoned in the middle of the bush.

Additionally, during the ground breaking ceremony, only officials of Nimba County were invited leaving out community residents who should benefit from the construction.



The Nimba Affordable Housing Units

It was further gathered that majority of the contractors for the project were taken from Monrovia, the country's Capital City; instead of the locals been hired to construct these buildings which is also in contravention of NOCAL's policy.

RHRAP HOST STUDENT'S FORUM IN BUCHANAN, GRAND BASSA COUNTY

The Rural Human Rights Activists Programme (RHRAP) on February 18, 2016 conducted a one-day forum for students of Grand Bassa County. This interactive forum brought 25 students from the Bassa High School, St. Peter Clever High School, the Grand Bassa Community College, Open Bible High School, SDA High School, Christian High School, amongst others. The forum was focused on understanding the scholarship scheme for Liberian Students, which is being provided by the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) using revenue collected from oil exploration companies in Liberia.

After the introductory aspect, majority of the participants said, they were not aware of the scholarship criteria provided by NOCAL. During the forum RHRAP provided awareness on the processes and criteria for obtaining scholarships that are offered by NOCAL followed by developing an Advocacy Roadmap for student's sustained advocacy for NOCAL to actually implement an open process including information dissemination for recruitment.

"This forum is a great opportunity for us as rural students and that we must make use of this opportunity by implementing the advocacy roadmap developed in this forum that will enable us to fully engage our government officials including Districts Representatives, District Education Officers (DEOs), County Education Officers (CEOs), amongst others".



RHRAP Host Student's Forum in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County

Says one of the participants. The overall objectives of the student awareness forums is to engage student bodies on how they, as students can benefit from the Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) offered by NOCAL using revenue collected from oil exploration companies.

STRATEGIC COALITION BUILDING

Considering the trend the natural resource sector is taking in Liberia, the need for robust coalition building at national, regional and international levels cannot be over emphasized. Firstly, RHRAP is pushing for strong alliance building between and amongst Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Liberia so as to adequately engage national actors including relevant Government Ministries and Agencies and extractive companies in Liberia for responsible mining. Mining should not be a curse for Liberia, but instead improve the livelihood of residents.

Since the end of the bloody civil crises in 2003, CSOs in Liberia have been aggressive in the promotion and protection of human rights and other developmental initiatives; but fragmentation has hampered greater achievements. Liberia CSOs are very fragmented thus causing gaps as well as duplication and losing weight instead of building up weight for positive democratic engagement. To this end, RHRAP is engaging other likeminded CSOs including coalitions for improve joint advocacy that will assure adequate accountability and transparency within the oil extractive sector of Liberia where the majority of the citizens including the unborn will benefit from revenue generated from the country's natural minerals. It will also help to prevent future violent conflict, which will also be in the interest of extractive companies operating in Liberia.

RHRAP participates in the 57th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR in The Gambia

In its vigorous advocacy campaigns, RHRAP attended the 57th Ordinary Session of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) held in The Gambia from the 31st of October – November 6, 2015. During this conference, RHRAP was working with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working on thematic group that was focused on natural resource advocacy case study by country. This process, which is related to the ACHPR, complain mechanism, provides knowledge to NGOs on how to identify problems and develop a resolution for submission to the commission. Africa has a policy document on natural resource mining, which is the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) that was signed by African heads of states in 2009. The AMV is a policy document with Action Plan intended for African national governments to implement as it was agreed and approved by African Leaders. The compliance to this document by African Leaders remains a challenge to the African mining sector.



RHRAP Participate in the 57th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR in the Gambia

In this document, African Leaders reaffirmed themselves to the domestication of the AMV including national awareness on the AMV, which is not happening in Liberia.

To this end, NGOs need to monitor the compliance to the AMV and adequately engage national government and commission for improvement. As a Watchdog, CSOs need to monitor the compliance of state actors and file complaints to the African Commission in the case of contravention. In RHRAP's opinion, all of these efforts will enable us to gradually achieve transparency and accountability within the natural resource sector.

RHRAP JOINS ITS AFRICAN COMPATRIOTS

RHRAP is a member of the International Alliance on Natural Resource of Africa (IANRA) based in Johannesburg, South Africa. IANRA is a network of 41 network organizations, 40 in Africa and 1 in Europe, including 13 national IANRA groupings or networks in Africa (at various stages of development) with community partnership and international linkages. IANRA works towards more just and sustainable management of natural resource in Africa. In November 2015, RHRAP joined other members of IANRA in Johannesburg, South Africa where member organizations, invited guests from the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN) and other International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) who met to have collective inputs into the new Model Mining Law currently under development by IANRA. This Model Mining Law focuses on the promotion and protection of mining communities in Africa that will push extractive companies in Africa to carryout responsible mining to benefit not only the extractive companies, but mining communities as well.

In furtherance of these initiatives, RHRAP is currently engaging other likeminded national Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to complete the formation of IANRA national network in Liberia. All of these processes of coalition building are intended for sustained and holistic advocacy campaign that will help RHRAP to achieve its advocacy objectives.

RHRAP ATTENDS THE 2016 AFRICA MINING INDABA (AMI)

RHRAP was invited by IANRA to attend the Africa Mining Indaba (AMI), which was held from the 8th -11th of February 2016 in Cape Town, South Africa. The conference brought together 360 organizations from Africa and other parts of the world. The program was learning and sharing conference with lots of free resource materials (books) that increased the capacity of advocates to carryout sustained advocacy on responsible natural resource extraction within their respective communities they represented. The below were the objective of the AMI 2016



RHRAP Attends The 2016 Africa Mining Indaba (AMI)

Promoting Accountability in the Extractive Sector



A Program being implemented by the
**Rural Human Rights Activists
Programme (RHRAP)**
and sponsored by the **National
Endowment for Democracy (NED)**



- To provide a platform for communities affected by the extractive industries to reclaim their rights through the formulation of alternatives.
- To advocate for transparent, equitable and just extractives practices in the management, governance and distribution of national resources through policy and legislative reform.
- To create meaningful decision-making processes for communities, advocating for just national and regional policies and corporate practices.
- To provide space for engagement for the communities affected by mining, inter-faith communities, governments, CSO's and private sector to share information and experiences.
- To provide space for the inter-faith community to lead and accompany affected and impacted communities.
- To increase and strengthen engagement with the International Council of Metals and Mining (ICMM) and its membership

In the couple of days to come, RHRAP will release the 2016 AMI final communiqué in the daily newspapers for the consumption of the public. You can also read more about the AMI 2016 conference at www.miningindaba.com.

During this conference, RHRAP was opportune to represent IANRA at the Mining Indaba where tops extractive companies operating in Africa including Liberia were present. In addition to mining communities participation, CSOs representatives at the conference re-emphasized that extractive companies must account and provide reparation for damages occurred during and after mining activities, which will help to provide some relief for mining communities residents.

What was common from both CSOs representatives and CEOs from extractive companies both agreed that without the adequate participation of the three cardinal stakeholders (National Government, Extractive companies, & mining communities residents), the theme “Responsible Mining” would not be achieved. Extractive companies therefore reassured their commitments to working with CSOs, and mining communities residents in improving the lives of extractive mining communities residents. As a natural resource advocate working in Liberia attending the 2016 Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI), Lorma Baysah was fortunate to listen to one of the panelists, a Chief Executive Officer from Aureus Gold Mining Company in Liberia.

In promoting responsible mining including Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the CEO from the Aureus Gold Mining Company boasted of rendering lots of humanitarian services including economic recovery initiatives during the deadly Ebola crisis in Liberia for communities where his company is operating.

With the exposure on the effects and dangers of mining gold (The price of Gold) during one of the side events at the AMI conference, lots of advocacy engagement needs to be carried out but firstly, environmental impact assessment on the gold mine in question in Liberia. Cyanide is used in the extraction and purification of gold. Using cyanides usually leads to water, and soli pollution resulting to water borne diseases amongst others. From the screening on the price of gold, (the consequences of mining gold) including research materials at the 2016 AMI forum, gold miners usually suffer from silicosis. In responsible mining, mining communities residents need to be informed about both the negative and positive effects of mining prior to the company operation inline with international standards. In responsible mining, extractive companies must adhere to free, prior, and informed consent of mining communities residents.