

Minutes of the 8th Regular Meeting of the VPA Steering Committee
Tuesday, May 25, 2010
FDA Boardroom, Congo Town, Monrovia

The meeting was called to order by Hon. Kredrick Johnson, Assistant Managing Director of the FDA who deputized for the Chairman, Hon. Moses D. Wogbeh.

Mr. Johnson read out the agenda. There being no amendment, a motion was obtained and seconded that the agenda be adopted for the meeting.

After prayer by Madam Victoria Cole, the Presiding Chair asked for self-introduction by members present for better familiarization with stakeholders he would be interacting with during the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were carefully reviewed while matters arising from the minutes were discussed simultaneously.

During the review of the minutes it was noted by Cllr. Brownell who chairs the LD working group that his group has been providing the necessary support to the consultant, Cllr. Negbalee Warner who was working on the draft legality definition. He said that it was necessary to make this clarification as it was not reflected in the minutes of the 7th regular meeting of the VPA Steering Committee. He furthered asked for clarification on the issue of threat made against the Coordinator and his principal deputy by individuals in high positions as reflected on page 3 of the minutes of the 7th regular meeting.

Mrs. Elfreda Tamba of the Ministry of Finance who is also a member of the Negotiating Team expressed surprise over the statement. The MOF representative whose presence at the meeting was strange, requested for TS Coordinator to name individual (s) who threaten he and his deputy. Mrs. Tamba however indicated that during their Brussels mission, she remembered the team had disagreements with TS Coordinator and his deputy, which in her view was a normal professional routine. He however emphasized that at no time officials of the TS were threaten by anybody during their negotiation mission in Brussels.

Mr. Amos Kofa, the TS Coordinator was in this light asked to clarify as to whether or not the threat was made against him and his deputy as reported in the minutes. In response, Mr. Kofa explained that during their Brussels mission, when the parties were discussing the one year adjustment of the VPA Road Map, the TS consistently indicated that the timeframe was not possible to complete the job. It was at that time the Chairperson of the NT Hon. Florence Chenoweth said “if the TS cannot complete the process within year as have been decided, you can step aside and we will find someone else to do the work.” Mr. Kofa said he and his deputy considered the Ministers’ statement as a threat.

At this point, Mrs. Tamba said Minister Chenoweth made the statement in the context of performance and job appraisal. Mrs. Tamba furthered emphasized that professionals do have disagreements but cautioned the body that when such statements are made they shouldn’t be interpreted in a different context.

The TS boss however thanked Mrs. Tamba for the concerns and comments but said though the GoL is the chief negotiator; it must take into consideration stakeholders who are working as technicians for the process. He said the GoL must respect the views and suggestions of the technicians who are doing the daily difficult work in order to support the negotiators with the necessary information leading to a successful negotiation process.

At this junction, Cllr. Alfred Brownell reminded the body that the TS staff were recruited through a multi-stakeholder process which clearly demonstrated an open vetting procedure and so he believes that no one has the power to dismiss any of the team members. He then registered a protest on behalf of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) that the statement made by the MOA boss should not be seen as a joke.

Executive Order:

The TS informed the body that Mr. Saytumah has been promising repeatedly from the Presidents’ office but nothing has been done with respect to the issuance of the VPA Steering Committee Executive Order.

As a way forward on the Executive Order, it was agreed that the TS do a formal communication to the Minister of Agriculture, requesting her to kindly follow up on the status of the Executive Order. The body however cautioned the TS to follow up persistently whenever there are pressing issues to be discussed that has the tendency to stall the process.

The CSO again objected to government's attitude towards the VPA Process. Cllr. Brownell said the Liberian Government is not exhibiting the needed leadership road in the VPA Process. He said the CSO will have to take a decision to step back because according to him, that kind of attitude undermines their efforts.

Still on matters arising from the minutes, it was agreed that the TS design a policy that would regularize the transportation issue for SC members. This decision was a result of complaints from community representatives as regards their transportation benefits from LDI, SDI and the TS.

Harmonized Version of the VPA ToR:

The committee on ToR which was set up by the SC sometime ago could not make a formal presentation as was expected, because every member of the committee did not sign the document. The body furthered demanded that each member sign and initialize each page of the document before making formal presentation.

June 2, 2010 Video Conference:

The TS made a suggestion which was accepted by the body that observers attending video conferences and negotiations meetings should act as observers and not NT members. Mr. Kofa said this was a universal rule and must be applied within the VPA Process, that observers don't speak but instead observe the process and if there is something to be said, it should be written on a piece of paper and passed on to a full flesh member of the NT.

However, the CSO representative on the NT who is also an observer, reacted harshly in disagreement. Mr. Kula Jackson said that statement could be a joke and not a reality.

Mr. David Kollie of the EPA emphasized that the SC and NT members should sometimes meet to harmonized disagreements so as to avoid future problems.

Secretariat Contract with theIDLgroup

The Coordinator of the TS disclosed to the SC that, staff of the TS do not have a guaranteed contract up to present since October of 2009. The TS Coordinator reported that theIDLgroup which the staff had previous contracts with, were refusing to issue long term contracts in the absence of the Executive Order. Mr. Kofa informed the SC that he had received an email from theIDLgroup that the company would only issue long term contracts if the SC formally communicates to them, requesting them to do so in the absence of the Executive Order. A copy of that email which was later forwarded to SC members has become an impediment to TS staff job status. Mr. Kofa indicated that the delay in issuing TS staff long term contract poses job insecurity for young professionals who are desirous to work for their country. He said it also has the tendency to weaken the momentum in any individual in these situations. He furthered pleaded to the SC to find a way out.

After several suggestions on the TS contract issue, it was agreed that the mail be forwarded to all SC member for their comments and suggestions. It was also agreed that comments and suggestions should be sent in by Monday, May 31, 2010 or on the contrary, it would imply that SC members have consented for the Chairman to communicate to theIDLgroup, authorizing them to issue a one year contract to the TS staff.

ToR for Consultant on Public Information and Transparency Measures

Mr. kofa informed the body that the Secretariat needs a consultant on Public Information and Transparency Measures. He said the document on Public Information is an annex of the Communication Strategy which cannot be done by the Secretariat. He said the consultant needs a ToR to be published in the papers. He however suggested to the SC that the Secretariat has some applications from previous advertisement that could be viewed and selection made to get the most appropriate institution to do the job.

It was agreed that the TS prepared a draft ToR for Public Information Consultant and circulate seem to SC members for their comments.

Presentation of VPA Secretariat 2nd Quarter Report

The Coordinator of the TS presented the 2nd Quarter Report on behalf of the team. The report was received by the presiding Chairman, Hon. Kredrick Johnson. He congratulated the team for a job well done.

Update from VPA Secretariat on Communities Consultations

The TS briefed the SC on progress activities of the Secretariat. It informed the body that the Secretariat travelled to the Southeast on one of its regular community awareness field missions as part of the TS mandate. The TS reported that the trip as rewarding.

AOB:

The presiding Chair disclosed to the body a letter of resignation from the Office and Finance Manager of the TS. The Chairman read the letter which quoted Mr. F. Dadeh Harper as saying he was leaving the job “owing to personal reasons.”

After the reading of Mr. Harper’s resignation letter, it was agreed that the TS OFM and the Chairman of the SC be given a chance to have an exclusive consultative meeting which will provide the opportunity for Mr. Harper to disclosed the real reason of his resignation so that the Chairman could have the audience to convince him to re-considered the decision in the interest of the project.

Community Empowerment:

Still on other business, Mr. Thomas Barleh of Grand Gedeh County expressed thanks and appreciation to the TS for paying a special visit to his county. Mr. Barleh said the visit was timely and rewarding. He used the opportunity to plead to the SC on behalf of other community representatives to provide funds for community awareness which he said is very necessary for the counties.

Mr. Sollie George of River Gee County requested the TS to work out modalities in order for community representatives to have identification cards. This issue was not addressed by the TS or the SC.

At this junction, the meeting was adjourned after a motion was made and seconded.

Twenty-Four (24) persons were in attendance.

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| 1. William Page | Com. Rep. |
| 2. George F. Kpawulu | Com. Rep. |
| 3. Thomas Z. Barleh | Com. Rep. |
| 4. Michael M. Roberts | Com. Rep. |
| 5. Michael Sayee | Com. Rep. |
| 6. Sylvester S. Gbeintor | MOJ |
| 7. Sollie K. George | Com. Rep. |
| 8. Max-well Nyounway | Green Advocates/CSO |

9. Wesseh A. Wesseh	Liberian Senate
10.Kula L. Jackson	NGO Coalitio/CSO
11.John S. Deah	LTA
12.Sely K.L. Williams	Com. Rep.
13.Mai E. Saryeh	LDI
14.Paolo Nastasi	UNMIL
15.Robert L. Nyahn	SAMFU/CSO
16.Victoria Cole	FDA
17.Abraham M. Kromah	MOA
18.Edward S. Kamara	FDA
19.David S. Kollie	EPA
20.Lawrence N. Satia	MOF
21.Amos T. Kofa	VPA
22.Charles K. Miller	VPA
23.F. Dadeh Harper	VPA
24.Queta R.J-Hessou	VPA