

## **4<sup>th</sup> Regular VPA Steering Committee Meeting Minutes**

### **Tuesday, December 29, 2009**

The meeting was called to order by the chairman, Hon. John T. Woods who requested for an opening prayer. The opening prayer was offered by Mr. Kula Jackson of the Coalition of NGOs.

#### **Welcome Remarks:**

Hon. Woods welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed his appreciation for the level of attendance. He then re-emphasized to the body the importance of the VPA Process in Liberia. He mentioned that the VPA process is a negotiation process between the European Union (EU) and the Government of Liberia in a move to stop illegal logging. He congratulated the Technical Working Groups and informed the meeting briefly about the technical video conference which was held on December 8, 2009. The chairman also gave update on the status of the executive order and promised that it would have been signed before the end of 2009. He said that the executive order has been delayed because he has not been able to make a follow-up with the President due to his illness. He however, said that he has spoken with the President on that.

#### **Adoption of Agenda:**

The Chair requested a motion for the adoption of the agenda. A motion was made and seconded. The agenda was then adopted for discussion. The minutes were also discussed with the necessary corrections, observations and comments made for the Technical Secretariat's prompt action. The minutes were then adopted.

A moment of silence was observed in memory of the late Mr. John Y. Gweama, who died on Monday, December 28, 2009. Mr. Gweama served as focal person for the VPA Process in Liberia.

#### **Matter arising from the minutes:**

With respect to matters arising from the minutes, representatives from the CSO informed the meeting that the CSO did not contest the SC election but rather abstained from the process. Cllr. Alfred Brownell from the CSO commented on the issue of the Executive Order and mentioned as to

whether it was prudent to have election in the absence of an Executive Order. He further mentioned that how can the SC take decision when the SC itself is not legal. He then questioned the decision making process of the SC. According to Cllr. Brownell, the SC comprises of multi-stakeholders whose representation is not equaled in number and as such a decision making process should be clearly established either by the Executive Order or through a consensus building process. In other words, a clearly decision making process must be established before having election.

In response to Cllr. Brownell's concern, Mr. Rudolph Merab of the Liberia Timber Association (LTA) commented that Liberia still has some laws on the books and, despite the fact we are awaiting an executive order, we need to do what is required while we wait". He concluded. Mr. John Deah from the industry also concurred with Mr. Merab even making reference to LEITI.

Mr. Mannah as well from the industry reacted to Cllr. Brownell's comment. He said that he understood Cllr. Brownell's comment to mean that the SC should not have been doing all of what it has done unless the Executive Order is issued and as such, the SC should cease to operate until the Executive Order is issued.

Hon. Woods added that all institutions involved with the VPA process should continue to do what is right for the growth of the country while awaiting the executive order to be issued. He emphasized the need to work together as stakeholders.

Still on the legal status of the SC, Mr. Teyah Moore of Green Advocates, a civil society organization said the SC has bridged an agreement which was previously reached amongst members of this august body (SC), which forbids having leadership election until the SC is fully composed. He said, that is why we (CSO) abstained from the election during the last meeting in November, 2009. Another CSO representative also spoke about the ToR for the SC.

Kofi Ireland, an observer from the Civil Affairs Department of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) said there is ToR that exists. He said there are documents to prove that ToR exists which have been serving as guide for the SC to work. He admonished SC members to check their records and be convinced of the fact.

In addition to the UNMIL observer, the Secretariat clarified the issue of ToR, referring to the meeting held at PA's Rib House. The Secretariat Coordinator

highlighted some issues that were discussed in the September 15, 2009 SC meeting and reminded Kula Jackson of his role as presiding chairman during that meeting.

In an effort to resolve the issue of the TOR, Mr. Moses Wogbeh of FDA suggested that all stakeholders who have a proposed ToR for the SC should present their respective ToR to the SC so that the SC can come up with a harmonized ToR.

Following Mr. Wogbeh's suggestion, representatives from the CSO left the hall for two (2) minutes to consult amongst themselves. Upon their return, they informed the body on decisions reached.

- That whatever document that will be given to them (CSO) will be considered a draft which will enable them to incorporate their own views.
- That the CSO will not participate in any election of the SC until there is a clear decision making process.
- That the CSO will contribute to all other sub-committee to carry the process forward, such as the technical working groups.

Finally, it was agreed by the body that the ToR which exist be given to the CSO for review and comments.

The presiding chairman encouraged every member of the SC to come to the next meeting with an idea of what the ToR should include. He suggested to the Secretariat that the next meeting agenda should include discussion around the ToR and the process of decision making.

#### **Update on December 8, Video Conference:**

Mr. Kofa informed the SC that the video conference was successful and exciting. He reported that the conference was chaired by Hon. Florence Chenoweth, Minister of Agriculture who serves as chairman on the Negotiation Team. And that, the VPA Coordinator updated the European Commission on activities of the Secretariat, the two Technical Working Groups while Hon. Woods briefed the EU on the Community Rights Law as well as chain sawing in Liberia.

The participants at the video conference agreed that the first negotiation meeting be hosted in Brussels in February, 2010. Mr. Kofa further

highlighted some of the possible items to be discussed on the agenda at the February 8 meeting.

Some of which, he said, include:

- Discussion on how far LD and LAS works have gone in terms of draft
- Discussion of draft text of VPA(no annexes, but principles)
- Public update on VPA progress in Liberia and so on.....

He further named the institutions that were represented; to include:

- Ministry of Agriculture.....Hon. Florence Chenoweth---Chairman
- “ Justice.....Hon. Christina Tah-----Co. Chair
- “ Finance.....Hon. Elfreda Tamba-----Member
- “ Commerce.....Hon. Sei W. Gahn-----Member
- National Investment Commission.....Mr. James Zayzay-----Member
- Forestry Development Authority.....Hon. John T. Woods-----Member
- Industry of Liberia.....Mr. Rudolph J. Merab-----Observer
- VPA Secretariat

Hon. Woods informed the body that members of the Negotiation Team (NT) have not yet understood the entire idea of the VPA process so they often sent proxies to NT meetings. He said however, after the video conference, he realized that the interest was being developed gradually in that he could see the enthusiasm on the faces of NT members therefore; more need to be done to encourage them.

### **Update on Secretariat activities for December, 2009**

Mr. Amos Kofa gave a summary report on the activities of the Secretariat as was reflected in the briefing notes. He spoke about the Secretariat’s trip to Grand Gedeh which resulted to the election of additional two community representatives. The two individuals introduced themselves as Sollie George and Thomas Barleh of River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties respectively. The report highlighted activities of the two working groups as well. Speaking on the two working groups, the VPA Coordinator complained about attitude of FDA representatives on the working groups. He made specific reference to Mr. Edward Kamara and regretted the death of Mr. John Gweama, adding “Mr. Gweama was the only representative from FDA who sacrificed his time to attend meetings.” “We need the full participation of the FDA representatives because we are depending on them to lead us through”. He noted.

Mr. Kofa emphasized the need for additional support to the VPA. He informed the SC of some problems the Secretariat observed and encountered while they were on an assessment tour in Grand Bassa and Rivercess Counties. He mentioned specific needs for community's empowerment and facilitation. The VPA Coordinator said funds are needed to enable community representatives to travel from point to point and report to their constituents.

In response, the chairman cautioned the Secretariat to work out a proposal and submit that to the next SC meeting for endorsement. He further mentioned that the VPA process in Liberia was under estimated because according to the chairman, Liberia already has the chain of custody which is being paid for. He said the budget for the VPA process has to be recast. Hon. Woods admonished members of the SC to explore other sources of funding other than DFID and IDL to help in the process.

At this point, it was agreed by the SC, based on a suggestion from an observer from the Liberia Democratic Institute (LDI) that the SC should formally request LDI to continue its gesture in facilitating community election since LDI is running out of funds. Madam Mai Saryeh said based on the SC request, her institution will out source funds to continue facilitating community election process.

Following the Secretariat's report, Cllr. Alfred Brownell noted that the two Technical Working Groups have a lot more to be accomplished before the next negotiation meeting in February. He said it is very impossible to have a draft document before February 8, 2010 therefore, the negotiation with the EU would not be possible. The CSO representative stressed the need for committee members to work harder to speed up the process. He further stressed the need for consultants to send in their CVs before coming as consultants to the VPA process. "It is important that we get to know their qualification as consultants," he added.

### **AOB**

The chairman then congratulated members of the SC for their commitment to the process. He said it was rewarding. He again expressed regrets over the death of Mr. Gweama but however encouraged members of the SC to continue attending meetings for the growth of the VPA process in Liberia.

A motion was then made and seconded for the meeting to be adjourned. The meeting was then adjourned.

Twenty-six persons attended the meeting including the VPA Secretariat.

They include:

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|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Abraham M. Kromah      | MOA                     |
| 2. Sely K. Williams       | MPEA                    |
| 3. George F. Kpawulu      | Com. Rep.               |
| 4. William V. Page        | Com. Rep.               |
| 5. Mai E. Saryeh          | LDI Observer            |
| 6. Thomas Z. Barleh       | Com. Rep.               |
| 7. Joseph F. Mulbah       | NIC                     |
| 8. Teyah S. Moore         | Green Advocates         |
| 9. Wesseh A. Wesseh       | Liberian Senate         |
| 10. Jimmie F. Jimmy       | MOL                     |
| 11. Kula L. Jackson       | CSO                     |
| 12. Robert L. Nyahn       | CSO                     |
| 13. Julie T.B. Weah       | CSO                     |
| 14. Moses D. Wogbeh       | FDA                     |
| 15. Paolo Nastasi         | UNMIL CA (Observer)     |
| 16. Isaac F. Mannah       | LTA                     |
| 17. John S. Deah          | LTA                     |
| 18. Edward S. Kamara      | FDA                     |
| 19. Kofi Ireland          | UNMIL CA (Observer)     |
| 20. Rudolph J. Merab, Sr. | LTA                     |
| 21. Michael M. Robert     | Com. Rep.               |
| 22. John T. Woods         | FDA, Presiding Chairman |
| 23. Amos T. Kofa          | VPA                     |
| 24. Charles K. Miller     | VPA                     |
| 25. F. Dadeh Harper       | VPA                     |
| 26. Queta Johnson-Hessou  | VPA                     |

