

Department of Urban Affairs

Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs: Hon. Paulita C.C. Wie

MANDATE:

Enacted into law in 1972, the Department of Urban Affairs serves as the technical arm of the Ministry. Specifically, the department is responsible to ensure the transformation of urban slums and communities into well developed and modernized metropolis; to guide the transformation of, and orderly growth of urban slums into urban centers; to ensure the orderly growth of cities and other municipalities.

SECTIONS:

The Department of Urban Affairs is comprised of two sections:

(1) The Urban Research and Administration– this section conducts periodic socio-economic surveys as a means of determining development trends; undertakes research to inform the department’s role and activities relative to urban issues and programs; and undertakes the overall administrative issues of the department.

(2) The City & Town Planning– this section conducts public/government land surveys, city and town layout and produces architectural drawings for public construction of buildings and facilities within cities and towns.

STRUCTURE OF THE DEPARTMENT

- Deputy Minister – head of the Department
- Assistant Minister for Urban and Technical Services
- Director for Urban Research
- Director for City and Town Planning

Workforce:

The department current manpower strength stands at 39.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Reactivated the SJSCC (Special Joint Stakeholders Consultative Committee) in May, 2012 primarily to intervene in the harmonization of conflict boundary areas in Liberia. Since its reactivation, the SJSCC has had four Round-Table Discussions and has in effect identified eleven (11) hot zones or land conflict areas across the country;

2. On June 28, 2012, the Department of Urban Affairs hosted the first Urban Development Stakeholders’ Round-Table Discussions at which time, Liberia Urban Development Agenda Round-Table discussion was launched by Hon. Blamoh Nelson, former Minister of Internal Affairs. This round-table discussions meeting coincided with the visitation into the country of the Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Dr. Aisa Karibo Kacyira, at which time, a formal partnership relationship was forged between UN-Habitat and the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Consequent of the partnership relationship, the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Internal Affairs was invited to participate in the World Urban Forum (WUF), an annual forum hosted by the UN-Habitat. The former Minister of Internal Affairs and former Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs in persons of Hon. Blamoh Nelson and Hon. Florence Geegbae Dukuly participated in the 6th World Urban Forum (WUF) held in Naples, Italy, a milestone on the road to sustainable urban future.

We Conducted a Special Forum for Traditional Chiefs during the period July 5-11, 2012, under the theme: What is meant by Governance Decentralization and what is expected of the Chiefs and Traditional Elders of the Country. Over one hundred fifty Traditional Leaders and Elders, Senior Mothers, and Governors were in attendance. The forum was successful. It brought together senior government officials and international organization representatives, who explained from the perspective of their sectors, the roles and responsibilities expected of the Chiefs under the Government Decentralization Program. The Forum produced Resolution 165, as a policy document of the Traditional Leaders and Elders relative to their consent as in keeping with Central Government’s Decentralization Program and was officially presented to H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia on the grounds of the historic

Providence Island. The forum also established a 15-member Chief's Boundary Harmonization Committee to support all efforts needed to settle boundary problems across the country;

3. During the period under review, the Department of Urban Affairs, signed a MOU with the Carter Center on implementation of boundary harmonization program. Similarly, the Carter Center has seconded to the Ministry of Internal Affairs a Legal Fellow in person of Ms. Kristie Bluett, assigned with the Department of Urban Affairs with particular focus on traditional justice;

4. During the period October 15-21, 2012 the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Internal Affairs was invited to participate in the World Conference of Mayors (WCM) annual meeting held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The Liberian Government delegation was comprised of City Mayors of Cestos, Voinjama, Paynesville, Tubmanburg, Sanniquellie, and Bopolu and was headed by the former Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs, Hon. Florence Geegbae Dukuly. The conference was successful in view of the fact that based on the output of the Liberian delegation, the WCM provided seating for two Liberian officials on its Board of Directors, namely MIA Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs and a Representative of the City of Paynesville to be named.

5. Consequent of the WCM Conference held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials (NBC-LEO), U.S.A, on November 6, 2012 extended invitation to the Government of the Republic of Liberia through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to participate in the annual NBC-LEO's International Cities Cooperation Forum which took place in Boston, Massachusetts during the period November 28 – December 1, 2012.

The Liberian Government was represented by a delegation of six city mayors headed by the former Deputy Minister for Urban Affairs, who during the conference made a presentation at the opening session of the conference on November 28, 2012.

6. The Department of Urban Affairs during the period under review held three Urban Stakeholders Roundtable Discussions. These roundtable discussions are targeted at organizing the First Liberia Urban Forum which is scheduled to be held in June, 2013. As a result, on May 7, 2013, Hon. Blamoh Nelson, former Minister, appointed two special committees: the Urban Forum Policy Drafting Committee-to develop a zero-draft of a national urban policy and the Urban Forum Organizing Committee-to plan and organize the national urban forum.

The policy drafting committee met on May 10, 2013, and observed that the designated time for drafting of a zero-draft of a national urban policy was too short; that a minimum of two years would be suitable to develop an urban policy for Liberia. The Committee therefore recommended: 1) that UN-Habitat seconds a consultant to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to focus on the issue of urban policy drafting, and 2) the urban forum which was initially focused on producing a policy now be focused on producing a road-map for urban development.

The Department of Urban Affairs during the period March 17 – 26, 2013 undertook to initiate a nation-wide general municipal management assessment mission to acquaint itself first-hand with the prevailing circumstances existing within the local administrative systems and service delivery capability at the municipality level. Some of the issues discovered were:

1. Activities of the cities are centered around the city mayors;
2. City planning and development not participatory;
3. There are several planning needs that are to be put in place (i.e., ownership to land, in some areas, land in the hands of private citizens while in others, land is in the hands of customary people – chiefs and elders, in some counties there is no county surveyor thus making security to land a problem; etc.
4. Financial matters and budgeting are also issues to be improved upon;
5. Issue of land transaction, lack of surveyors in some counties impede development in most of our cities;
6. Lots of capacity issues from need to train and recruit qualified staff to logistical support. Almost all of our city mayors do not have equipment to work with, no vehicle, no capital equipment to undertake some of the activities they seem to attempt to undertake (i.e., solid waste and garbage collection, et al).

Based on the outcome of the field assessment mission, a three days City Mayors' Retreat was conducted during the period April 25-27, 2013, to train city mayors and city council chairpersons on various topics and issues. There were number of professional personalities who presented papers on such topics as: the Local Government Act, a critical milestone to mass citizen's participation in Liberia's governance system; strategy for designing sustainable income

generation programs with capacity to enforce city ordinances – a catalyst for sustained growth and development; amongst others. There were over forty city mayors and city council chairpersons in attendance.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

1. Consummated a partnership relationship with the UN-Habitat that brings to bear the identification and subsequent assigning of an expert/consultant on urban development to help accelerate urban development planning in Liberia;
2. Entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Carter Center for the implementation of Boundary Harmonization program and the seconding of a legal fellow focused on traditional justice issues;
3. The successful hosting of the Chiefs' Forum under the theme: What is meant by Governance Decentralization and what is expected of the Chiefs and Traditional Elders of the Country? This forum resulted into the adoption of Resolution 165 developed by the over 150 Traditional Leaders, Elders, Senior Mothers, and Governors. It further established a 15-member Chief's Boundary Harmonization Committee to support all efforts needed to settle boundary problems across the country;
4. The successful participation into international conferences: World Urban Forum (WUF), World Conference of Mayors (WCM), and the NBC-LEO's International Cities Cooperation Forum, on behalf of the Government and peoples of the Republic of Liberia. As a result of participating in these conferences, there are number of prospects and benefits to be accrued by the Country relative to the development of sister city relationship, private-public partnership, etc.
5. The successful conduct of the field consultative mission and subsequent hosting of the city mayors' retreat.
6. The conclusions of negotiations for the establishment of the American-Liberian Twin-Cities Initiatives (ALTCI) which seeks to establish twin-city relationships between 36 American cities and 26 Liberian cities. A visiting delegation of three is set to visit Liberia to consummate this arrangement in view of the MOU, protocols of the initiative, et al.

Immediate actions:

- At the moment, there is no urban development policy in Liberia. We are accelerating efforts along with key urban development stakeholders to produce one. A national urban Forum is being planned. Observation from the committee constituted to prepare a draft national urban policy suggests that the time is too short to produce one before June. Meeting is planned for early next week with key urban stakeholders to discuss the implication of the committee's observation and decide on the objective of the forum. It is critical that we finalize discussions with stakeholders and partners for the holding of the first national urban forum scheduled for June this year.

Additionally, the urban policy drafting committee recommended that the Ministry request UN-HABITAT to second a consultant who will help fast track the formulation of the National Urban Policy. Action is needed on this!

Note: UN-HABITAT is MIA key urban development partner.

- Boundary harmonization is another important project approved under the MTEF program, and assigned to the department of Urban Affairs. As indicated above, the Ministry has identified about eleven (11) hotspots, some are being gradually resolved why others need urgent attention.
- City layout-under the boundary harmonization project, four cities (Harper, Zwedru, Pleebo and Fishtown are to be layout. Work plan have been formulated. Funding to jumpstart the program is still in contingency.
- We are at the concluding stages of establishing Sister-city Relationship with American cities. It is anticipated that after these discussions, there will be twining of 36 American and 26 Liberian cities.

Conversation on this initiative begun when the vice President of the Republic of Liberia, H.E Joseph N. Boakai visited the United states and encouraged our American counterparts to develop interest in Liberia. A 3-member American team arrival in the country for this initiative is being postponed to allow for proper preparation and for appropriate authorities to be duly informed.