

Liberia experienced more than a decade of civil crisis which ended in 2003. The prolonged crisis had severe impact on land governance, natural resource management and the environment in Liberia. Several policy related documents as well as conflict mapping exercises and reports flag issues of mismanagement and exploitation of natural resources and land issues as still potential conflict drivers. Recognizing the need for reform in the land sector, in 2009, the Government of Liberia established the erstwhile Land Commission of Liberia to coordinate reforms of land policies, programs and laws in Liberia. During its five years of existence, the Commission focused on four broad objectives that include: 1) effective land administration and management, 2) equal and equitable access to land, 3) security of tenure for all and 4) the promotion of investment in the country's natural resources.

The Land Commission transitioned into the Liberia Land Authority (LLA) by an Act of the Legislature in 2016. The LLA is working to bring all land related functions from other government agencies into the single Land Authority with the mandate to develop policies and implement programs in support of land administration and management. A new Land Rights Act enacted into law in 2018, identifies four broad categories of land in Liberia, namely Customary Land, Private Land, Public Land and Government Land.

As steps are being taken to improve land governance in Liberia, there is a need for human and institutional capacity building in land administration, land use and management and the protection of the environment, which are pivotal for sustained economic growth and development. As an administrative staff of the erstwhile Land Commission, recognizing the need for new knowledge and skills in my current area of work to contribute more meaningfully to the increased tasks ahead, I enrolled into the Master's Program in Environmental Conservation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA in 2017.

I believe that my interest at protecting the environment grew from the rapidly declining state of the environment in Monrovia, the capital city, and the effect of human activities on the environment, especially the coastal ecosystem.¹ With my newly acquired knowledge and training, I hope to assist in resolving environmental problems by better understanding of the role of people in the environment, and how they are mobilize to become agents of positive change.

With support from the International Research and Training Grant by the Institute for Regional & International Studies (IRIS), and in fulfillment of the requirements to obtaining a Master's Degree in Environment Conservation Program at the UW- Madison, I embarked upon a research to assist efforts by the government by conducting empirical research on the connection between citizens and wetlands. The aim was to guide programs to promote community driven wetland conservation in the Marshall Reserve specifically, and Liberia in general. My research was also intended to bring the voice of local stakeholders into national wetland policy formulation, promote local community's buy-in and participation to become better stewards of wetlands and also draw attention to the importance of wetlands in the Marshall Reserve about 30 miles from Monrovia.

After my graduation in 2018, I returned home to work and was promoted to the position of Project Director in January 2019. The LLA receives support from several donors including the World Bank, the Swedish Government through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the European Union among others. Other donors also provide support to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in the land sector of Liberia to help improve land administration and management and support the implementation of the new Land Rights Law. My role is

¹ This result from the prolonged conflict that saw the overgrowth of the population of the city from 250,000 in 1990, to over a million over the past 19 years. This sustained growth of the population along the coast led to the overexploitation, degradation and destruction of wetlands of global biodiversity and the ecosystem remains vulnerable to sand mining, overharvesting of mangrove forests for firewood and charcoal production, human settlement, landfills and dumping among others. These activities not only threaten the loss of biodiversity but also undermine key ecosystems services such as protection from storms as the country lies along the coast, water purification, climate change mitigation and adaptation and support to fish stock.

to coordinate the activities of all donor-funded projects implemented by the LLA to ensure that they meet their objectives and monitor progress. I work to also coordinate their activities, including CSOs and NGOs to avoid duplication and overlaps in the sector. Other responsibilities include identifying funding gaps in programs and developing funding proposals along with relevant technical departments. This new role, although not directly related to my field of studies in Environmental Conservation, provides the opportunity to ensure environmental safeguards in projects and ensure that funding is made available to support the development of policies and programs including a National Wetland Policy for Liberia. My Master Program has served as a catalyst to other opportunities. Over the last one year I have participated in several international training and workshops. These include: The 2019 World Bank Land and Poverty Conference in Washington DC, USA, a Project Planning Training Workshop in Gavle, Sweden, and the World Bank Consultant's Service Workshop at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in Accra, Ghana.

From May –October 2019, in addition to my role as Project Director, I also served in the interim as the Project Coordinator of the World Bank supported Liberia Land Administration Project until the recruitment of a new Project Coordinator. Over the five-month period, I worked assiduously to ensure teamwork and improve information sharing and coordination between departments of the LLA. As a result of these efforts, the project which was downgraded to moderately unsatisfactorily in April 2019, had an improved rating of moderately satisfactory in October 2019. I continue to work with the new Coordinator to ensure steady progress in project implementation

I wholeheartedly appreciate the funding assistance that supported my dream for better and higher education, especially as a female in a male dominated field in my part of the world. I am the first female Director at the Liberia Land Authority and stand as a motivation for many other females in the institution. I am also one of two members of the senior management and work to support the newly established gender unit at the LLA to ensure that women are given equal opportunities through affirmative actions. I also encourage women to develop interests in the field of surveying, environment conservation, cartography, GIS, land use planning among others because I believe that it is never too late to pursue your dreams.