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LRA/PR-037/18-19

Liberia's DRM Strategy Implementation Needs Serious Support And Political Will *Stakeholders Call For Action In Gbarnga*



Partial View of participants at the opening of the two-day engagement in Gbarnga

(Monrovia – Sunday, April 28, 2019): Stakeholders are calling for total support and backing of the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA) in the full implementation of the country's first-ever comprehensive Domestic Resource Mobilization (DRM) Strategy.

The stakeholders, representing local and international development partners and NGOs, civil society and the business community, described the strategy as being attractive and inclusive to boost revenue collection in Liberia, if fully implemented. They were however wary of its full implementation, citing perceived funding challenges and diminishing donor support.

The call was made during a two-day stakeholders' engagement on the dissemination of key messages in the country's DRM Strategy which climaxed on Friday in Gbarnga, Bong County, with about 50 participants gathered from across the country attending.

They opted for an inclusive and appropriate use of revenue collected for the development of the country, which would in return attract tax compliance and spur revenue growth to boost national development. When collected taxes are used to impact the lives of the people through the provision of basic social services, they would be moved to become more tax compliance, the stakeholders said.

DRM refers to the generation of revenue locally and their allocation to economically and socially productive investments including basic social services such as roads, electricity, quality health and education. It is potentially the biggest source of long-term financing for sustainable development and it is the life blood of all state governance such as the provision of public goods and services. President George Weah last year endorsed the 5-year strategy.



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UNDP Economic Specialist and National Economist Stanley Kamara underscoring the importance of the DRM Strategy for Liberia

Besides providing the opportunity for participants to clearly understand Liberia's DRM Strategy and suggest ways forward for implementation, the UNDP-sponsored engagement presented strategies options and areas of interventions to stakeholders.

The exercise made stakeholders to clearly understand how the DRM Strategy is critical in financing the government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) and creating sustainable livelihoods in Liberia.

Speaking at the event, UNDP Economic Specialist and National Economist Stanley Kamara underscored the importance of the DRM Strategy for Liberia's development and pledged the UN agency's continuing support to realizing the aspirations of the strategy.

He applauded the LRA in leading efforts to finalize the document. Kamara disclosed that Liberia is among the very few countries in Africa to have promptly embarked the DRM process immediately after the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

He said the UNDP's support to the DRM Strategy began since 2016 during the LRA nationwide regional dialogues which culminated into the National Revenue Symposium in Monrovia in June 2017 that gave birth to the Strategy.



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He told participants that the implementation of the DRM Strategy is also geared towards meeting targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs which has 17 separate goals that affect every aspect of society.

Mr. Kamara said unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was heavily donor dependent, the SDGs is dependent on domestic revenue generation. This is where, he noted, the DRM Strategy comes in.

The Strategy, he said, has the potential to raise increased revenue for the development of Liberia and urged Government and all stakeholders to do all that are required to make the DRM Strategy becomes a success — to ensure that Liberia becomes a less dependent country.

Making remarks on behalf of the LRA Commissioner General Thomas Doe Nah, the Assistant Commissioner for Policy Molley Kiazolu underscored the importance of the DRM and how it is tied to the PAPD.

Participants, in their recommendations, among others, called for a total political will on the part of the government to boost the implementation of the document. Stakeholders feared that in the absence of political will and donor support in strengthening the LRA to implement the DRM Strategy, it would be another document left to dust on the shelf.

The participants also called for heavy investments in agricultural production (production of crops by county or region) and social services including roads, electricity, opening the tourism sector. These, they believe will open the economy, increase local industrial activities, thereby providing more employment opportunities. With these, the participants believe revenue intake would increase.

The pro-poor agenda is an ambitious strategy that seeks to better the lives of Liberians, he said, adding that to achieve this agenda, there must be capital to do so. “That’s how the DRM Strategy is tied to the Pro-Poor Agenda.

LRA Manager for External Relations and Partnership, Wellington Jah, applauded the participants for showing up and actively participating in the dialogue. He noted that their recommendations would be compiled and presented at a major forum in Monrovia as part of carving an implementation plan for the country’s DRM Strategy.