



Human Rights Commission Trains Companies and Host Communities on Business and Human Rights

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in collaboration with the Vice President's Office has trained 80 participants from selected companies and host communities in Pujehun and Moyamba districts on Business and Human Rights.

The selected companies were— Sierra Tropical, CSE, Natural Habitat, Socfin Agricultural Company, Miro Forestry Company, Sierramin Bauxite, Vimetco and Sierra Rutile. Similarly, representatives from the host communities including local authorities, civil society organisations, Sierra Leone Police and landowning families participated in the training.



According to the Deputy Director of Business and Human Rights and Labor Relations, Abdulai Yollah Bangura, the thrust of the training was to build the capacity of the participants in Business and Human Rights for the purpose of mitigating conflicts in companies' operational areas. Mr. Bangura noted that this was the second training organised by HRCSL with funding support from UNDP. He added that the Commission had done monitoring on compliance of business and human rights standards by these companies, hence the need for such training.



The training generated discussion on major conflicts between companies and the communities which included land grabbing, compensation, communication gap, compliance to employment rights and corporate social responsibility. On the other hand, companies' representatives accused communities of conniving with workers to steal from the company which they say affect the company's output.

In Pujehun district, Socfin Agricultural Company and landowners in Sahn Malen have been in a long-standing dispute. Francis Solomon, Security Manager in Socfin said the training was very beneficial to them because if they had had such an opportunity before, that could have mitigated the many conflicts between them and the community. He said if companies adhere to the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) principle which they were taught in the training, which would mitigate key challenges with communities.



Sima Mattia is the Secretary of Malen Affected Land Owners Association (MALOA), he emphasised the need for companies to obey the FPIC principle adding that they as family landowners in Sahn Malen have been in conflict with Socfin for the payment of Lease Rent. He stated that “family landowners cannot ascertain the portion of land the company should pay for because they were not involved in the lease agreement.” While he still called on the Commission for its intervention into their dispute, he was however optimistic that the training will help to mitigate some of the concerns if the company was ready to work with the communities.



Assistant Superintendent of Police Francis Musa Foday, Officer Commanding Zimmi Police Station, said the training was timely and important to his job. He added that “human rights issues cuts across every spectrum of life and the skills he learnt will strengthen him as a police officer to observe, maintain, protect and respect fundamental rights of citizens in conflict with the law.” ASP Foday promised to cascade the training to his junior officers so collectively they will make the change in their policing role to respect human rights.

Suliaman Conteh, Environmentalist for CSE road Construction Company said one of his major take-homes from the training was ‘deprivation of information which leads to conflict.’ He said this has led to strike actions and roadblocks by the communities because of a lack of information on compensation and other rights issues.

At the training in Moyamba, Senesie Rogers of Sierramin Bauxite Company expressed gratitude to HRCSL for bringing both companies and communities into the training. He noted that conflicts occur between both because the communities do not understand their operations adding that, “communities do not know their limits and have high expectations which often result to conflict with the companies.”

Aruna Bangura, Social Manager of Miro Forestry Companies said the training will strengthen their perspective and knowledge to incorporate human rights issues in their operations. He said, “this is like a checklist of what we do within our operational areas to evaluate what we do and identify areas to improve.” He recommended to HRCSL to create visibility and profile companies adhering to human rights on their website and social media platforms to motivate them while encouraging others to improve.



Presentations were done by the Chairperson- Patricia Narsu Ndanema on Women and SGBV in companies host communities, Vice-Chairperson Victor I. Lansana on Background and functions of HRCSL and International human rights standards, Dr Gassan Abess on Business and Human Rights related conflicts in Sierra Leone, Abudulai Yollah Bangura on Respecting the concept of Free Prior and Informed Consent and its role on the prevention of BHR related conflicts and Moses Massaquoi on Categories of rights affected by business operations among many other presentations. A certificate of participation was presented to all participants.