



IMPACT

Protecting Natural Resources in Liberia

Undeterred by civil unrest, courageous grassroots lawyers in Monrovia work to protect natural resources.



The war-torn nation of Liberia is richly endowed with tropical rainforests, iron ore, diamonds, and gold. The abusive exploitation of these natural resources has helped fuel Liberia's continuing civil conflict.

Courageous grassroots lawyers at Green Advocates in Monrovia triumphed under these most challenging conditions and helped draft and pass Liberia's first environmental law, while involving local communities in the process.

Strong environmental laws and communities that participate in environmental decision making hold the promise of helping to bring peace to Liberia, while protecting the nation's valuable natural resources and ecosystems for generations to come.

A young Liberian lawyer, Alfred Brownell, contacted E-LAW U.S. in 2000 to ask for help in launching Green Advocates, Liberia's only public interest environmental law organization.

E-LAW U.S. Staff Attorney, Jennifer Gleason, connected Alfred and his colleagues with lawyers in Tanzania and Cameroon who had founded successful environmental NGOs. Alfred traveled to Eugene to work with E-LAW U.S. and credits E-LAW for helping him launch Green Advocates in 2001.

Attorneys at Green Advocates were committed to helping Liberia rebuild after years of civil strife by putting in place a solid environmental law that respects the rights of all Liberians.



Lawyers at Green Advocates, Monrovia, Liberia

"Existing laws were confusing, conflicting, overlapping, or economically driven. Citizens and indigenous peoples had no rights to challenge government actions and tribal lands were deeded out to timber concessions," says Alfred.

Green Advocates drew support from E-LAW U.S. to draft Liberia's first framework environmental law. Staff Attorneys at E-LAW U.S. and E-LAW advocates around the world reviewed and commented on the draft while Green Advocates held workshops to help communities participate in the drafting process.

Alfred recently wrote with good news: "After more than three years of hard work and lobbying, Liberia now has three instruments providing for the protection of the environment and the sustainable management of Liberia's natural resources. . . . This work would not have been accomplished had it not been for the good comments and valuable information provided by numerous [E-LAW] Amigos."

For more information about this E-LAW Impact or Green Advocates, contact the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide at elawus@elaw.org.