

2009 ELECTORAL SUPPORT PROJECT WAVE 3 CONCEPT NOTE

Key objective of the project:

To develop a professional and sustainable capacity of the Sierra Leone National Electoral Commission to enable it to carry out its mandate to conduct all public elections and referenda, provide training opportunities for all stakeholders in the electoral process, and develop a national democratic culture.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Sierra Leone has come a long way from a devastating civil war that left behind a ravaged economy, destruction of physical infrastructure and massive loss of human life. Destruction of social fabrics and mass exodus of skilled human capital created an adverse situation in human conditions, the effect of which will be felt in many years to come.

A lot has been achieved since the end of the war in 2002 with the concerted efforts of the international community in putting back the country to normality through a variety of interventions under Public Sector Reform Programme. Good governance and the rule of law have been identified as critical to ensuring that that country does not slip back to the unfortunate history of conflict.

To this end, the government of Sierra Leone with the support of donor community immediately embarked on the Judiciary Reform programme and the restructuring of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) inter-alia soon after 2002. These initiatives led to unprecedented successive democratically elected governments in Sierra Leone the most notable of which are the Presidential /Parliamentary Elections in 2007 that saw a change of the country's leadership in a peaceful democratic way and the just concluded Local Council Elections with equal amount of success.

Despite the above successes, a number of challenges were identified during the electoral processes that call for immediate attention. Some of these challenges are highlighted in the justifications for the extension of the Electoral Support Project here below. Central to these challenges is the inadequate capacity of NEC to run National Elections on its own. The Commission has been operating without its home grown competencies. This has created dependency syndrome on hired professional at costs that the commission can not afford when donor funds stop flowing.

The previous elections though successfully conducted, were run from hired premises. This is another area that raises concern in terms of sustainability. The government of Sierra Leone together with the donor community are already addressing some of the infrastructural capacity issues but the continuation of the current project to 2012 would ensure that momentum that is already built is continued to the next National Elections. This strategy will enable NEC to have its own competencies with the necessary assets to be able to conduct yet other peaceful and democratic elections.

As peace begins to reign in Sierra Leone, the investor confidence will slowly come back with increased revenue base for the government. These developments although slow and gradual, promise the ability of the National Electoral Commission to sustain its operations in years beyond 2012.

It is the informed view of the NEC Secretariat that if the invaluable support from our esteemed donors stops by the end of the current project in December 2008, most of the gains that have been made will be lost before the next National Elections slated for the year 2012.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

NEC is proposing the continuation of Electoral Support Project to run up to 2009 to address the following challenges that remain impediment to the delivery of NEC's constitutional mandate in conducting peaceful, free and fair National Elections in subsequent years.

1. Development of Sustainable Staff

Having core staff with relevant electoral competencies within NEC's establishment that is guided by a team of knowledgeable and patriotic commissioners is a sure way to guarantee the future performance of the commission. Capacity gaps have been identified in the areas of Financial Management, Procurement, Logistics, Human Resources Management, Management Information System, and other areas of Electoral Administration.

As a result of this, NEC relied on services of contracted professionals at high costs for support to deliver the previous National Elections. This trend is not sustainable by NEC when the donor resources will stop flowing. NEC is striving to develop its own competencies so that it can fully own future electoral processes. This strategy is also in sync with the donor preference as articulated in Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness. Capacity development was one of the key deliverables of the current project and some work has been started in this area that needs to be deepened in the extended project.

Apart from training, the Commission is also aiming at recruiting two Technical Advisors and support personnel to help build the NEC's capacity in the areas of election planning and management.

2. Training of Trainers Programme in Civic Education

There is also essential need to enhance electoral and civic education in 2009 at regional level and in Freetown. The recent level of voter apathy and invalid votes indicate the need for the Commission to improve on its internal capacity to deliver voter education and civic education programme.

A much more comprehensive approach is needed which will include the composite efforts of NEC and other democratic institutions, including National Commission for Democracy (NCD), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), Human Rights Commission (HRC), Civil Society, and other institutions working on women's rights issues.

A training of trainers programme is proposed within the 2009 Electoral Support Project with the objective to have qualified trainers from the above institutions in election management and civic education.

3. Development of Effective Management Information System (MIS)

MIS is a critical component of electoral management. Credibility of any election depends on among other things, accurate and timely data capture, and dissemination of critical information at decision making points and security of classified data that may be needed for conflict resolutions.

NEC with its nation wide operations is in dire need for a wide area information network for effective data management and efficient information flow. Connectivity between the Commission Secretariat and its regional hubs is non existent making the whole operations inefficient and cost ineffective. Development of management information system with real time connectivity between the secretariat and its strategic regional hubs is being proposed to be part of the next electoral project.

The NEC currently has significant set of IT equipment, which need to be maintained and upgraded so as to sustain the Commission's information system.

4. Promote Public Sensitisation and Civic and Voter Education

In a bid of raising public awareness on the democratic process, there is the dire need for the Commission in 2009 to embark on massive public sensitization and civic/voter education at both the Provincial and in the Western Area. The need to mount the awareness for civic education, gender equality and peaceful politics is real and the Commission, in 2009, will partner with Civil Society Organizations and the Media interested in such awareness campaign, to do a proper promotion nationwide.

The Commission will also hold regular stakeholder meetings to strengthen positive interaction between the Commission and important stakeholders.

5. Support greater engagement to Civil Society Groups

Since Civil Society groups are watch dogs in any community, the Commission will embark on the production of educational materials on good governance and leadership to empower them to correct the wrongs in communities that really deter transparency and credibility in elections. The Commission will also embark on training of trainers in civic education and support them to do civic education at Ward level. This will also help and strengthen the good relationship between the Commission and the Civil Society.

Additionally, the National Election Watch Coalition will be supported to promote democratic socialization by encouraging responsible and informed participation through civic education campaign

6. Promote Sustainable Democracy through the Conduct of Bye Elections

The Commission is sometimes faced with the task of conducting bye-elections due to inevitable circumstances of death of Parliamentarians, Mayors, Chairpersons, Councillors or court rulings relieving said persons of their positions. It is the responsibility of the National Electoral Commission to have a budget in preparedness for such possible bye-elections in promoting sustainable democracy and continued governance. Essentially by law, such vacancies must be filled within the correct timeframe to ensure all constituencies or wards are fully represented either in Parliament or in the Local Councils, according to the Constitution and the Electoral laws of Sierra Leone.

While it is difficult to anticipate the number of vacancies that will occur in a year, the Commission has estimated a 3% turnover.

7. Develop NEC's Infrastructural Capacity

After the 2002, the commission started its operation with virtually no physical infrastructure. A lot of work is being done by the government of Sierra Leone and the donor community to ensure that NEC operates from its own premises and utilizes own warehouse for management of sensitive electoral materials. In view of such development, the security of the new building is necessary; the Commission is therefore requesting a parameter fence for the new headquarters.

Some NEC offices are privately own and the Commission also request to cover the rent of these premises.

8. Electoral Law Reform

Sierra Leone as a country is poised to go through massive political and social transformation in the new democratic dispensation. This transformation calls for a constant review of electoral laws and regulations. The legal framework of election in Sierra Leone is not coherent and needs for critical review. NEC is planning to have a consultative engagement with all stakeholders with the support of consultants to take a look at the current Electoral laws and Regulations in an effort to realign the same with society dynamics. The review of electoral laws is imperative in ensuring that these laws still remain relevant in responding to the contemporary expectations of Sierra Leoneans. Good electoral laws are important ingredients in delivering good elections. The review of the electoral laws is necessary to start in 2009 to ensure that the process is finalized in time before the 2012 general elections.

9. Electoral Training Initiative

NEC staff capacity cannot be built by participating in training sessions alone; NEC staff also need to learn by doing. This is an important part of securing the sustainability and confidence of the Commission and its staff.

The Commission intends to engage many of its staff members as facilitators in the Electoral Training Initiative. This will provide detailed knowledge in election management, good governance and democracy to interested Sierra Leoneans.

Through the initiative, the Commission aims at providing training in election processes, thereby creating a pool of election workers to serve both the commission and other institutions of democracy in the country.

The initiative will be implemented through a modular system to be implemented in the three regional headquarter towns of Bo, Kenema and Makeni and the capital city of Freetown. Higher Institutions of Learning in the regions will be used for the training programmes using the cascade method. There will be NEC Lead Trainers who will monitor the regional and NEC district staff will act as trainers for effective implementation.

The Electoral Training Initiative will further serve as a measure of educating the electorate and providing professionalism (career oriented) for interested individuals. Basically the drive for civic education will gain further momentum through this initiative where participants will have the opportunity to learn through various modules, details on Electoral Systems and Management. The education acquired in this training will eventually trickle down to the other electorates and help in enhancing the political culture in the country as a whole.

The NEC judges that this Initiative can at a very modest cost help to build the capacity of the Commission both currently and in the future, and prove a significant boost for the sustainability of elections in Sierra Leone.