

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2012 National and Local Council Elections were to consolidate the democratic gains made since the end of the civil war in 2002. These elections were the third conducted since 2002 and, significantly, the first which Sierra Leone had administered itself.

Key findings

- The high turnout and enthusiasm of voters, especially women and youth, was impressive.
- At polling stations and tally centres, the staff seemed impartial, helpful and organised. A large number of women and youth served as polling officials on Election Day.
- Some polling stations did not open on time due to late delivery of materials. This led to initial overcrowding. However, we observed that at almost all stations, voters were processed within the allotted time.
- Security was provided by the police, who were visible at all polling stations. They seemed to conduct themselves professionally and discreetly.
- Voter education was insufficient and appears to have been initiated late.
- On Election Day, restrictions on the movement of vehicles were put in place. This contributed to the overall calm. However, these restrictions disadvantaged some sectors of the population, particularly the elderly and those with disability.
- The Campaign was free and robust. Despite ten political parties participating in the elections, competition was largely between the two established parties, APC and SLPP.
- The issue of a level playing field remains a concern. This was particularly evident in the widespread use of money and goods to influence voters; openly partisan media conduct; and the use of state resources for campaigning.
- There is full freedom of the press. However, the group noted that most of the media was openly politically aligned and largely ignored the Media Code of Practice.

- There was a significant increase in nomination fees for candidates as compared to the 2007 elections. This proved controversial. Although the state intervened by subsidising the fees for this election, it remains a pending issue.
- The Campaign and elections were remarkably peaceful, although there were some incidents of violence and intimidation. Of particular concern were the intimidation and attacks directed against three prominent women from the opposition on Election Day.
- Women have played an active and influential role in most sectors of society in Sierra Leone. However, the number of women candidates in these elections was low and this disparity is striking.
- The Women's Situation Room was an innovative monitoring project, which allowed voters and observers to report issues of concern which were then forwarded to the NEC and police. They particularly highlighted gender issues in this election.
- On Election Day, large numbers of domestic observers from a diverse range of civil society organisations were present. The National Elections Watch, in particular, posted observers in every polling station throughout the country. Their Citizens' Situation Room provided independent and regular updates, and they compiled a comprehensive database on the election.
- The Public Elections Act 2012 has consolidated all electoral laws for the first time; this is an important development.
- For the first time, a new biometric registration system was introduced. Despite some initial technical problems, this has improved the efficiency and transparency of the voter registration process.

Recommendations

Women and Youth

- Introduce legislation that allows for quotas to be set for women and youth, to increase their numbers in Parliament and Local Councils.

Legal Framework

- Review the Public Electoral Act 2012 and identify areas where amendments may be necessary to further strengthen the electoral process.

- To alleviate concerns regarding the secrecy of the vote, the serial number should be removed from the ballot paper. However for accounting purposes the serial number should remain on the counterfoil.
- Amendments should be made to provide for the continuous registration, updating, and maintenance of the Voters' Register.
- The NEC to put in place a consultative process with political parties and other stakeholders, including women, youth and disability groups, to arrive at a reasonable nomination fee before the next electoral cycle.

Campaign

- Strengthen existing provisions in Public Electoral Act 2012 which limit the use of state resources for campaigning.
- Establish a regime that regulates campaign expenditure.
- Allow for greater participation of new and emerging parties by establishing a system of state funding for political parties.

Media

- The IMC should be empowered to enforce strict adherence to the established Media Code of Practice for all media.
- Freedom of Information Bill should be passed into legislation.
- • Concerted measures should be taken to ensure that journalists are adequately trained in political and election coverage.

Voting

- A comprehensive and wide-reaching voter education programme should be developed and implemented well in advance of polling day.
- The NEC, in consultation with relevant representative bodies, should provide a more suitable infrastructure at polling stations to provide for the aged and persons with disability.
- We suggest that the NEC assesses the impact of vehicle restrictions on vulnerable groups for future elections.

- As originally proposed by the NEC, poll closure should be brought forward to allow counting to start early.
- The NEC needs to clarify arrangements regarding party agents accompanying the vehicles transporting the election material after the count at the polling stations.
- Review the length of time between completion of vote tabulation and the announcement of results.