On Friday 1st May 2015, Chairman of the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) Justice Tolla M. E. Thompson convened a stakeholders meeting between Political Parties and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) at the PPRC head office on Tower Hill. The meeting was a follow up of an earlier one held on NEC’s Position Paper on the Implications of the Postponement of the 2014 National Census from April 2015 to December 2015 on the Delimitation of Ward and Constituency Boundaries for the 2016 and 2017/18 Local Council and Parliamentary Elections, respectively.

The National Electoral Commission in its position paper expressed that the deferment of the conduct of the National Census would have serious impact on the NEC’s timeline for the conduct of boundary delimitation, which will in turn impact on the timeline for the conduct of Local Council elections scheduled for late 2016 and for Parliamentary elections scheduled for either late 2017 or early 2018.

The publication of the NEC Position paper was consequent on the stance taken by all registered political parties that suggested to H.E. President Koroma to defer the National Population Census as a result of the Ebola epidemic in the country. During the meeting organised by the PPRC and NEC in league with the All Political Parties Association (APPA) held at the PPRC Headquarters in Freetown, national executives and representatives of eight political parties including the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF), Peace and Liberation Party (PLP), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Citizens Democratic Party (CDP), United National People’s Party (UNPP), United Democratic Movement (UDM), and the All Peoples Congress (APC) agreed that as a result of the prevailing health emergency, that warranted political parties to advocate for the postponement of the National Population Census, the same should also apply in the case of elections and that the already postponed national census should be held before any elections in Sierra Leone.

The Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) Chairman Chief Sumano Kapen III, who on behalf of his party, vehemently opposed to the suggestions made by the opposition political party representatives while the Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) National Secretary William Tucker, declined to take a position on behalf of his party on the matter. In his statement, the PPRC Chairman Hon Justice M.E. Tolla Thompson advised political leaders to always inform and dialogue with the Electoral Management Bodies whenever they are dealing with such delicate issues which touch and concern the entire nation.

The NEC Chairman Mohamed N’fah Conteh during his reaction to some of the concerns raised by the political leaders present, assured of the Commission responsibility in conducting credible elections and stated that by law, the Commission needs a comprehensive census data to enable it conduct Constituencies and Ward boundaries nationwide in order to meet with international standards and best practices. He further assured the political leaders that the Commission, will always continue to engage with all of its stakeholders, at all times and at every level of the electoral process in order to achieve its objective.

On 25th April 2015, a memorial service was held in his honour at the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone, Brookfields, Freetown after a short illness. He was buried on Thursday 30th April 2015. A memorial service was held in his honour at the Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone, Brookfields, Freetown.

David Kajue joined the Commission in early 2007 as Voter Education Officer for Bombali District. His public relations skills and personal effort were instrumental in the successful conduct of the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary and 2008 Local Government Elections in that part of the Country. Quite recently, David had served as District Electoral Officer-Bombali District; before that, he was Electoral Officer in the Department of Legal Affairs, Research and Documentation; also before that, he was District Electoral Officer-Koinadugu District, where he conducted the 2012 Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections and several other Paramount Chieftaincy Elections and Local Council Bye Elections.

David Moses Kajue was a graduate of the University of Sierra Leone (Njala University College). He taught at the Annie Walsh Memorial School before joining the Commission.

The National Electoral Commission mourns the death of David Moses Kajue, Former District Electoral Officer, Bombali.
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Accountability
The Commission shall take full responsibility for its activities and will always be answerable to the peoples of Sierra Leone and to its partners.

Credibility
The Commission shall endeavor to win the confidence and trust of all Sierra Leoneans and the international community through the quality of its services.

Independence
In all the electoral matters, the Commission shall ensure that it operates freely in its own best judgment, without taking directives from or being controlled by any person or authority.

Integrity
The Commission shall carry out its activities in an honest and truthful manner, and will take all reasonable measures to prevent willful wrongdoing by its officials.

Professionalism and Dedication
The Commission shall endeavor to have a well-trained, professionally competent, motivated and confident staff, dedicated to the delivery of trustworthy elections.

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Editorial Team

Albert Massaquoi Editor
Emmanuel S. Lavalie Sub Editor
Christopher A. A. Jones Contributor
Edmond S. Alpha Contributor
Georgia Musah Contributor
Solomon R. Villa Graphics

We appreciate the comments and responses from the readership of the January- March 2015 edition of the NEC News Bulletin. We hope to take on board some of the recommendations in order to improve on subsequent publications. The April-June, 2015 edition of NEC News Bulletin focuses primarily on the just concluded Stakeholders’ validation of NEC Strategic Plan 2015-2019 at Regional and National levels. Meanwhile, the Chair of NEC and Chairman of NEC and team, continue to embark on extensive outreach and familiarisation visits through courtesy calls, stakeholders engagements and partnerships. As a result of such stakeholders partnerships, the Commission in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, successfully distributed hygiene and educational materials to all educational institutions nationwide. The Commission continues to engage with other key stakeholders such as Statistics Sierra Leone and the Constitutional Review Committee as it plans to undertake major electoral activities such as demarcating Constituencies and Ward boundaries and conducting Elections and Referenda.

The Commission is also in collaborative partnership with the National Registration Secretariat on a possible consolidation of all forms of civic registration data nationwide into a constituted National Civil Register. This edition also features Political Parties reactions to NEC position paper on the Implications of the Postponement of the 2014 National Population and Housing Census on the Electoral Process in Sierra Leone.

The Mission of the National Electoral Commission (NEC-SL) is to conduct all public elections and referenda, register all eligible voters, demarcate electoral boundaries, impartially serve all stakeholders, undertake electoral education and make regulations for the efficient performance of its functions in promoting sustainable democracy and good governance.

The Vision of the National Electoral Commission Sierra Leone (NEC-SL) is that of an independent, credible and well-resourced institution which promotes democracy and good governance by continually administering credible elections that meet international standards and practice.

On Wednesday 24 June 2015, Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairman Mohamed N’Fa-Alie Conteh, Electoral Commissioners, NEC Legal Retainers and technical staff from the Training, Legal, Field Coordination & External Relations Units attended and participated in a one day session on Stakeholders Review of Referendum Laws for Sierra Leone. In attendance were the Chair of the Constitutional Review Process Hon. Justice Edmond Cowan, UNDP Chief Technical Adviser—Constitutional Review, Sana Baloch, officials of the Constitutional Review Committee, Members of Parliament, Chairpersons of PPRC and NCD, officials of the Law Officers Department, representatives of Political parties and the Bar Association. During the deliberations, NEC Legal Retainer Glenna Thompson made a presentation on the topic: The Legal Framework for the conduct of Referendum.

NEC Chiefs Raymond George and Sheku Ahmed Koroma also jointly made presentations on the Operational Framework and Procedures for the conduct of Referendum. Framework for the conduct of Referendum.

Chairperson of NEC Mohamed N Conteh and CRC Hon. Justice Edmond Cowan co-chairing the engagement session.

Stakeholders during the plenary sessions, drew experiences from referendum processes in Tanzania, Kenya and Scotland and participants lengthily discussed a range of issues on institutional empowerment and mandate to make rules, regulations and procedures to conduct Referendum in Sierra Leone, as in the case of the National Electoral Commission.
NEC and Stakeholders on National Validation of NEC Strategic Plan 2015-2019

Continued from page 3

Court in Sierra Leone and replaced the Electoral Laws Act of 2002.
• Designing, procuring and piloting the first ever Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system in Sierra Leone by the the Commission and its international partners.
• Training of the Commission’s on BVR technology, enabling them to register 2.7 million voters.
• Successful printing and distribution of voter identity cards across the country in the run-up to the 2012 elections.
• Establishment of an Election Results Management System by creating central and regional Tally Centers which improved the accuracy and speedy counting of results.
• National ownership of electoral management of the first multiple elections; Improvement in external communications with all stakeholders by regular press briefings and meetings with political parties.
• Effective management of an Election Support Programme Steering Committee;
• Introduction of the first ever Biometric Voter Registration and production of a clean voter register.
• Establishment of a decentralized result tally system.
• Leadership in the electoral reform process culminating in the enactment of the Public Elections Act, May 2012.
• Establishment of the Institute of Electoral Administration and Civic Education in Sierra Leone.

2015-2019 Strategic Plan National Stakeholders Validation.

According to the objectives of the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, the Commission plans to consolidate all gains made in the areas of structures, protocols, systems and further establishes processes for sustainability in accordance with the stipulated theme for the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan which is ‘Consolidation for sustainability’. 

NEC Strategic Pillars

The Commission and Management in developing its Strategic Plan identified the following thematic issues for the consolidation for sustainability phase of the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan:

- Staff Capacity Development
- Infrastructure Development
- Information Management Systems
- Electoral Education, Communication and Outreach
- Reform of Electoral Laws and Regulations
- Boundary Delimitation
- Voter Registration
- Elections and Referenda
- Monitoring and Evaluation

The 2015-2019 Strategic Plan initiative is expected to further:

- Strengthen the trust and consolidate a strong partnership with key stakeholders
- Improve the management of available resources and reduce dependence of donor support
- Build a strong team of professionals by intensifying capacity development interventions; Improvement in staff welfare to enhance staff retention and reduced international technical assistance;
- Conduct elections in accordance with the established legal framework;
- Use of sustainable election technologies in line with the economic and environmental realities;
- Infrastructure development to enable NEC-SL facilities/warehouses built in all provinces to facilitate operational procedures, improve asset management and reduce recurring rental and re-location costs.

According to the deliverables in the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, the documents is set to guarantee the successful conduct of the 2018 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections and other category of elections during this plan period.

The National Electoral Commission is in the process of completing its Strategic Plan for the 2015-2019 electoral cycle. The Strategic Plan is an electoral road-map that the Commission wants to use as its operational manual during the stated period.

In order to develop the plan, the Commission contracted the services of Rafzee Consultancy Firm to develop the NEC Strategic Plan 2015-2019. In furtherance to stakeholders input in finalizing the document, the Commission during the weeks of 11th - 19th May 2015, held series of regional stakeholders’ participation sessions in Kenema, Bo, Makeni and Freetown. These sessions were finalized with a two-day National Stakeholder’s Validation Workshop on Thursday 11th—Friday 12th June, 2015 at the Shangri La Complex, Aberdeen, Freetown. Mr. Edmond S. Alpha Director of Training and Outreach chaired the various validation workshops and the lead consultant Dr. Adeyemi Rodney Sandy made the various presentations, assisted by Mr. Abukar Koroma, Director of Administration-NEC. Other Heads of Departments intermittently made some inputs. The invited guests were drawn from various sectors including State Acts, Non-state Actors, Political Parties, Civil Society, the Media, Religious Bodies, Traditional Authorities, Development Partners and the Security.

The main objective of the regional validation workshops was to solicit stakeholders’ inputs in the spirit of participation in order to obtain valuable contributions from relevant parties that will add value to the Strategic Plan document for it to have a national character.

The Strategic Plan 2015-2019 seeks to consolidate all its gains over the stated period and to firmly establish the Commission as a model Electoral Management Body, with its fundamental objectives of creating an organizational structure that builds its technical capacity, establishes its credibility and portrays autonomy.

Historical Perspective

The 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, is the 3rd in the series of the Commission’s strategic plans. The 1st being that of 2005-2009. With support from international partners in the period 2005 – 2009, the Commission implemented the strategic planning and reform process as well as the conduct of the 2007 general elections. After the successful completion of the 2007 elections, the 2008 Local Council elections and several other elections, the Commission significantly contributed to the consolidation of post-conflict democracy and towards its recognition as a credible institution. Since then, the Commission developed and implemented the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan electoral cycle and is in the process of completing the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan.

Successes of the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan

The Commission recorded several milestones in the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan period amongst which were:

• Enactment by Parliament of the Public Elections Act in May 2012; The law is a consolidation of previous electoral laws into one single document which established the first Electoral Offences...
The Commission successfully implemented a cascaded training programme on Geographic Information System (GIS) for NEC District officers from 21st - 22nd April 2015 at the One World Link Center in Bo City.

The objective of the training was to expose staff on the operations of the GIS field data capture and to embark on a national collection of GIS data capture nationwide. District staff were given the opportunity to practically use the GPS data capture. The training was to give the staff an opportunity to be armed with the required knowledge, expertise in order to use the equipment to capture GIS data of all NEC designated Voter Registration (VRC) and Polling Centers (PC) nationwide. The data capture exercise was faced with some challenges such as access to some difficult mountainous and riverine terrains during the rainy season and some delays were experienced as a result of some VRCs in Port Loko District that were used as Ebola Isolation Centres. The district staff successfully captured GPS data from a total of 2,998 VRC/PCs all over the country.

The training also gave the district staff the opportunity to use the ArcGIS 10.2.2 software gadget specifically in the Geographic Positioning System (GPS) data capture, in order for them to be knowledgeable in undertaking the field data capture of NEC Registration/ Polling centers nationwide.

After the theoretical sessions, the Training and Outreach Department in collaboration with the Operations and IT Departments of the National Electoral Commission from 12th -19th June 2015, deployed NEC IT and district staff to embark on a national collection of Geographic Information System (GIS) data capture. District staff were given the opportunity to practically use the GPS data capture gadget and undertook a pilot data capture at selected locations in and around the Bo Municipality.

Following the outbreak of Ebola in May 2014, educational institutions in Sierra Leone were closed in order to protect school children and teachers from contracting the disease and to stop it from spreading within the school environment. By March 2015, and with the subsiding Ebola infection figures, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST), through the Reopening of Schools Committee sought the assistance of the National Electoral Commission to undertake distribution of Post-Ebola Educational and Hygiene materials to educational institutions nationwide. The distribution exercise was carried out in phases during the months of March - June 2015.

Memorandum of Understanding

According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between MEST and NEC, the Commission was tasked to take the lead in providing the required technical and operational support through its district offices in order to assist MEST at district level in the distribution process. The Ministry on its part was tasked with the responsibility of providing data of all educational institutions in Sierra Leone; provide list of all materials and equipment for the distribution and also collaborate in planning meetings for the distribution exercise.

Hygiene and Educational Materials

During the phase one distribution process, a total of about 9,014 were reached with thousands of metric tons of hygiene materials including: 30 litre buckets, 20 litre gerry cans, infrared thermometers, bars of soap, rubber gloves, chlorax disinfectants, personal protection equipment, brooms and scrubbing brushes. During the phase two distribution also, learning and stationery materials such as book, pens, pencils, sharpeners, geometrical sets, rulers, erasers and different set of ruled and plain papers were distributed.

Security and Monitoring

The Sierra Leone Police provided the required security for the storage and escort for the distribution process. During the distribution, Electoral Commissioners, Management and Technical staff of the Commission provided supervisory and monitoring roles; development partners and civil society organisations also observed the process nationwide. Members of the District School Reopening Management Taskforce and senior MEST officials were also involved in some form of monitoring. The Local Back to School Committees on behalf of the schools received the supplies at the community level.
NEC DEVELOPS POLICY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN ELECTIONS

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) in 2015 developed a NEC Disability Policy (NECDiP) that is designed to ensure that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) rights are protected in elections participation. The NECDiP was developed with help from the Consultant Teddy Foday Musa and team. In order for effective implementation of the NECDiP, the Commission also developed the NECDiP training manual as a key support resource that aims to increase disability awareness issues relating to electoral rights of PWDs.

The Training & Outreach Department in collaboration with the Department of Human Resource, Gender & Disability of the National Electoral Commission embarked on training of NEC district staff on the NECDiP. The training was co-facilitated by the Consultant Teddy Foday Musa and the NEC Training Unit.

NECDiP Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the Training of Trainees (TOT) on the NEC Disability Policy was geared towards providing NEC district staff the opportunity to be able to relate with PWDs in the conduct of electoral activities and also to build the capacity of staff on disability issues in order to prepare them to serve as pioneers of the NECDiP at district level where the policy would have been validated by stakeholders.

NECDiP Stakeholders Validation

As a follow up to the development of the NECDiP, the Commission through the Department of Human Resource, Gender and Disability in collaboration with the Disability Commission conducted a one day stakeholders consultation and vetting of the NECDiP on Tuesday 2nd June, 2015 at the Atlantic Hall, Stadium Hostels, Brookfield. A number of stakeholders on disability issues and Persons with Disability (PWDs) organizations were invited to assess the document, make the necessary inputs on the NECDiP and thereafter, validate its content.

Commissioner Frederick Kamara, Chairman of the Disability Commission, gave the key note address. According to Mr. Kamara, who is visually impaired, thanked the Commission for such a laudable venture of developing such a valuable document in line with the Disability Act 2011 and other national and international legal instruments, and also in line with Government policy of putting in place assistive policies and strategies in improving the lives of PWDs, who are themselves citizens of Sierra Leone who should have and enjoy such rights equally as the able persons.

Commissioner Augusta Bockarie on behalf of NEC registered the Commission’s commitments in promoting the rights of PWDs in elections and catalogues the strides that the Commission has undertaken as one of the few institutions that has set up a department for gender and disabilities issues, hence the NECDiP is a continued manifestation of the Commission’s seriousness in that drive. The Consultant Teddy Foday Musa facilitated the day’s proceedings and he took time to go through the document with participants. At the end of the session, salient recommendations were made by participants such as in developing braille, pictorial and audio-visual versions of the NECDiP and a nationwide dissemination of its content for the benefit of all.

On Thursday 18 June 2015, The Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairman of NEC Mohamed N’Fah-Ake Conteh, Electrical Commissioners and technical staff of the Commission visited the Statistician General Mohamed King Koroma and team at their Tower Hill Head Office, A.J. Momoh Street on a bilateral engagement of both institutions that a technical sub-committee will be conducted later in the year. Salient contributions were made from Commissioners Macksood Sesay, Augusta Bockarie of NEC and also Andrew Bob Johnny of SSL.

The objective of the meeting was the review of the current Memorandum of Understanding that had existed between both institutions. According to NEC Chairman M. N. Conteh, the NEC by law relies on census data from its counterpart in order to draw its constituency and ward boundaries. Mr. M. K. koroma on the other hand, on behalf of SSL, assures the visiting team of his institution’s commitment to the ongoing preparation of the National Population and Housing Census that will be conducted later in the year. Salient action plans and timeline of activities, that will include dates for the final review and eventual signing of the MOU between SSL and NEC.
The Government of Sierra Leone and Development Partners have approved for the setting up of a National Civil Register, the National Registration Secretariat (NRS) has undertaken collaborative efforts to register certain groups of people in remote rural communities in some villages in Bombali, Kono, Moyamba and Western Rural Districts.

Main while, a joint NEC/NRS Fibre Optic Data Connectivity project that is expected to link up the NRS Headquarters on Wallace Johnson Street with NEC Head Office at Tower Hill, as well as the NEC National Data Centre at Wellington is underway. The operation is geared towards the synchronizing of registration data between the three locations. A secondary data backup link is also expected to be created by an on line Internet Service Provider via Radio link. The success of the pilot project will eventually lay the foundation for a national civil registration process in Sierra Leone.

On Wednesday, 20th May 2015, national executives of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) paid a courtesy call on the Chief Electoral Commissioner and Chairman Mohamed M. N Conteh on his assumption of office. The SLTU delegation among other issues held extensive discussion with the Commission on collaborative ties. During the meeting, the NEC CEC/Chair thanked and welcomed the SLTU delegation for a timely visit as it was hoped that the Commission is prepared to collaborate and work with any institution or organisation in the interest of the development of the country.

The SLTU delegation among other issues held extensive discussion with the Commission on collaborative ties. During the meeting, the NEC CEC/Chair thanked and welcomed the SLTU delegation for its electoral register, for the purpose of voting.

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) in collaboration with the National Registration Secretariat (NRS) have jointly undertaken a pilot project on Biometric Field Data Capture in Five Districts nationwide. The objective of the exercise was to assess both the Hardware and Software Performance of Biometric Registration Solutions in the pilot project before it is finalized for use. With support from UNDP and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), NRS and NEC IT staff under the supervision of the UNDP IT Consultant embarked on a one month long pilot data capture exercise undertaken by various other State institutions before. After the establishment of the National Civil Register, the National Electoral Commission is expected to extract relevant data of all eligible voters to develop its electoral register, for the purpose of voting.

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