

**A Workshop Report on  
Women's Political Participation in 2018 Elections in Sierra Leone- Lessons  
Learnt**

Organized by UNDP convened at the Bintumani Hotel, Freetown, Sierra Leone

May 2018

# Women's Political Participation: Lessons Learnt in 2018 Sierra Leone Elections

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## Acronyms

AG: Attorney General  
AMNet: Advocacy Movement Network  
AMNET: Advocacy Movement Network  
APPWA: All Political Party Women's Association  
CEDAW: Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
ECOWAS: Economic Community of West Africa States  
EU: European Union  
FPTP: First Past the Post  
MP: Members of Parliament  
MSWGCA: Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs  
NAP: National Action Plan  
NEW: National Elections Watch  
ONS: Office of National Security  
PPRC: Political Parties Registration Commission  
PR: Proportional Representation  
PWD: People with Disability  
SLP: Sierra Leone Police  
SLPP: Sierra Leone People's Party  
UN Women: United Nations Women  
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  
UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution  
WSR: Women's Situation Room

## *Executive Summary*

Women in Sierra Leone accounts for more than 50 percent of the population however, gender inequality is widespread in the country's economic, political, and socio-cultural landscape. Accordingly, women lag far behind men in all aspects of their lives, including participation and representation in national and local governments.

The history of women's representation in Parliament shows that it dates as far back as 1957 with only one woman present as a Parliamentarian. Although, gender data for subsequent elections are not found, available evidence shows that it took 28 years to marginally increase the number of women in Parliament to three in 1985. Since the 1996 general elections, some attempts have been made to gather gender data on women's political participation by women's groups, and leaders. Accordingly, the data shows that women's representation in the Parliament since the 1996 general elections is increasing- it was 5 (6%) women in the Parliament in 1996, which increased to 19 (15%) in 2002, 17 (14%) in 2007, 16 (13%) in 2012, and 18 (12%) in 2018. Similarly, the first local elections were held in 2004 in 32 years since the abolishment of local bodies in 1972. The 2004 local election data shows 58 (14%) women nationwide represented in the local council, which increased to 86 (17%) in 2008, 19% (number not available) in 2012, and 71 (16%) in 2018. However, in the Parliament and the local council, the increase has been marginal and in an extremely slow pace.

The women's groups in Sierra Leone have been advocating to successive governments and political parties for ensuring minimum 30% seats at all levels of decision making. However, the data above shows that women are far from achieving this minimum demand. While both the governments and the political parties have made commitments to fulfilling this demand, and acknowledged to correct the historical disadvantages against women, concrete measures are yet to be undertaken to this end. Importantly, the *'Affirmative Action Bill'* failed to garner support in the Parliament in 2012.

Sierra Leone had its third post war general elections on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018 for President, Parliament and Local Council, followed by a Presidential run-off on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Post elections period provide a unique opportunity to examine the issues around women's political participation. Therefore, it becomes imperative that the stakeholders take stock of the electoral and political processes to examine the progresses, and document lessons learnt, especially identifying what worked and what did not, in order to formulate timely interventions to improve the processes to ensure greater participation of women in the political processes. In this context, UNDP organized a two-day workshop on *'Women's Political Participation: Lessons Learnt'* on 16 and 17 May 2018. The workshop aimed at examining and documenting the issues around low participation and representation of women in decision-making, including the issue of intimidation and violence in electoral

context, gender considerations in election observations, electoral security, and media, challenges of female candidates and representatives, initiatives of women's organization and the affirmative action provisions. Stakeholders representing the government, political parties, civil society and women's organizations, media, academics, research groups, observer's organizations, and international organizations participated in the workshop. The workshop report aims to provide valuable insights to women's political participation in Sierra Leone and also address to some extent the gender data gap on women's political participation by consolidating data from 1996 to present, wherever possible. Representatives of the government, civil society organizations, members of Parliament, and international organizations attended the workshop.

The workshop opened with a formal opening session, where the representatives of Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), political parties-namely Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), Women's Form (Women's Network), UN Women and UNDP deliberated on their commitments and support to women's political participation.

At the working session, the resource persons presented in eight different relevant topics in the two-day workshop, which are as follows:

- 'Women's Political Participation: Progress, Challenges and Gaps' Women's representation in political party structures
- Experiences of women as candidate and representatives
- Gender based violence in electoral context-Women Situation Room (WSR)
- Gender responsive media
- Elections observation and gender considerations
- Electoral Security and Gender Considerations, and
- Women's groups support to women's political participation

Data was assessed for five elections between 1996 and 2018. While there have been Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, the numbers are marginal, except in 2018 where 5 (31%) women contested as Vice Presidents. Despite the candidacies, women are yet to be elected as President or Vice President.

The sharp increase in Vice-Presidential candidacy during the recent election was viewed as increasing awareness among women with regard to women's political participation, and confidence of women to venture into politics. However, women expressed concern that not winning elections in these positions will be a setback to women's candidacy in these positions in future.

However, even after the passage of 60 years since the first woman made it to the Parliament in 1957, women are yet to make a significant stride forward in terms of their numbers in the Parliament. Progress is noted on women's candidacy for Parliament in 2018, as the percentage doubled in the recently held elections since the previous election in 2012. The situation, however, is reverse for the elected members of Parliament, as women's percentage is in a decline since 2002 elections.

While data was not available for 1996 elections, those available for the subsequent elections show low percentage of women among Parliament candidates. Only 11% were women among candidates in 2002 and 2007 elections, which decreased almost by half (6%) in 2012, but increased by double (13%) in 2018. In relation to elected women members for Parliament, 6% of women won elections in 1996, which increased to 15% in 2002 -the highest percentage recorded ever in all five elections. Since then the percentage has continuously decreased in successive elections to 14%, 13% and 12% in 2007, 2012 and 2018 respectively.

The first Municipal Council election was held in 2004<sup>1</sup>, after thirty-two (32) years of abolishment of local bodies in 1972. Although data on candidacy for Municipal Council elections for previous elections were not available, female Municipal Council candidacy data for 2018 elections shows 21% (482) were women among the municipal council candidates (2260) nationwide. The percentage of elected councilors was recorded at 14% in 2004, which increased to 17%, 19% and 16% percent in following elections in 2008, 2012, and 2018 respectively. The highest percentage of women councilors (19%) were recorded in 2012. Accordingly, the percentage positively impacted the highest percentage of appointments of councilor in Mayoral (16%) and Deputy Mayoral (32%) positions in the same year. However, in 2018 the percentage dropped by 3 percent (16%) for Councilors, and by 2 percent (14/%) for Mayors. The 2018 election for Deputy Mayor is yet to be held.

In general, increasing participation and representation of women is evident among candidates, as well as elected and nominated representatives. However, the pace of increase has been extremely slow and marginal. Women are still far from achieving the much-demanded minimum 30% representation at decision-making levels. In 2018, the results have been mixed; while some progress is seen among the Vice Presidential and Parliament candidates, as well as among the ministers, the percentage for elected representatives for both the Parliament and the Municipal Council has decreased. The workshop participants attributed to the increase in candidacy to the consistence visibility to the issue of women's political participation and their advocacy with the political parties. However, decreasing percentage of those elected was expressed as a concern and attributed to reflection of the society's traditional mindset that is yet to fully support women's leadership in decision making levels.

**On VAW:** Although, there were no major indications of deliberate efforts or organized attempts to harass women in particular, some cases were reported on intimidations and violence against women. In total, 576 cases were reported to the call center, among which, 20 (3%) involved a woman witnessing or being the victim of elections related violence, harassment or intimidation. Accordingly, at least 98% of WSR Observers reported that they did not witness a single case of election-related violence directly targeting women in the first round. The second round was not different. In the few reported cases to WSR, there were also reports of women

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the post-conflict reconstruction and strengthening of democratic governance and institutions effort.

being sexually assaulted and gang raped. It was noted that women were most likely to be attacked by men closer to them, owing to women's political allegiance. For similar reasons, there were cases of women assaulted and/or harassed by their neighbors. Generally, it appeared that differences in political beliefs were the major motivation for election-related violence, also seen true in the 2018 elections. The WSR successfully mediated in many cases to calm tensions and referred to relevant government and security institutions for further redressal, where necessary.

**On electoral security:** In view of the security concerns in electoral processes among general public, and its possible impact in participation of women in the processes, the security institutions played a critical role in promoting gender responsiveness in electoral security. Efforts were made to deploy greater number of women among the security personnel; in total 20% women were deployed from various security institutions, among which the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLPF) deployed the highest percent of women (30%). Accordingly, extra security (close protection services) for women and the vulnerable during party nomination exercise, campaign periods, polling day, period preceding the declaration of results, and special security measures taken to provide security for the vulnerable after the announcement of the results. While vehicle movement was restricted on the election day, there were vehicles that were assigned, especially in view of pregnant and lactating women, as well as for persons with disability. Security personnel were provided training that included especial considerations to women and vulnerable group in the electoral processes.

**On Observation:** the National Election Watch (NEW) had deployed observers in technical, and Short-Term Observers (STOs) categories. NEW had deployed women observers, among whom 24% were in technical categories, and 16% were among STOs. Similarly, European Union (EU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also deployed observers in the elections. EU had deployed 40% of women observers in the technical category, and 54% as Long Term Observers (LTOs) in the first and second round of elections. Similarly, 50% were women among the Short-Term Observers (STOs) in the first round of elections, and 53% in the second round. ECOWAS had deployed 50% of women among LTOs and 40% among STOs in the first round of elections.

**On media:** The topic looked at how the media in Sierra Leone had incorporated gender consideration in regard to promoting gender responsiveness in media and ensuring greater media space for women's voices, and engagement. The media monitoring reports shared in the presentation stressed that the media in 2018 elections showed greater efforts to include women candidates in the media. In addition, the Media showed restraint with regard to negatively portraying women candidates and publishing damaging stories against women. However, there were challenges both the Media and the women candidates faced in their interaction with each other. While the Media experienced women candidates shying away and difficult to access, the women candidates experienced lack of encouragement from the Media.



**On the topic of women's experiences as candidates and elected representatives:** The challenges for women to venture into politics were highlighted as the traditional socio-culture mindset, and the poor economic condition of women. The female candidates face financial constraints as one of the biggest barrier to their success in politics, as it negatively affects their ability to campaign, and compete in other electoral processes. Also, intimidation and harassment against women candidates as a tactic used both by the political opponents, and traditional groups to discourage women from politics are highly prevalent. At the Parliament, women have actively participated to promote gender responsive legislations yet failed to garner support for '*Affirmative Action Bill.*' Also, capacity-building opportunities in the Parliament was raised as an issue, as very few such chances were available for women to enhance their skills as Parliamentarians.

**On the topic of women's organizations' support to women's political participation:** It was highlighted that efforts were made to identify potential women interested to context 2018 elections, and trainings were organized on leadership skill and role of elected representatives. Similarly, candidate trainings were held to build capacity of women candidates, especially focusing on campaigning skills, and understanding government structures, including Parliament and Municipal Council. Programmes to raise awareness were also held to encourage votes for women, as well as to ensure that greater number of women understood registration and voting processes, under the slogan '*women's right to vote, and to be voted.*'

**Affirmative action bill and its provisions were discussed:** An '*Affirmative Action Bill*' was developed by women leaders in the Parliament in 2012, which proposed measures for minimum 30% seats in Parliament and Municipal Council, through a combination of measures, which is the constituency reservation, and allocation of safe seats for women. It was highlighted, that the Bill could not be tabled in 2012-2018 Parliament as it did not garner support from male members of the Parliament. However, it was shared that the Attorney General (AG) in 2012 was also asked to prepare a government Bill, which is yet to be shared by the AG's office.

Overall the recommendations stressed on timely planning for substantial results on women's political participation for the 2023 elections.

**On legislation:** Recommendations included making efforts to ensure that the '*Affirmative Action Bill*' is widely consulted and promoted for enactment, with inclusion of provision for minimum seats for women, as well as legislating this provision under the National Constitution through its review and amendments. In addition, review of legislations that affected women's candidacy for example the requirement to resign from a job before a year of candidacy, dual citizenship, and campaign finance laws were part of the recommendations. The recommendations for capacity building focused on ensuring that adequate number of trainings are provided not only to the candidates but also to the elected representatives both in the Parliament and the Municipal Council. Recommendations for gender-based

violence in electoral context, included generating data and information on the prevalence and nature of incidents against women voters and candidates, and women's advocacy group to pay greater attention to liaising with authorities in resolving the violence.

**On electoral security and media:** The recommendations included providing gender responsive trainings to security personnel, and media, not only as electoral event activity but also as part of all security and media trainings.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### a. Background

Women accounts for more than 50 percent of the population in Sierra Leone, however, gender inequality is widespread on the country's economic, political, and socio-cultural landscape. Accordingly, women lag far behind men in all aspects of their lives, including participation and representation in both the national and local governments.

The history of women's representation in Parliament shows that it dates as far back as 1957 with only one woman present as a Parliamentarian.<sup>2</sup> Although, gender data for subsequent elections are not found, available evidence shows that it took 28 years to marginally increase the number of women in Parliament to three in 1985.<sup>3</sup> Since the general elections in 1996, some attempts are made to gather gender data on women's political participation by women's groups, and leaders. Accordingly, the data shows that women's representation in the Parliament since the 1996 general elections is in increase; it was 5 (6%) women in the Parliament in 1996, which increased to 19 (15%) in 2002, 17 (14%) in 2007, 16 (13%) in 2012, and 18 (12%) in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the first local elections were held in 2004 after 32 years, since the abolishment of local bodies in 1972. The 2004 local election data shows 58 (14%) women nationwide represented in the local council, which increased to 86 (17%) in 2008, 19%<sup>5</sup> in 2012, and 71 (16%) in 2018. There has been an increase both in the Parliament and the local council, however, this has been at an extremely slow pace and marginal.

The women's groups in Sierra Leone have been advocating to successive governments and political parties for ensuring minimum 30% seats at all levels of decision making, however, the data above shows that women are far from achieving this minimum demand. While both the governments and the political parties have made commitments to fulfilling this demand, and acknowledged to correct the historical disadvantages against women, concrete measures are yet to be undertaken to this end. Importantly, the 'affirmative action Bill' failed to garner support in the Parliament in 2012.

Sierra Leone had its third post war<sup>6</sup> general elections on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018 for President, Parliament and Local Council, followed by a Presidential run-off on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Post elections period provide a unique opportunity to examine the issues around women's

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<sup>2</sup>Women's Political Participation: Progress, Challenges And Gaps" Paper Presented At The Two-Day Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop Organised By UNDP, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone By Dr. Bernadette Lahai-Gender And Agricultural And Rural Development Expert.

<sup>3</sup> Women's Political Participation: Progress, Challenges And Gaps" Paper Presented At The Two-Day Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop Organised By UNDP, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone By Dr. Bernadette Lahai-Gender And Agricultural And Rural Development Expert.

<sup>4</sup> Women's Political Participation: Progress, Challenges And Gaps" Paper Presented At The Two-Day Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop Organised By UNDP, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone By Dr. Bernadette Lahai-Gender And Agricultural And Rural Development Expert.

<sup>5</sup> Number of women represented at municipal council were not available for 2012

<sup>6</sup> The country concluded its civil war in 2002.

political participation. It is imperative that the stakeholders take stock of the recent electoral and political processes to document the lessons learnt, especially by assessing the progress, gaps and challenges, as well as identify key areas of actions for timely interventions.

In this context, UNDP organized a two-day workshop on ‘*Women's Political Participation: Lessons Learnt*’ on 16 and 17 May 2018.<sup>7</sup> The workshop aimed at examining and documenting the issues around low participation and representation of women in decision-making, including the issue of intimidation and violence in electoral context, gender considerations in election observations, electoral security, and media, challenges of female candidates and representatives, initiatives of women’s organization and the affirmative action provisions. Almost, ninety participants attended the workshop representing the government, political parties, civil society and women’s organizations, media, academics, research groups, observer’s organizations, and international organization’s participated in the workshop.

The workshop report aims to provide valuable insights to the issues around women’s political participation in Sierra Leone, as well as it aims to address to some extent the gender data gap on women’s political participation, through consolidating such data into one report from 1996 onwards, wherever possible.

#### ***b. Objectives of the Workshop***

- i) To examine the progress of women’s political participation in the post election context in view of the recently concluded 2018 general elections
- ii) To identify issues and challenges around women’s political participation, and provide key recommendations
- iii) To document the lessons learnt, and consolidate gender data around women’s political participation

#### ***c. Modality of the Workshop and Report Layout***

- i) Modality

The workshop was divided into two parts, the first part was the opening session, where key stakeholders expressed their commitments to women’s political participation. Among them were the Minister of Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affair, representatives of political parties currently representing in the Parliament, President of the Women’s Forum, and UNDP and UN Women representatives.

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<sup>7</sup> Two months after the country’s multi-tier general elections.

The second part of the workshop included a prior exercise of identifying resource persons for preparing papers on various topics to be presented at the workshop, and presenting and facilitating the working sessions, over the one and a half day period. Following the presentations, group works were facilitated among the resource persons and the participants to identify key areas of concerns, and accordingly develop recommendations. The workshop was conceptualized and designed by Ms. Salina Joshi, Gender Consultant, UNDP, in consultation with the Governance Team, UNDP Country Office (CO), and relevant stakeholders.

The workshop topics and presenters are as follows:

- Women's Political Participation: Progress, Challenges And Gaps: Honorable Dr. Lahai, Former Member of Parliament.
- Women's representation in political party structures: Ms. Augusta James-Teima, President, All Political Party Women's Association (APPWA).
- Experiences of women as candidate and representatives: Ms. Rosaline Smith, Former Member of Parliament.
- Gender based violence in electoral context - Women Situation Room (WSR): Dr. Nemata Majeks-Walker, Eminent Women, WSR; Former Founding Member of The 50/50 Group, and Ms Hawa Samai, National Coordinator, Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet)
- Gender responsive media: Ms. Williette James, Lecturer, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone
- Elections observation and gender considerations: Ms. Marcella Samba-Sesay, Chairperson, National Elections Watch (NEW).
- Electoral Security and Gender Considerations: Mr. Manso Dumbuya, Office of National Security (ONS), Sierra Leone
- Women's groups support to women's political participation: Dr. Fatu Taqi, President, The 50/50 Group

Ms. Velnora Edwin, President, Good Governance facilitated the workshop, and Mr. Elias Bangura took workshop notes. Ms. Salina Joshi finalized the report with inputs from the UNDP CO, and the resource persons.

## ii. Report Layout

The report is divided into four chapters; the first is the introduction, which includes background, objectives, workshop modality and report layout, and opening session remarks. The second chapter includes status and progress of women's political participation and representation, highlighting gender data of candidacy, representation, and leadership of women in cabinet, national Parliament, and international Parliamentary bodies. The third chapter, includes presentations on each topic, highlighting the issues, and challenges, and includes presenters and participants inputs. The fourth chapter includes recommendation from each of the topic.

#### *d. Key Stakeholders Remarks at the Opening of the Workshop*

##### **Commitments on Promoting Women's political participation in Sierra Leone**

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At the opening session representatives of MSWGCA, political parties, women's advocacy organizations, UN Women and UNDP deliberated on their commitments and support to women's political participation.

**Mr. Sam Doe, Country Director, UNDP**, welcomed the participants on behalf of UNDP. He highlighted that the lessons-learnt workshop is timely in view of the recently concluded elections and its results, which depict the number of women in the Parliament is in a decreasing trend. In this context, he emphasized the need to ask the difficult questions, and seek answers as to why progress on women's political participation has yet to make a significant stride forward, despite the various efforts by the stakeholders. Believing that the workshop will consolidate the lessons learnt from the past processes, examine what needs to be done differently, and identify area of interventions for stakeholder to take actions accordingly, he assured continuous support from UNDP in promoting women's political participation.

**Ms. Fatmata Sawaneh, National Women's Leader for the ruling Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP)**, pointed out that 'business as usual' attitude has to change when it comes to women's political participation, and stressed on the need for women to support other women rising above party politics in supporting the common agenda and achieve our goal. Expressing her firm commitment, she said she looked forward to engaging strongly in promoting women's political participation.

**Ms. Nanette Thomas, National Women's Leader, All People's Congress (APC)**, expressed her commitments to supporting women's political participation and pointed out that her Party has actively contributed to increase in the number of women in decision making. Noting that the 'year one' has started ticking in view of the 2023 general elections, she said that stringent measures needs to be put in place for tangible progress forward.

**Ms. Isatu Jabbie Kabbah, National Women's Leader, National Grand Coalition (NGC)**, highlighted the 'Gender Bill' and its affirmative action provisions on minimum 30% quota for women at all decision-making levels as a key effort to focus post elections. Expressing her concern against the recent incidents of violence against women, such as rape (in Tonko Limba), acid attack (in Kono), and torching of a house (in Mambolo), she said that the women were victimized for supporting another party, and that violence is one of the serious barriers to women's political participation and demanded that the perpetrators must be brought to book. Expressing her commitment to women's participation, she reflected on the need for political parties to be sincere to women, and transform lip service to actions by equally promoting women to take up decision making roles, and not limit them for political demonstrations, rallies, cooking and dancing alone.

**Ms. Maria Bangura, National Women's Leader, Coalition for Change (CAC)**, stated that she is committed to promoting equal representation of women at the decision making

level, and that it is indeed unfortunate to see women represented in fewer numbers at the decision-making level in Sierra Leone. Expressing her concerns on the prevalence of violence against women and high illiteracy among women, she said she would continually contribute to addressing these issues in creating opportunities for women to engage in decision-making.

**Ms. Maude Regina Peacock, President, Women's Forum**, highlighted the importance of women's role in decision making for conflict prevention and greater political stability in the country; she said that there is no dearth of strong and capacitated women in Sierra Leone, who should be allowed space and opportunity to make decisions for the society and the country. As the largest network of women's organizations, she said, the Forum stands committed to continuing efforts to promote women's political participation.

**Mr. Samuel Londo, Project Coordinator, UN Women**, said that the UN Women is committed to the cause and has been continuously contributing in the area of women's political participation. Pointing out the need to engage with men as a strategy to garner support for women, he said the UN Women launched the *He For She* campaign in 2017, among several other efforts undertaken. As one of the key challenges in regard to women in politics, he said, that the "the systemic violence against women," effectively needs to be addressed to provide safer political space for women. He too expressed UN Women's commitment to continuously support in the area of women's political participation.

**Honorable, Ms. Baindu Dassama, Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs**, stated that her Ministry has now been tasked with responsibility by the new government in line with promoting women's political participation, which includes:

- proposing amendments to the 1991 constitution to increase the chances of women's participation in politics
- proposing mandatory provision for all political parties to enact gender policies that will specify a threshold for women in executive, parliamentary, and local council positions
- review and enactment of the 30 percent quota Bill
- and plan training and funding for female candidates for public elections.

Accordingly, she shared that the President, Honorable Julius Mada Bio, has made a commitment to transform the Gender Affairs Directorate into a Gender Affairs Commission to develop, coordinate, monitor and support the implementation of gender laws and policies. She expressed her commitment to stand by in promoting women's agenda and called out women in Sierra Leone to support her in working in the true spirit of enhancing women's emancipation and proving that women can set political differences aside and work together to collectively contribute as women.

### ***Remarks from the Floor***

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***Ms. Haja Marie Bob Kandeh, President, Market Women Association,*** said the key to securing women's representation in decision-making is legislating affirmative actions; immediate action is required to impact the outcome in the next elections, as one of the challenges is last-minute efforts during elections.

***Dr. Fatu Taqi, President, The 50/50 Group,*** said, women in politics too have paid lip service only and that the women must put women before their parties in garnering support from party leadership in legislating quota measures, so women do not have to wait forever to see much progress.

***Honorable Bernadette Lahai, former MP and Minority Leader,*** said the political will is key in support of women's political participation, and women should seek commitment from the President himself, to see tangible progress.



## Chapter Two: Status Of Women’s Representation In Decision Making, And Political Participation In Sierra Leone

The Section highlights the status and progress on women’s participation as candidates, and as representatives in decision-making bodies, especially in the Parliament, Municipal Council, Cabinet of Ministers, and political party structures. Attempt has been made to examine the progress from 1996 until the recent general elections held in 2018, based upon data that was available. Additionally, the section highlights the lessons learnt as discussed and identified by the workshop participants.

The section is informed by the presentations made in the workshop by Honorable Dr. Bernadetta Lahai, Former Member of Parliament, and Ms. Augusta James-Teima, President, All Political Party Women’s Association.

### *a. Women’s Candidacy for President and Vice President*

Candidates	1996		2002		2007		2012		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Presidential Candidates	13 (93%)	1 (7%)	7 (78%)	2 (22%)	7 (100%)	0 (0%)	9 (100%)	0 (0%)	14 (88%)	2 (22%)
Vice-Presidential Candidates	14 (100%)	0 (0%)	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	11 (69%)	5 (31%)

*Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018*

The table above provides gender data from five general elections held between 1996 and 2018 in Sierra Leone. The number of Presidential candidate across the five elections in total was 55, out of which only 5 (9%) were women. There was no female Presidential candidate at all in two successive general elections of 2007 and 2012. Not more than 2 women at a time have contested Presidential elections, seen in 2002 and 2018 elections.

Similarly, only 8 (15%) women out of 55 vice Presidential candidates over the 5 elections have been women. While, there was no female candidate for 1996, all the other subsequent elections 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2018 saw one female candidate each, until 2018, which had the most female vice-presidential candidates than any other elections (31%).

## Progress:

The data for women’s presidential candidacy shows no progress over the period of five elections, as the number fluctuates between meager figures of 1 and 2 in all the elections that women contested. However, in regard to vice presidency a sharp increase in female candidacy was noted in the recently concluded 2018 elections, where 5 women contested for the position, which is a comparatively healthy departure from the dismal trend of a single woman contesting in every elections over the period between 1996 to 2018. As such, while candidacy for the positions are poor, there is yet to be a woman elected to the positions of President and Vice President of Sierra Leone.

Participants in the workshop highlighted the fact that both the Presidency and the Vice Presidency are male dominated positions, and as there is being no precedence of women winning elections in these positions, very few women attempt to contest. The sharp increase in vice presidential candidacy during the recent election was viewed as increasing awareness among women in regard to women’s political participation, and confidence of women to venture into politics, however, women expressed concern that not winning elections in these positions will be a setback to women’s candidacy in these positions in future.

### *b. Women’s Candidacy and their Representation in Parliament*

	1996		2002		2007		2012		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Parliamentary Candidates</b>	NA <sup>8</sup>	NA <sup>9</sup>	1,346 (89%)	159 (11%)	502 (89%)	64 (11%)	548 (94%)	38 (6%)	695 (87%)	100 (13%)
<b>Elected Member of Parliament</b>	75 (94%)	5(6%)	105 (85%)	19 (15%)	107 (86%)	17 (14%)	108 (87%)	16 (13%)	129 (88%)	18 (12%)
<b>Paramount Chiefs Represented in Parliament</b>	10(83%)	2(17%)	10(83%)	2(17%)	12(100%)	0(0%)	12(100%)	0(0%)	12(86%)	2(14%)

Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17 May, 2018

<sup>8</sup> This data was not available up to the writing of this Report.

<sup>9</sup> This data was not available up to the writing of this Report.

While data was not available for 1996 elections, those available for the subsequent elections as shown on the table above demonstrate extremely low percentage of women among Parliament candidates. Only 11 percent were women among candidates in 2002 and 2007 elections, which decreased almost by half (6%) in 2012, but sharply increased to the highest percentage (13%) in 2018.

In relation to elected women members for Parliament, 6% of women won elections in 1996, which increased to 15% in 2002 -the highest percentage recorded ever in all five elections. Since then the percentage has continuously decreased in successive elections to 14%, 13% and 12% in 2007, 2012 and 2018 respectively. It is important to note that although the percentage of women's candidacy for Parliament was recorded the highest in 2018, the percentage of those elected has been the lowest in the same year- lowest after the 1996 elections.

Paramount Chiefs are provincial district heads, among who are also nominated to Parliament. Only 2 women were nominated among Paramount Chiefs in the elections in 1996, 2002, and 2018, while no woman were nominated among the Paramount Chiefs in 2007 and 2012.

### **Progress:**

Evidences suggest that the first woman to be elected to Parliament was in 1957.<sup>10</sup> However, even after the passage of 60, women are yet to make a significant stride forward in terms of their numbers in the Parliament. While progress is noted on women's candidacy for Parliament in 2018, as the percentage doubled in the recently held elections since the previous election in 2012. The situation, however, is reverse for the elected members of Parliament, as women's percentage is in a decline since 2002 elections.

The workshop participants highlighted contributing factors to increased Parliamentary candidacy as – the continuous advocacy of women's group to political parties for fielding greater number of women as candidates, as well as increasing interest and confidence among women to venture into politics as the main factors, as an influence from women who have been at the decision-making level.

As emerging phenomena, it was noticed that in 2018 for the first time an independent female candidate won the Parliamentary elections. Participants highlighted that it is an evidence to women's attempts in breaking barriers, and standing on their own without political backing, or blessings.

### *c. Women's Leadership Positions in National Parliament, and International Parliamentary Bodies, since 2002 to 2018*

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<sup>10</sup> "Women's Political Participation: Progress and Challenges" Paper Presented At The Two-Day Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop Organised By Undp, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone By Dr. Bernadette Lahai, Forer Member of Parliament, Gender And Agricultural And Rural Development Expert.

Leadership Positions in Parliament	Committee Chairs and Deputies in Parliament, Sierra Leone	Parliamentary Delegation led by Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Acting President of Sierra Leone;</b></li> <li>• <b>Deputy Speaker, Parliament, Sierra Leone</b></li> <li>• <b>Deputy Speaker ECOWAS Parliament;</b></li> <li>• <b>Minority Leader in Parliament, Sierra Leone;</b></li> <li>• <b>Deputy Chief Whip, Parliament, Sierra Leone;</b></li> <li>• <b>Vice President Pan African Parliament;</b></li> <li>• <b>Coordinator, Inter-Parliamentary Union</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security;</li> <li>• Basic Education;</li> <li>• Tertiary Education;</li> <li>• Health and Sanitation;</li> <li>• HIV/AIDS;</li> <li>• Lands, country planning and the Environment;</li> <li>• Political and Public Affairs;</li> <li>• Public Accounts Committee;</li> <li>• Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs;</li> <li>• Youth Affairs</li> <li>• Sports;</li> <li>• Information and Communication;</li> <li>• Tourism and Culture;</li> <li>• Marine Resources;</li> <li>• Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pan African Parliament;</li> <li>• Inter-Parliamentary Union;</li> <li>• Forum for African MPs on Population</li> </ul>

*Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018*

The table above features various leadership positions that women in Sierra Leone have held in both the National Parliament, and the International parliament bodies. Within the Sierra Leone parliament, the highest of this position has been the Acting President of Sierra Leone. Internationally, women members of parliament belong to several international parliamentary bodies and have held high-ranking leadership positions in these bodies, ranging from Vice President of Pan African Parliament, President of Pan African Parliamentary Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition, Deputy Speaker of ECOWAS Parliament and National Coordinator, and Inter-Parliamentary Union. Women member of Parliament have led three international Parliamentary bodies, namely – ECOWAS, Pan African Union, and Inter-Parliamentary Union.

## Progress:

A yearly data is not available to track progress in regard to women's leadership within both the National Parliament, and the International Parliamentary Bodies. However, it is clear that women have been actively engaged in leading many of the Parliamentary Committees as well as international Parliamentary associations, and delegations. Participants discussed that although women have represented in fewer numbers in Parliament, they have been able to significantly contribute to legislative developments, as well as pushing for gender and vulnerable group responsive legislations. They said that despite the challenges women face to reach at the decision-making level, once they have entered in the Parliament, they have strongly and actively represented women of Sierra Leone.

### *d. Women in Local Councils*

Local Council	2004		2008		2012		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Municipal Councillors	421 (89%)	58 (14%)	370 (83%)	86 (17%)	81% NA <sup>11</sup>	19% NA <sup>12</sup>	375 (84%)	71 (16%)
Mayors/Chairpersons	18 (95%)	1(5%)	18 (95%)	1 (5%)	16 (84%)	3 (16%)	18 (86%) <sup>a0</sup>	3 (14%)
Deputy Mayors/Chairpersons	17 (89%)	2 (89%) (11%)	16 (84%)	3 (84%) (16%)	13 (68%)	6 (32%)	NA (elections not conducted yet)	NA (elections not conducted yet)
Paramount Chiefs <sup>13</sup>	138 (93%)	11 (7%)	138 (93%)	11 (7%)	137 (92%)	12 (7%)	135 (94%)	14 (9%)

Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018

<sup>11</sup> Number Not Available.

<sup>12</sup> Number Not Available.

<sup>13</sup> Musu, are paramount chiefs elected or nominated for Municipal Council? They head district offices, right?

The first Municipal Council election was held in 2004<sup>14</sup>, after thirty-two (32) years of abolishment of local bodies in 1972. Various reports support that women first entered Municipal Council in the 1950s, however, there is no data available to confirm this information. In 1961, one woman was elected Deputy Mayor of Freetown for the first time.

Although data on candidacy for Municipal Council elections for all elections was not available, female candidacy for 2018 show 21 percent (482) among total municipal council candidates (2260). The elected data reflected on the table above shows that women’s representation as Councilors began at 14% in 2004, which increased to 17%, 19% and 16% percent in following elections in 2008, 2012, and 2018 respectively. The highest percentage of women in 2012 accordingly increased the percentage for the positions of Mayor (16%) and Deputy Mayors (32%) in the same year. However, in 2018 the percentage dropped by 3 percent (16%) for Councilors, and by 2 percent (14/%) for Mayors. The 2018 election for deputy mayor is yet to be held.

Percentage of Paramount Chiefs for Municipal Council was constant for all elections to 7%, which increased by 2 percent in 2018 (9%).

**Progress:**

The progress on women’s representation in the Municipal Council is reversed in the recently concluded elections, similar to the Parliament, the percentage of women’s representation in the Council dropped in 2018. Participants expressed concern that while there are more women venturing to contest elections, the decreasing trend of their elections is something that needs to be carefully assessed and studies. Accordingly, the decreasing elected rate could demoralize women from contesting elections, as such requires studies in place to identify the causes and recommend solutions to mitigate the downward trend. However, among Paramount Chiefs women’s representation is marginally progressing.

*e. Women as Cabinet Ministers and Deputies*

Cabinet	1996		2002		2007		2012		2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Femal	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Ministers</b>	23 (92%)	2(8%)	18 (86%)	3(14%)	21 (87%)	3 (13%)	22(85%)	4(15%)	24 (83%)	5(17%)

<sup>14</sup> As part of the post-conflict reconstruction and strengthening of democratic governance and institutions effort.

<b>Deputy</b>	18	2	17	3	17(81	4	13(65%	7	23(79%)	6
<b>Ministers</b>	(90%)	(10%)	(85%)	(15%)	%)	(19%)	)	(35%)		(21%)

Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop May 16 and 17 May, 2018

The above data shows that the percentage of women in ministerial position in 1996 was 8%, which increased to 14%, 13%, 15% and 17% in following elections in 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2018. Largely the percentage is in increase since 1996, except a marginal drop in 2007. In regard to deputy ministerial positions, the percentage was in an increasing trend since 1996 from 10% to 15%, 19% and 35% in subsequent elections in 2002, 2007, and 2012 except a decline in 2018 (21%). It is significant to note that for the first time the much-demanded minimum percentage of women was reflected for deputy mayoral position at 35% in 2002.

### Progress:

Women's representation in ministerial positions is in progress and was recorded the highest in 2018 (17%). For deputy ministerial position, however, the consistent increase in every election was reversed in 2018. While the progress is noted in nomination of women in these positions, it is however, very slow and marginal. Participants noted, that it took 22 years for the percentage of women in ministerial position to double from 1996 to 2018, and with this rate it will take another 22 years to achieve the minimum demand of women. It was also discussed that while successive governments since the 1996 elections have nominated higher number of women in ministerial positions, however, it is still yet to take a departure from tokenistic approach.

### *f. Ministerial Portfolios held by Women since 1962 to 2018<sup>15</sup>*

Minister	Deputy Minister
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of State without Portfolio;</li> <li>• Minister of State, Food;</li> <li>• Minister of State, Finance;</li> <li>• Minister of State, Rural Development;</li> <li>• Secretary of State, Social Affairs</li> <li>• Secretary of State, Education;</li> <li>• Minister of Health</li> <li>• Minister of Information, Communication and Tourism</li> <li>• Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs;</li> <li>• Minister of Tourism and Culture;</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Affairs;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism and Culture;</li> <li>• Transport, Communication and Tourism;</li> <li>• Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security</li> <li>• Education, Science and Technology;</li> <li>• Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation;</li> <li>• Office of the Vice President;</li> <li>• Trade and Industry;</li> <li>• Energy and Power Works, Housing and Technical Maintenance</li> <li>• Transport and Civil Aviation;</li> <li>• Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs;</li> <li>• Marines Resources;</li> <li>• Finance and Development;</li> <li>• Youth Affairs;</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> Musu is there a ministry that is not typically given to women?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs;</li> <li>• Minister of Energy and Water Resources;</li> <li>• Minister of Lands and the Environment;</li> <li>• Minister of Development and Economic Planning;</li> <li>• Minister of Trade and Industry;</li> <li>• Minister of Local Government;</li> <li>• Minister of Political Affairs;</li> <li>• Minister of State Vice President Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Sanitation</li> </ul>
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Source: Paper by Dr. Bernadetta Lahai for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018

Women’s history of representation as Ministers dates back to 1962, where the first female Minister of Sierra Leone was appointed in 1962 as the Minister of State without Portfolio, this was also the first female Minister to be appointed on the African Continent, which was followed by appointments of 3 female deputy ministers in 1985.<sup>16</sup>

### Progress:

Since 1962, there have been 58 female Ministers and Deputy Ministers appointed to 33 Ministries as shown on the table above. It is important to note that women have been appointed to both “soft” (Gender, Health and Sanitation, Education and Tourism and Culture) and “hard” (Foreign Affairs, Energy, Development and Economic Planning, Trade and Industry, Land and Environment, Marine Resources and Agriculture) Ministries.

### *g. Representation of Women from Political Parties in Parliament 2018*

Political Parties	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of women
SLPP	44	5	49	10%
APC	60	8	68	12%
C4C	7	1	8	12%
NGC	3	1	4	25%

Source: Parliament, Sierra Leone 2018

<sup>16</sup> “Women’s Political Participation: Progress and Challenges” Paper Presented At The Two-Day Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop Organised By Undp, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018, Freetown, Sierra Leone By Dr. Bernadette Lahai, Forer Member of Parliament, Gender And Agricultural And Rural Development Expert.



In Parliament, 4 political parties represent in the 2018 Parliament. The APC has the highest number of women in the Parliament, followed by SLPP the party in the current government; both NGC and C4C have only one female Parliament member each.

**Progress:**

Progress on women’s representation along party lines could not be assessed and compared with other elections due to absence of relevant data.

*h. Representation of Women from Political Parties in Local Council*

Political Parties	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of women
SLPP				
APC				
C4C	28	8	36	22%
NGC	13	1	14	7%

*Source: Paper presented by Ms. Augusta James Teima, President, All Political Party Women’s Association, for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018*

*i. Women in Political Party’s National Executive Committees in 2018*

Political Parties	Male	Female	Total	Percentage of women
SLPP	26	5	31	16%
APC	36	4	40	10%
C4C (Waiting for data)				
NGC	16	3	19	16%

*Source: Paper presented by Ms. Augusta James Teima, President, All Political Party Women’s Association, for Gender Lessons Learnt Workshop, May 16 and 17, 2018*

The table above presents Gender data was presented for 4 political parties representing in the current Parliament. Data form previous executive committees could be included in the table above due to data unavailability. The table above shows 2018 data of women at the political party executive committee, which is reflective of the representation of

women in other decision-making bodies. SLPP has the highest number of women in Party's National Executive Committee, followed by APC and NGC.

**Progress:**

Women's representation in the party executives ranges between 10% and 16%, in absence of data from previous executive committees, the current figure could be taken as an indicative data to estimate women's representation in the party executive positions, which may not have exceeded beyond 20%. Participants noted that women's leadership in the party structure is mostly limited to women's wings.

***Overall Progress***

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In general, increasing participation and representation of women is evident among candidates, as well as elected and nominated representatives. However, the pace of increase has been extremely slow and marginal. The women are still far from achieving the much-demanded minimum 30% representation at decision-making levels. In 2018, the results have been mixed; while some progress is seen among the vice presidential and Parliament candidates, as well as among the ministers, the percentage for elected representatives for both the Parliament and the Municipal Council has decreased. Participants noted, that the decreasing trend in elected women implies the need for stringent measures such as the affirmative actions that are legislated and implemented. It was however, noted that what women have qualitatively gained what they lost quantitatively as women are increasingly and actively holding leadership positions in Parliament, Cabinet and Councils among other decision-making bodies, and gaining opportunities to actively contributing to the development of the society and the country.

## Chapter 3: Insights From Gender Advocates- Challenges And Lessons Learnt

### a. Affirmative Actions for Women's Political Participation

This section highlights the efforts made to promote the Affirmative Action (AA) Bill, the key provisions proposed, the current status of the Bill, and the existing challenges in enacting this Bill. The section is informed by the presentations made in the workshop by Honorable Dr. Bernadetta Lahai, Former Member of Parliament, and inputs from the workshop participants.

- ***Efforts to push for affirmative action Bill and its current status***

Women advocates in Sierra Leone, along with the other national stakeholders and international organizations, especially those from the post-conflict era since the year 2000 have made various efforts, including calling on the government to honor its commitment to implement the CEDAW Convention<sup>17</sup>, which calls for the AA provisions to ensure women's representation in decision making.<sup>18</sup> Some of these key efforts are:

- Developing a Women's Manifesto in a consultative process to incorporate stakeholder's recommendation on AA provisions;
- Presentation of a position paper by women in 2003 to the Vice President, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, and the Local Government Taskforce for the inclusion of special seats in the local government Bill, and a request for three women to be included within the all-male Taskforce to finalize the local government Bill;
- Development of a draft gender policy calling for quotas to adopt by all political parties;
- Presentation of a position paper to the two Constitutional Review Committees (CRC) calling for AA provisions;
- Launching of a monthly dialogue forum on the issue of AA initiatives;
- Organizing a dialogue conference on Women's Chieftaincy and a minimum 30% gender quota;
- The first 'Gender Equality Act' Bill proposing AA provisions was drafted by Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai, followed by a review of the Bill by an international expert and engaging the Attorney General's Office on the review and

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<sup>17</sup> Sierra Leone ratified the Convention in 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Article 4 (1) of the CEDAW Convention 1979. Other regional protocols such as the African Protocol on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance call for quotas for women.

consultation of the draft Bill, as well as organizing round tables in regards to the Bill, inviting the gender advocates and long-tenured female members of parliament.

While, attempts were made to table the Bill in successive parliaments, where series of seminars were organized for the members of parliament with regard to the draft Bill with a view to getting their buy-in. The male members were not averse to the AA measures, but were concerned about the 'constituency reservation' proposal of the Bill, as it affected male members in the constituencies reserved for women. The men parliamentarians recommended reserving one district in each constituency to be contested only by women, while the other districts to be contested by all interested males and females. Again, the Bill was developed as a private Bill, but as MSWGCA was responsible for implementing the Bill, it needed to be proposed as a government Bill. Surrounding such challenges, the last Parliament's time expired before the Bill could be revised and tabled in Parliament.

- ***Key provisions of the Bill***

The latest Bill on 'Gender Equality Act' revised in 2012<sup>19</sup>, proposes number of AA measures appointed and elected seats. Under the heading of 'Women in Appointive and Elective Positions' the Bill calls for ensuring not less than 30% to be women among those appointed in public offices or services at any time. For elective seats in Parliament and local councils, the Bill calls for designating one constituency in each district to be a reserved constituency and designating one ward in each constituency to be a reserved ward.<sup>20</sup> Further, it proposes that the reserved constituencies and ward rotate after every two consecutive Parliamentary or Municipal Council elections. Also, a person elected under reserved constituency or ward, is eligible for contesting in reserved seats for only one term. Additionally, the minister of local government, gender, and internal affairs, as well as council of paramount chiefs are made responsible for electing women paramount chiefs, as parliament paramount chiefs.

- ***Present status of the Bill***

In 2014, the Office of the Attorney General (AG) was tasked by then Cabinet to revise and submit a draft Bill, however, such a draft is yet to be shared by the AG's Office. Also, the MSWGCA argues that Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy should precede the affirmative action Bill to ensure buy-in of the cabinet, and the President. Therefore, the MSWGCA is in the process of finalizing the policy, as well as for following up with the AG's office on the Bill. Women's advocacy groups are also preparing to follow-up on the Bill, including consultations on the Bill, and advocacy efforts.

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<sup>19</sup> Bill included in Annex 3.

<sup>20</sup> This way there will automatically and always be a minimum of 14 (then) and 16 (now) female members, assuming that no woman wins in the other remaining constituencies.

- ***Highlights from the workshop participants***

Participants discussed that while the political will is key to legislating affirmative measures, the political will is often limited to lip service, and rarely translated into actions. This is evident, as despite the years of advocacy efforts by women's groups and stakeholders, the demand for a minimum of 30% seats for women is still to be achieved. For example, the government's proposal for the amendment of 1991 Constitution – 'the White Paper'<sup>21</sup> failed to include the affirmative measure recommendations.<sup>22</sup> Sadly, women are also divided across party lines, and choose to side with their respective parties, rather than coming together and supporting each other as a team.

The participants also highlighted that the elections manifesto of the now governing party – the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) has made the following commitments:

- "Review and enact the minimum 30% Quota Bill which creates the chance for women to hold 30% of positions in elective and appointive positions;
- "Amend the 1991 Constitution with a view to increase the opportunities of women to participate in politics"; and
- "To make it mandatory for all political parties to enact gender policies that will specify among other things a threshold for women in executive positions in both the local councils and parliamentary positions."<sup>23</sup>

The commitments listed above provide a good basis to negotiate with the government for concrete policies and actions. Participants insisted that it is critically essential for women's groups to maintain consistent and persistent visibility whilst calling for government accountability to implementing these promises, as well as undertaking a multipronged approach to support the process - for example, consulting with legal and affirmative action experts to articulate the legal provisions, wider consultation and dissemination of the provisions.

The participants also, discussed electoral system as a tool to promote greater representation of women, and identified Proportional Representation (PR) system as more favorable to women in comparison to the First Past The Post (FPTP) system. Other issues discussed were legal provisions that affected women aspirants, such as the one in the Constitution that barred dual citizenship holders from contesting elections, and the Constitutional provision that require aspirants to resign from their jobs one year prior to the elections. Additionally, the participants also emphasized the need for review of legal measures to provide some relief for women in relation to registration fees, and some financial support for campaigning.

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<sup>21</sup> Government White Paper on the report of the Constitutional Review Committee on the Review of the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991, October 2017, Printed and Published by the Government Printing Department, Sierra Leone, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Stakeholder interview May 2018.

<sup>23</sup> New Direction, One Country, One People, People's Manifesto, SLPP for 2018 Elections (pg 47).

It was pointed out that such legal measures should be discussed for necessary amendments.

- ***Challenges***

### **Political Will often Limited to Lip Service**

Although, political will is readily expressed, the challenge lies in its implementation. Political will has mostly been relegated to mere lip service by the political parties. In addition, women tend to toe the party lines and fail to collectively speak in unison with one strong voice on woman's agenda. The political parties, and the male members of the Parliament are key groups whose support is necessary, instead they remain as one of the main hurdles for women advocates to overcome.

### **b. Women's Experiences in Politics**

This section mainly shares the experiences of women candidates, as well as elected representative, and discusses challenges and opportunities in this regard. The section is informed by the presentations made in the workshop by Honorable Rosaline Smith, Former Member of Parliament, and the inputs from the participants.

- ***Experiences as Candidates***

As candidates, women in Sierra Leone continues to face sociocultural challenges as women are yet to be viewed as political actors as par with men. For women candidates the struggle begins within the home, convincing family members of their aspirations to join politics. While family and community members often are found discouraging such ambitions, and in some cases women face violence for going against the wishes of family and community members, there are many cases where women completely enjoy family support.

Besides this, one of the significant hurdle women face as candidates is that of financial nature. Women candidates often need financial resources for community work necessary to build their support-base in their constituency, in addition to party membership fees, candidate's application and registration fees, and campaigning costs. Campaigning often is a major area where financial resources are needed, as it involves a huge cost from travelling for campaigning, arranging food and logistics for campaigners, as well as campaign materials. Resource constraints often do not allow women to reach as many constituencies as they desire, and women are often ill equipped when it comes to fundraising skills. Finance also plays a significant role in dictating who the party symbol goes to.

Also, getting party endorsement for candidacy is another hurdle, as men are often the naturally preferred candidates, and the party uses arguments such as the will of the people prefers male candidates, men have the institutional memory and are longest serving.

Very few women can compete with arguments as these, as well as have resources to contribute to parties for their candidacies to be taken up seriously.

Additionally, presence of fewer women in party leadership falls short to influence decisions in women's favour, for example, in the committees that decides on criteria for awarding party symbol, often there are no or very few women.<sup>24</sup> Women's leadership in all the parties are mostly relegated to heading parties' Women Wings. Disappointingly, political role of women has mostly been limited to dancing and cooking for parties in their campaigns.

Intimidation and harassment are something that the women candidates often experience as evidences show that violence is also used as a tool by political opponents to scare away women from contesting elections, or by social authorities who do not agree with women's involvement in politics. The secret societies (traditional groups) are often found intimidating women against party opponents, or for going against traditional values and norms. Women are often regarded as groups who could be easily bullied and their character smeared, and thus political opponents take advantage of this situation. Commonly, women candidates face allegations for keeping sexual relationships with party leadership for attaining party symbols. All these affects women's candidacy, and only those who are resilient can survive this and move forward.

- ***Women's Experiences in Parliament***

Women although fewer in number in Parliament, have proved to be an active group mostly engaging in substantial legislative issues, including promoting legislations that supports women, and other vulnerable groups. Women in Parliament have significantly contributed to incorporating gender considerations in several legislation, and promoting exclusive legislations upholding the rights of women and girls, for example, the Anti-Human Trafficking Act 2005, Local Government Act 2004, the three Gender Acts-Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, the Devolution of Estate Act and the Domestic Violence Acts 2007, and the Sexual Offences Act 2012.

The voice of women MP's in debate especially on issues of controversial nature has been invaluable. For example, on the Abortion Bill- the women MP's were able to put their case across and they succeeded in securing the votes from their male colleagues, and got the Bill passed by Parliament, however, disappointingly- the Bill failed to get assent from the President due to the public outcry against the Bill as it attracted a lot of attention and debate from the religious bodies, civil society, media and some pressure groups. The strong voices of women in Parliament on issues especially concerning vulnerable groups mostly led to positive outcomes.

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<sup>24</sup> The All Peoples Congress (APC) for example, all substantive positions in the Party's structure are dominated by men. The only positions made available to women are the Financial Secretary and Women's Congress Leader. The National Advisory Council (NAC) which is the second highest decision making body of the party, you will only find five (5) women sitting in that panel. NAC is where the criteria are set for the award of party symbols and other critical party decisions. With the under representation of women at the executive and the National Advisory Council, it makes it difficult to get the votes in support of gender equality.

Personal efforts and expert knowledge of some female MP's often times significantly contributed to changing the debates in favour of women and girls, and other vulnerable groups. A good example of such was the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, which was pending ratification since a long time. Although, its ratification was a challenge but through personal advocacy with members of Parliament especially men- and attempts were made to domesticate some of the provisions in the accord.

Women in Parliament also actively led Parliamentary Committees, as well as international and regional parliamentary bodies, and represented Sierra Leone in World Forums. Female parliamentarians were members of ECOWAS Parliament, Mano River Union, Mano River Women Peace Network, the Pan African Parliament, African Union, and Inter-Parliamentary Union. The Parliament of Sierra Leone has over the years recognized the role of female MP's as mothers of the House, sisters of the House and the umpire of the House. In all of the above, the presence of women in Parliament cannot be over emphasized.

However, women's experiences in Parliament was not devoid of challenges, the Parliamentary Women Caucus were divided both across inter and intra party lines. Among the reasons, the most prominent were - firstly the conflicting views on distribution of Caucus positions, the second was about the opportunities for learning and travel not being fairly distributed, and the third was in regard to the division brought by supporting different flag bearers. This led to the inability in holding Caucus meets, as the meetings were poorly attended. Such issues not only hampered the work that women collectively needed to focus on and address, but also it contributed to a poor image of the Caucus. Moreover, the purpose of the Caucus was defeated, as women lost on the support of other women much needed especially when representing in fewer numbers.

- ***Capacity Building Opportunities***

The training for female candidates were catagorised as 'too little too late,' as the trainings were fewer in numbers, and sometimes too close to campaigning period to be entirely effective. While much importance was attached to providing training for female candidates, there were very little efforts to continue the training for women in Parliament. The presentation stressed that it is not just enough to get women elected to Parliament, they should be supported to ensure that women perform to their optimum capacities, and promote a positive role for future generations of women to follow. Female members of Parliament come with various level of skills, experiences and expertise, but often in the , beginning they lack even basic knowledge on parliamentary procedures and practices. Even continuing members needs refresher courses and training to sharpen their skills. For first time female members, such capacity development training is imperative. Parliaments are modernising very fast with Information Communication Technologies (ICT) knowledge and skills, and women would need support to effectively carry out its role, adorning these skills as well. While there were opportunities for women to engage in workshops, roundtables, seminars and conferences,



there were very few focused trainings targeted for women with the objective to enhance their knowledge and skills on relevant legislative and Parliamentary issues.

- ***Experiences of Engaging with Constituencies***

Women in Parliament were faced with expectations from their constituencies that were beyond their role as MPs. The families expected MPs to attend various events (birthdays, weddings, funerals, visiting the sick and so on) being present both in person, and with cash support. The reasons for such expectations was pointed at those candidates who had raised expectations of the constituencies making unrealistic promises in a bid to win election, in addition to the general lack of awareness on the role of members of Parliament. When clarifying the role of MPs, many women were responded with -*'if you were sent only to make laws, its useless'*, and or *'why did I wait for three hours in the queue to register, and another couple of hours to vote, if you were not going to respect my wishes.'* It was also stressed that often women face these demands more then men, as women naturally tend to appear more willing to extend support for such request. However, responding to such expecations drain women MPs not only mentally and physically, but also financially, in addition to proving to be a diversion from the things that they should be focusing on.

- ***Feedback from workshop participants:***

The workshop participants discussed the challenges women candidates faced, especially the sociocultural and financial ones, and stressed upon the need for consistent public awareness through radios and other means on women's political rights, and their role in decision making. Additionally, they stressed on advocating for laws that provided women relief from financial burden relating to candidature costs.

Training carried out to close to elections compromise on quality, and will be a distraction for candidates, especially at a critical time when focus on electoral preparation and campaign is required. And another challenge that we have is that many female aspirants have dual citizenship, which is against the constitution for those vying for parliament. Also, political party nominating committees lack confidence in women as 'winning' candidates.' In her justification for the initiatives of the 50/50 group in supporting women's political participation during Sierra Leone's 2018 elections and beyond, she said the participation of women in politics is essential to building sustainable development. The participants raised concerns that even 18 years since the introduction of multiparty elections in 1996, women are still struggling to make headway in politics. Some thought that identifying women early and training them for leadership positions will be an advantage.

### **Challenges:**

Mainly financial constrains, intimidation against women aspirants and candidates, lack of political will are the major challneges to women’s political participation. Similarly, inconsistent support to women’s capacity building both to the candidates and the elected representatives are issues that pose challenges to women’s effective political participation.

### **c. Violence against Women in Elections**

The Section mainly highlights on the prevalence and nature of intimidation and violence against women in the electoral context, mainly focusing on the 2018 elections, and the responses from the Women’s Situation Room (WSR) in addressing those issues, as well as the challenges faced by WSR. The Section is informed by the paper submitted by Dr. Nemata Majeks-Walker, an Eminent Woman of the Women’s Situation Room (WSR), and presentations made in the workshop by Ms. Hawa Samai, President, Advocacy Movement Network (AMNet), and from the discussions and inputs from the participants in the workshop.

- ***About Women’s Situation Room in Sierra Leone (WSR)***

Women’s Situation Room (WSR)<sup>25</sup> is a women’s peace building mechanism instituted to prevent and mitigate conflicts before, during and after elections in African countries. It is a process that mobilizes women in collaboration with youth to ensure their active participation in peaceful and democratic electoral processes as an instrument for peace and security measures in accordance with the UNSCR 1325.

In the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone, the Women’s Situation Room supported efforts towards peaceful elections, mobilizing female election observers, and peace monitors, to monitor and report incidents of intimidation and violence. It operated a call center in Freetown to receive calls from the public and provide accurate, precise and unbiased information as relevant. The call center also responded to incidents of violent nature; either signposting or indeed, linking up the callers with the appropriate institutions.

The WSR was led by both, national and international eminent women who intervened by liaising with authorities ensuring swift and fair action in order to promote and inculcate the spirit of peaceful elections. In Sierra Leone, WSR process was set up in the lead up to the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018 elections. The process does not end with the announcement of election results but includes relevant follow-up activities as deemed necessary.

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<sup>25</sup> The WSR was initiated by the Angie Brooks International Center (ABIC) for Leadership and Women’s Empowerment during the Presidential and Legislative Elections of Liberia in 2011, when Liberian women leaders and women peace activists came together to lobby for peace, calm tensions and prevent the escalation of election related violent incidents. The overarching theme of the Women Situation Room (WSR) is “Peace is in our Hands.”

- ***Prevalence and Nature of Intimidation or Violence against Women in the 2018 Elections***

It was noted that the 2018 elections were largely peaceful even though the build up to it was sometimes very tensed, chaotic and unpredictable. In fact, many political commentators pointed out to the possibility of the outbreak of violence. In regard to intimidation and violence against women it was observed that irrespective of whether or not the women were the primary targets for violence, they usually were indirect victims and were more affected by violence, than others. Although, there were no major indications of deliberate efforts or organized attempts to harass women in particular, some cases were reported on intimidations and violence against women. In total, 576 cases were reported to the call center, among which, 20 (3%) involved a woman witnessing or being the victim of elections related violence, harassment or intimidation. Accordingly, at least 98% of WSR Observers reported that they did not witness a single case of election-related violence directly targeting women in the first round. The second round was not different. The figures tabled below presents these findings:

<b>Violence against Women: Female Observer's Findings</b>		
<b>2018 Elections</b>	<b>I witnessed a manifestation of violence against women</b>	<b>I did not witness any manifestation of violence against women</b>
<b><i>First Round</i></b>	1.5%	98.5%
<b><i>Second Round</i></b>	0.8%	99.2%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>98.9%</b>

*Source: WSR 2018*

In the few reported cases to WSR, there were also reports of women being sexually assaulted and gang raped. For instance, in the mining town of Rutile in the Moyamba, it was reported that a woman had to flee following threats by a group of men that they were going to rape her in public. Another version of this same story tried to provide justification for this act, suggesting that it was the woman who had in fact asked that she be raped publicly, if the other won the elections. These cases clearly demonstrate the nature of gender-based violence in the electoral context where it suggests that women were most likely to be attacked by men closer to them, owing to women's political allegiance. For similar reasons, there were cases of women assaulted and/or harassed by their neighbors. Generally, it appeared that differences in political beliefs were the major motivation for election-related violence, also seen true in the 2018 elections. The WSR successfully mediated in many cases to calm tensions and referred to relevant government and security institutions for further redressal, where necessary. It is generally believed that heightened tensions adversely affected women's participation in the 2018 elections. And the numbers shared by the WSR observers seem to support this belief, in the first round of the elections, there were as many female polling officers as men, however, the ratio of male presiding officers to female was about 3:1, although there were women who could have been appointed as Presiding officers. The observers also

estimated that there were about thirty-four percent (34%) of women among all political party agents. In the second round in particular the numbers were fewer, as there were several incidents of harassment of polling station officials and party agents, and the security concerns may have affected women's participation. Such hostility to polling station officials were even displayed in the social media through online trolling and cyber bullying. There was a particular case of a female ballot box controller in Freetown whose photos were recklessly shared around social media with very malicious captions alleging that she had been deliberately invalidating votes.

- ***Responses from WSR on gender-based violence:***

The WSR used the reports from field monitors as well as data from the call center to make immediate peace-building/violence-prevention interventions. Intervention efforts included reaching out to, and pacifying aggrieved political actors, holding mediation talks with violent youth groups as well as regular consultations with officials of election management bodies, including NEC and the security forces. The WSR often succeeded in this mediation role because of the favorable public perception it enjoys as a politically neutral body. The fact that most of these efforts were largely women-led also provided a unique advantage to the process in terms of acceptability, respect and trust from political actors and youths who are frequently at the center of all major election-related violent outbreaks.

Workshop participants pointed out that many incidents of gender-based violence in an electoral context, are not reported, as victims expect very little help even after exposing themselves. The group/participants outlined three types of violence against women - physical, psychological, cultural and traditional. *Physical violence* included beatings, assault, rape, destruction of properties and arson (e.g. bill boards, posters and properties), disruption of campaign and meetings, and banishment of individuals in some communities. *Psychological violence*: involves disappearance of individuals, verbal abuse, and defamation of character, sexual harassment, threatening languages, and economic violence. *Cultural and traditional violence*: in some communities in the northern area of the country, women are not allowed to stand for paramount chiefs (which is now an electable position).

The participants agreed that there should be stricter implementation of code of conduct for political parties and their agents and punitive actions should be taken against political parties. Participants identified Secret Societies<sup>26</sup> (traditional groups) that invariably create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, particularly amongst the illiterate electorate. In addition, they also pose a threat to women's political participation by way of intimidation or gender-based violence. Efforts should concentrate on ensuring that perpetrators are apprehended swiftly and brought under the law in court so as to act as a deterrent.

The group discovered that some of the challenges are weak enforcement of laws, some of which are inadequate to even address the problem. Lack of evidence to pursue some matters in the courts was also discovered to be a challenge, as is the traditional and

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<sup>26</sup> Traditional Groups.

religious beliefs of some ethnic groups. It was advised that relevant laws - the *Assaults Act 1861*, *Public Order Act 1965*, and the *Offences Against the Persons Act 1861* should be revised.

- ***Challenges***

While the WSR's is strong on monitoring and mediating conflict prevention and mitigation, responding to cases of gender-based violence has not been one of its strength, as it faced challenges in resolving specific cases of gender-based violence. This was mainly because fully resolving such issues required the co-operation of the victims themselves and the law enforcement bodies, including the police. In a highly politically charged environment, the incidents of violence are viewed to be instigated from a political perspective, thereby making it difficult to respond to adequately and positively.

The challenge with this is that violence during elections is generally viewed and treated with high political considerations. It is very usual to find that these disputes are later resolved behind the scenes and out of court after the intervention of some major political actors from the community. The victims in such scenarios rarely get the opportunity to experience any real justice. It is unclear whether major political incidents of violence that took place before, during and after the elections would ever be investigated and the culprits brought to book. The WSR did not appear to have a concrete tangible response plan to effectively respond to the cases of gender-based violence before, during and after the elections.

## **f. Gender Considerations in Elections Observation in 2018 Elections**

This section covers information on gender considerations taken into account during the 2018 election observations. It is informed by the presentation made by Ms. Marcella Samba-Sesay, Chairperson, National Election Watch (NEW), and valuable inputs from the workshop participants.

- ***Women's participation among observers***

In 2018 elections, both the domestic and international observer groups made efforts to include gender considerations in the electoral observations. The observer groups believed that assessment of women's participation at various stages of the electoral process is one of the fundamental pre-requisites for determining the overall assessment of credible, free, fair and peaceful elections. The aim is to interrogate whether or not the processes created a level playing field that encouraged inclusive participation of men and women in the electoral processes.

### NEW OBSERVERS IN TECHNICAL CATEGORY

#### **OBSERVERS DEPLOYMENT IN DISTRICTS**

NO	DISTRICT	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL
1	Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT)	379	74.9	127	25.1	506
2	Supervisors	401	70.6	167	29.4	568
3	District Election Material Movement Observers (DEMMOS)	9	52.9	8	47.1	17
4	Ward Elections Material Movement Observers (WEMMOs)	384	86.1	62	13.9	446
5	Regional Tally Centre	9	60.0	6	40.0	15
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>1182</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>1551</b>

Source: NEW 2018

The NEW deployed various categories of observers ranging from Supervisors, Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) or Quick Count Observers, District Elections Material Movement Observers (DEMMOs); Ward Elections Material Movement Observers (WEMMOs) and STOs by District. The NEW made valiant efforts to integrate a minimum 30% representation across all observer categories; however, this was limited, owing to the capacity gap in technical areas where the availability of women to undertake the assignment finite. As a result, only 24% women participated as observers, as illustrated in the table above.

#### NEW OBSERVERS IN SHORT TERM CATEGORY

	Short Term Observers (STO)	Male	%	Female	%	Total
1	KAILAHUN	398	70.6	166	29.4	564
2	KENEMA	642	67.9	304	32.1	946
3	KONO	402	64.3	223	35.7	625
4	BO	694	72.7	260	27.3	954
5	BONTHE	219	69.1	98	30.9	317
6	MOYAMBA	286	57.1	215	42.9	501
7	PUJEHUN	237	68.9	107	31.1	344
8	BOMBALI	352	55.4	283	44.6	635
9	KOINADUGU	183	64.0	103	36.0	286
10	FALABA	151	66.2	77	33.8	228
11	TONKOLILI	442	65.3	235	34.7	677
12	KAMBIA	352	66.9	174	33.1	526
13	KARENE	278	79.9	70	20.1	348
14	PORTLOKO	412	52.7	370	47.3	782
15	W/RURAL	577	63.1	338	36.9	915

<b>16</b>	<b>W/URBAN</b>	1085	55.1	883	44.9	1968
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6710</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>3,906</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>10616</b>

Source: NEW 2018

The NEW involved women among short-term observers and achieved 37% of women among observers. As STOs could be quickly trained and mobilized, women's participation among STOs were more feasible.

The NEW also made attempts to ensure greater participation of women within its own organizational structure. In its Strategic Management Committee, 6 out of 15 members are women, accounting to 40% inclusion at the decision-making level. Among the 5 Regional (West, East, North South and Northwest) Coordinators, 2 are women representing in the West and North-West respectively. Efforts were also made to increase women's number among its District Coordinators; so far there are only 3 (in Kambia, Pujehun and Kenema), in a total of 16. As part of the NEW's Operational Policy, there must be a gender balance among District Coordinators, and Secretaries, which are leadership positions in the districts. Gender balance is ensured among the district teams with a composition of 50% women in all 12 district-teams across the country.

#### European Union (EU) OBSERVERS

<b>EU Observers –First Round</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>First Round</b>		
<b>Technical</b>	6	4 (40%)
<b>LTO</b>	13	15 (54%)
<b>STO</b>	20	20 (50%)
<b>Total</b>	39	39 (50%)
<b>Second Round</b>		
<b>Technical</b>	6	4 (40%)
<b>LTO</b>	13	15 (54%)
<b>STO</b>	16	18 (53%)
<b>Total</b>	35	37 (51%)

Source: NEW 2018

The *European Union Election Observer Mission (EUEOM)* deployed observers in both the first and the second round of the elections. For both rounds, they deployed observers in three categories namely, technical, long-term and short-term categories. In the first round 39 women observers were deployed comprising 50% of the total observers. In the second round 35 women observers were deployed comprising 51% of the total observers. Women were mostly deployed in the long-term and short-term categories than in the technical categories. The EUEOM

significantly takes gender into account in its mission's deployment. It ensures that every observation team has women members.

### Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) OBSERVERS

ECOWAS Observers in the First Round of Elections	LTO		STO	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	7	7 (50%)	33	22 (40%)
<b>Second Round</b>			27	18 (40%)

Source: NEW 2018

The ECOWAS deployed observer in the first round of the elections, in both the long-term and short-term categories. Among the long-term observers 50% women's participation was ensured, while among the short-terms, it was 40%. For the second round, it only deployed short-term observers, among which 40% were women. The ECOWAS Observer Mission deployed observers along five thematic areas, which were legal, political, media, gender and conflict prevention.

- ***Gender Considerations by the observers' mission***

The observer's mission promoted greater number of women among the observers, the EUEOM ensured a gender balance exceeding women's number in some cases in its observer's team. Besides, both the national and the international observer mission also included gender as a cross cutting theme in its training for observers. The missions also ensured that the checklist for the observers included gender considerations. The NEW's Checklist captured specific gender data for both rounds of the Polls. The observation missions also made it a point to duly meet with the women's groups during the pre-assessment missions.

- ***NEW's observation findings from gender perspective***

### **PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION**

- While there were no legal provisions by way of an affirmative action, the political parties also did not embark upon actions to adopt strategies for voluntary party quotas for women within party structures. The CRC Process reopened by the former government did not culminate in recommending minimum quota for women to impact the 2018 electoral process. Only 33 out of the 138 CRC recommendations made their way to the Government White paper of affirmative action provisions.
- Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials were skewed mainly those urging women to register and vote.



- There were no female Presidential Candidate or Running mate in all 4 leading political parties (APC, SLPP, NGC and C4C).
- Authorities failed to regulate nomination fees in a timely manner, affecting women's decision to run for offices. The President's response to subsidize the Candidates fees to a lower and relatively affordable amount came in very late; mostly after party symbols had been awarded.
- Women's advocacy to increase women's participation did not yield positive results in absence of or lack of a national cohesive strategy, and political will among the parties. The calls for awarding more symbols to women were resoundingly loud and clear but unheeded.
- Late mobilization and training of women candidates were recurrent across the country. Trainings were on going during campaign periods, which compromised on the quality of the training, and created diversion from campaigning that the candidates needed to focus upon.
- There was no special fund created for female candidates. This contravenes the ECOWAS Action Plan, which stipulates that special funding should be provided for women candidates in countries where there is no public funding for political parties, and Sierra Leone falls under this category. Notwithstanding the absence of a general fund, the three popular Parties APC, SLPP and NGC in a bid to ensure that women candidates have equal access to campaign resources and thereby leveling the electoral playing field - waived candidate fees for women. SLPP and NGC paid Nomination fees for women candidates to NEC and gave a minimal cost to run their campaigns. NGC allocated campaigning amount to female candidates based on the office the candidate was running for.
- The elections were highly competitive with smear campaigns and scrambling for votes. Gender considerations got sidelined and lost in such circumstances. There was no protection against election related violence against women, and women human rights defenders. NEW observed that secret societies and mask devils were used to scare the participation of women political campaigners and the candidates at the early stages of the campaign in the provinces. The state took action through the Ministry of Internal affairs to put a temporal ban on Secret Societies and mask devil parade. The Women Situation Room raised concern about ritual murder during this period as a factor affecting women's participation. All observer missions and groups together with a number of stakeholders reported and expressed concern on the high spate of violence in many parts of the country and the capacity in terms of independence and professionalism of the Sierra Leone Police to address the issue. The signing of the *Freetown Declaration* by political Parties and facilitated by the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) to foster tolerance and address the question of inter-party violence was more on Paper and then in action.

- Ineffective electoral offences court: Elections related violence perpetrated with impunity.
- Slots allocated to profiling women in the media were limited. Citizens groups took the challenge but this was limited mostly in SLBC and 98.1. The ECOWAS Framework emphasize that State media especially in countries using the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, should provide an equitable platform to highlight programs and grant visibility to female candidates.

## **ELECTION DAY OBSERVATION**

- NEW's advocacy to NEC to learn lessons from Liberia where a Gender Disaggregation Tracker were used by officials on Poling day to generate gender data went unheeded; thus, undermining ECOWAS Gender and Election strategic framework on Data. As such, real time participation of women and youth was captured by NEW to some extent.
- NEW's disaggregated data shows a high participation of women as observers in the districts in the North compared to other Regions.
- The African Union Observation Findings issued on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2018, reported an average participation of women as polling Staff and low participation as party agents.
- A generally positive and inclusive process was observed with a balance of women and men playing roles as polling officials, as well as observers across all missions.
- During the first round on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, NEW observed that 93% of polling stations had at least one female NEC official present out of the 7 officials. This was the same for the Run Off on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March; where NEW observers reported that 94% of the polling stations observed had at least one female NEC official.
- The implication of distance and access to facilities are generally critical to women's interest in participating in elections. NEW also observed that participation was generally enhanced by suitability of polling stations, as 80% of observers reported that polling stations were properly located in terms of access by all categories of individuals and in terms of distance, only 4% noted that such stations were hard to be reached. Similarly, for the Run Off, 82% of the observers said polling stations were suitably located whilst 7% said polling stations were not suitably located. The electoral laws provided special preferences for pregnant and lactating mothers, and the elderly for direct access to polling booth, and not having to wait in queue.
- ***Feedback from workshop participants:***

The workshop participants expressed enthusiasm in the greater number of women among observers and said that it was commendable that EUEOM led by example; in ensuring equal participation of women among observers, and the sterling efforts of the ECOWAS and NEW are also noteworthy. It was said that such efforts would set a precedent to positively influence future overall participation of women in the electoral processes, including among party agents, and electoral workers among others.

The participants stressed that while the women's participation among electoral observers was commendable, efforts should also focus on collecting substantive data and its analysis on gender-based violence. The cases of intimidation, harassment and rape against female candidates and voters must be thoroughly examined to cinch a better understanding of the prevalence and gravity of such gender based violence.

- ***Challenges***

It was especially challenging to identify women observers for technical observation. There is a need to identify and train women observers for technical categories. Some of the key recommendations from the observer's group to NEC were not taken into consideration, such as on the Gender Disaggregation Tracker to be used by the polling officers on polling day.

#### **g. Support to women's political participation from women's groups**

This section highlights the initiatives of the Women's Network/Group in supporting women's political participation and is informed by the presentation made by Dr. Fatmata B Taqi, President, the 50/50 Group, and pertinent inputs from the workshop participants. The Group is one of the leading women's network in Sierra Leone.

- ***Initiatives to supporting women's political participation***

The 50/50 Group is a non-partisan civil society organization established in Sierra Leone since 2000. The organization is active in promoting gender equality, political and governance work, where one of its primary objectives is to build the capacity of women through training for effective participation in the political arena and decision-making processes at all levels. The organization also seeks to change the community's mindset so as to gain their support by working on their attitudes and perceptions towards women's participation in politics and the electoral processes. Since its inception, the Group has trained over 2000 trainers for local and general elections across the country and over 10,000 women in leadership, communication, advocacy skills, and the role of women in parliament and local council. The 50/50 Group had trained female aspirants for the 2004 local council elections, which resulted in 104 women trained in total - out of which 52 were elected to the local

councils. As a result of their consistent approach to candidates' training, the two districts of Koinadugu and Kailahun had their first ever, female representation in Parliament and Local Council in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

In 2018 elections, the 50/50 group had carried out series of activities, which are shared below:

- **Awareness raising programmes on 'women's rights to vote and to be voted':**

Public awareness was promoted through rallies and Town Hall meetings, as well as workshops targeting first time voters, especially among female students from schools and universities, women's and men's groups, and traditional leaders. This activity also involved the production of Information Education Communication (IEC) materials, including T-shirts, stickers, flyers, banners and election jingles. Additionally, Radio discussions were held and the airing of short messages, skits and jingles on radio programmes.

- **Engendering the registration process:**

The registration processes were engendered to undertake considerations to supporting women and vulnerable groups in the 16 districts. The Group's support included helping voters who could not read nor write to ensure their names appeared correctly on the voter registration lists, informing women of registration stations locations, documents required to register, and providing transportation to registration centers for vulnerable women. Rallies were carried out to encourage and assist awareness in strategic locations such as the market place. Radio and TV messages to advocate voter registration procedure were continually disseminated.

- **Dialogue with political parties promoting party symbols for women:**

The executive committee of the 50/50 Group held meetings and dialogue with political party leaders demanding a minimum 30% quota amongst those who were awarded party symbols, as well as awarding winnable seats to women.

- **Review of 2007 Women's Manifesto:**

A two-day workshop was held, to review the 2007 Women's Manifesto, with the objective to be served as an advocacy document to engender the political party manifestos. Women advocates from all the districts participated, where issues concerning women including emerging areas of concern were discussed. The finalized Women's Manifesto was published and were submitted to all political parties with demands to include affirmative actions, among others.

- **Civic and Voter Education training for women in 14 districts:**

The Group trained female voters on civic and voter education, targeting specifically females who could not read or write, and first-time voters. The voter education program informed women about the voting process, as well as demonstrated to women the importance of their votes and their right to vote as an equal member of the society. A simulation of the voting process was held for women. In addition, discussions on voting procedures were aired on TV and radio stations across the country.

- **Training for potential women aspirants for 2018 Parliamentary and Local Council Elections:**

The 50/50 Group trained potential women for political leadership with the aim to encourage their candidacy in the lead up to 2018 elections. Drawing on its membership and network of already trained women, the 50/50 Group developed a training manual and a handbook for participants attending training, and also hosted public speaking forums.

The training manual was developed by the group in consultation with experts within its group and external consultants. Similarly, a handbook encompassing relevant topics was also developed for participants. The training manual covered topics as listed below:

**Session 1:** Introduction

**Session 2:** Local Government and Parliamentary Elections

**Session 3:** Breaking Barriers that prevent Women from participating

**Session 4:** Leadership Skills

**Session 5:** Assertiveness Skills

**Session 6:** Making the decision to stand

**Session 7:** Women joining and advancing in political parties

**Session 8:** Advocacy Skills

**Session 9:** Action Plan

**Session 10:** Evaluation

Following the training, the 50/50 Group hosted 'Public Speaking Forums' to allow female aspirants to present their political platforms or manifestos to voters. The debates encouraged issues-oriented discussions and were held in a format that advocated maximum public attendance and contribution to the debates. The 50/50 Group used these forums to monitor and gauge to what extent the skills and knowledge imparted to the aspirants were being used.

- **Training for female candidates on campaigning and other relevant skills:**

The 50/50 Group conducted a series of trainings for female candidates; the Group developed a training manual specifically tailored for Sierra Leonean context, and to

ensure uniformity and consistency in the overall delivery of the training. The topics addressed at the training included:

**Session 1:** Introduction

**Session 2:** Preparing the campaign

**Session 3:** Development of campaign message

**Session 4:** Strategies for targeting voters and support

**Session 5:** Speaking in public

**Session 6:** Budgeting and fundraising

**Session 7:** Campaign action plan

**Session 8:** Evaluation

- ***Holding women candidate's debates***

Following the candidates training, 'Mock Candidate Debates' were organised for the trained candidates to allow platforms for female candidates to practice presenting their political agendas and manifestos to voters. The mock debates were held in a format that ensured wider public attendance and their valuable inputs. The debates were also used as a means to remind and revise and to measure to what level the candidates employed the skills and knowledge taught at the trainings.

- ***Achievements and setbacks***

It was highlighted that the initiatives yielded a lot of dividends which mainly included informed participation of women voters and candidates in the political and electoral processes, which are discussed in details below:

- First time female voters became aware of their rights.
- More women candidates decided to participate in the parliamentary and local council elections, and consequently more women ran for the elections.
- Greater number of women registered, particularly amongst those who could not read nor write.
- Knowledge on voting procedures were improved among women, which resulted in reduced number of invalid ballots.
- More women were able to easily identify their registration stations and were able to be present with documents required for registration.
- Women aspirants were trained on leadership and campaigning skills and how to develop their individual political manifestos, and seek party symbols. Whether these women are elected into office or not, the skills acquired from these trainings would have capacitated them to take on leadership roles in other spheres of life.
- Candidates were able to articulate issues better due to the mock debates; that have help them to be more confident in facing crowds and in answering questions posed by them.

- A communique was signed by all political party leaders to give party symbols to potential female aspirants.
- However, despite the commitment as per the above communiqué, less than 30% of female aspirants received symbols. As such, the minimum 30% demand remains to be delivered among the elected representatives as well.
- ***Key discussion points by both, workshop presenters and participants***

It was pointed out that there is an immediate need for women's advocacy groups to both persistently and consistently ensure visibility to the issue of women's political participation, by engaging with the political parties and other relevant bodies. The commitment made by the President on the first day of Parliament where he expressed strong willingness to support women's political participation, was identified as an opportunity for women to start engaging at the highest level. Subsequently, the Women's Forum (the women's network) confirmed that such an initiation had begun after the President was sworn in.

Concern was expressed that women in politics tend not to support women across party lines. However, it was agreed much needed to be done for women to work together in politics in Sierra Leone to raise women's issues with a strong concerted voice.

The important and apt issue of rural women being often forgotten was raised, where more efforts are needed to build capacity of women in politics focusing on rural areas. However, it was also cautioned that the definition of rural should be carefully assessed, as rural women are not those who are already empowered, but those who have the potential but are not reached out to and as such, their political aspiration are yet to be exploited. The participants also discussed including disabled among the vulnerable groups to promote their political participation. The late Osman Tarawallie (alias Salone Trump), a politician was remembered as an example of a leader who vehemently supported women's cause, and their upliftment; he in his campaign is noted for saying that if he wins he will have an all-female Cabinet.

It was unanimously agreed that work for 2023 elections should start now, especially in legislating quota measures. The participants robustly voiced the urgency to start now for the 2023 elections as time was short.

- ***Challenges***

The challenges woman face in Sierra Leone with political participation may be expressed by the following 7C's, as listed below:

**Culture** – The Culture in the country predominantly views politics as solely a man's domain.

**Care** - The majority of a woman's time is expected to be spent in providing care and support to the family as such, minimizing their scope and opportunity to

explore their own political interest.

**Cash** – The lack of Cash/Funding indicates severe financial constraints that women face, which creates a barrier in their political aspiration.

**Confidence** – A woman’s confidence is shattered from the very outset owing to the above 3C’s; consequently, women tend to shy away from embracing a political career as they are unsure if they can make it.

**Corruption** - Corrupt practices where the playing field is not level renders the environment difficult for women to operate.

**Co-operation** – Lack of Co-operation amongst women owing to party lines must be strengthened upon a common goal to promote trust, cohesiveness and oneness.

**Constitutional** – Constitutional constraints where legislative affirmative measures to support women’s political participation is yet to be provided.

#### e. The Media – Gender Responsive Coverage:

This section highlights issues around the media coverage in 2018 elections from a gender perspective to mainly discuss how responsive the media was in providing space to women candidates, as well as paying attention to portraying women candidates in a responsible and sensitive manner in the media. The section is informed by the presentation made by Ms. Williette PRO James, Lecturer, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, and the view of the participants at the workshop.

- *Media Coverage of Women Candidates over the duration of the 2018 Elections*

The presentation highlighted that the African politics has been predominantly seen as a preserve for men. In Sierra Leone, until very recently, certain local customs in some parts of the country prevented women from talking at public meetings and participating in politics. Women’s participation in politics is often faced with numerous challenges such as illiteracy, socio-cultural barriers, economic constraints, child bearing and care responsibilities, gender-based violence and many more. Despite the challenges, women have come out to contest in the political arena with immense and commendable courage, however, support has been limited, including from the media.

In recent times, there has been increasing awareness to this issue, and the media has been making greater efforts to ensure that women candidates and voters are provided much needed support. During the 2018 elections, the Sierra Leone media with support from a consortium of Civil Society partners, made a landmark move by providing direct support to women, youth and presidential aspirants through organized debates. These “all-inclusive and successful debates” created a platform for these groups to have their voices heard, as they articulated individual agendas and plans pertaining to their respective areas.



Efforts were also made by few individual broadcasting media institutions<sup>27</sup> to support women candidates, as they provided free airtime for them to share their manifestos with the wider audience. Some newspaper institutions provided space for introduction of women candidates.

Few media houses also assigned reporters to remote provincial areas of Kono, Kailahun and other locations in the North, to categorically cover stories on women aspirants and women voters. A male reporter<sup>28</sup> who visited remote locations well before the elections expressed delight, enthusiasm and passion when reliving his experiences of interviewing the women candidates, particularly those in extremely rural areas.

Despite, the media being criticized for stereotyping women candidates and their negative portrayal, the Monitoring Unit of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) expressed that there were no reports of media institutions or journalists to have violated media codes or have been offensive to women. While these efforts were commendable and in the right direction, a lot still needs to be done to ensure that women in politics are supported in a holistic manner, especially those women in the rural areas and those economically impoverished to access media.

However, media itself face challenges in undertaking efforts to support women in Politics, for example in the 2018 elections, the political parties assigned more men for media interviews than women. Additionally, as men were more actively engaged in political activities, they made it to the front-page stories more often than women. Importantly, men appeared better informed than women when it came to information on what was happening within the parties and outside in a wider political context, because of their access to party leadership among others.

The political parties preferred and tasked men to be interviewed, as there was a misconception that women are not capable to succinctly articulate the views of their political parties. Mr. Samuel Wise Bangura of the AYV Media Empire said political parties had informed the media that their single focal point of contact was the parties secretariat - whom when approached only approved men to be interviewed. Even when the discussion revolved on issues relating to constituencies where women were aspiring for seats; men were delegated to be interviewed.

Generally, even outside politics, men sidelined women from engaging in the media; for example the AYV reporters went to some remote provinces in the North to conduct interviews and noticed women were not allowed to speak. The men told reporters to speak only to them and that they required the authority of the men to permit their women to be interviewed. Women were fearful to talk in town hall meetings, which resulted in their views not being captured by the media coverage of those meetings. Most women had to get permission from their husbands before they

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<sup>27</sup> Africa Young Voice Media Empire- AYV on Sunday Programme, Radio Democracy FM 98.1 Breakfast Show, Skyy Radio FM 106 - Skyy Women's World programme and so on.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mohamed Kabba of Awoko Newspaper.

made decisions to appear on the media. This hampered journalists who wanted immediate interviews. Many who did not get permission from their husbands did not appear for interviews. This disrupted planned programmes at various media institutions, especially the broadcast institutions. Similarly, the women aspirants, especially those aspiring for local councils in the rural areas appeared to be anxious and panicky at the mere appearance of reporters.

Also, some media houses charged interviewees some fees to appear in the media. While the media houses do have high running cost and taking a fee becomes imperative for their sustainability; this often poses challenges to women candidates who already face financial constraints with all the electoral expenses. All these factors resulted in greater media coverage of men in politics than women. Subsequently, there were criticisms from women's groups against the media on the aspect of selective coverage of women during the 2018 election as follows:

- ***Highlights from workshop participants***

The workshop participants stressed that women issues in general, and moreover the issue of women's political participation is not assigned as much importance in the media. They said that political party leaders who are often men own the media houses, and therefore explains why women are assigned so little attention coverage or space in the media.

Participants emphasized that in addition to promoting gender responsive media, much needs to be done to ensure that women are better positioned to interact with the media. Training programmes for women candidates should focus on media engagement as well.

Training should also be organized for journalists, as well as media owners. The media owners too need to understand the value of inclusive media reporting in elections and ready to support stories from the journalists.

- ***Challenges***

The key challenges are those that relate to political parties, who are still not willing to promote women candidates as their champions, as they discourage women's engagement with the media on behalf of the parties. Therefore, they are very unlikely to recommend women to engage with the media on their behalf. Similarly, the socio-cultural context discourages women's public appearances, especially in media. Financial constraint is also something that women find as a critical barrier, as engaging in the media costs money. Due to these reasons, women lack confidence in facing the media, and these challenges are yet to be internalized by the media to provide sufficient support to women candidates to overcome these barriers and engage with the media. Training for the media on gender responsiveness should incorporate this perspective, which happens in a piecemeal basis and not in a

consistent manner for the media to adopt a culture that supports women in political arena.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations:

### ***Conclusion***

The two-day workshop ended on a high note. All the stakeholders expressed that the gender lessons learnt workshop was a timely effort to examine the issues around women's political participation and come up with way forward. The participants coined a phrase to give name to the urgent initiatives that were required by all the stakeholders, which was - *Women Planning For 2023 Elections Now! Now! Now!* Because many of them thought one of the solutions lies in early preparation. The women's groups decided to meet in a regular basis and follow-up and promote the implementation of the recommendations provided below, and in a urgent basis follow-up on the affirmation action Bill, and the MSWGCA's national gender policy, among others.

### ***Recommendations***

- ***Affirmative Actions***

#### **Review and revise the affirmative action provisions**

The MSWGCA, the Attorney General's Office and the women's groups among others need to be engaged in revising the draft Bill, where the women's group can support revision of the Bill together with legal and gender experts and follow it up with wider consultations to finalize it.

#### **Promote quota measures for inclusion in the White Paper**

- Advocacy efforts for quota measures should also include promoting the inclusion of gender quota in the government 'White Paper.'
- Ensure that the revision of the recommendation for the white paper spelling out the provisions that ensure a minimum threshold level for women's representation at all layers of decision making for both the elective and appointive positions.

#### **Review the electoral system, and other legal provision that affects women's representation**

- Explore opportunities to review the electoral system to include favorable system for women's representation such as the proportional representation system.

- Additionally, review and revise Constitutional provisions that require aspirants to resign from jobs one year prior to elections.
- Also, consider proposing legislations that rebate candidates' registration fees, as well as providing financial support for campaigning, especially to women to encourage contesting in elections.
- *Women's experiences in politics*

### **Capacity Building for female aspirants and candidates**

Carry out proper planning, in identifying the number of potential women aspirants, and accordingly plan trainings, in a timely manner to avoid compromising on the quality of the training, and distracting participations from focusing on electoral preparation and campaign. Develop training programmes for women in Parliament, inclusive of components on parliamentary structure and committees, parliamentary functions, debating skills, negotiation and mediation skills, leadership skills, gender and social inclusion issues, potential legislative and budget issues are some of the areas that the female MPs would find helpful to assist them with their work in Parliament. Additionally, explore establishment of an expert group comprising of legal and gender experts to support the women with necessary technical assistance on the legislations discussed in Parliament. Carry out profiling to understand the capacity needs and accordingly plan training programmes.

### **Awareness among the communities in support of women's political participation:**

Develop information package on the role of Parliament and Municipal Council members to provide better understanding on the functions, and what to expect from the representatives. Explore mass communication mediums, especially radio and television to disseminate the information to the larger public.

### **Engage in dialogue with the political parties on ensuring women's participation in party leadership, and candidacy**

Carry out discussion and dialogue with the political parties on the issue of promoting women's participation and representation in politics, particularly in regards to party leadership, and enabling an environment for women to actively function within party structures. Additionally, ensuring consistent engagement with political parties in supporting of legislating quota measures, including consultative processes with the parties.

### **Support strengthening of the Women Caucus**

Engage with the Women Caucus regularly to provide support in strengthening their capacity in working effectively across party lines, and assisting them with cohesion and team building exercises, and collectively delivering on their common agenda goals. Women's groups can play a key role in providing such support to the Women Caucus.

It is imperative that awareness trainings are carried out in the communities on the roles of women, and women in their engagement with the communities also highlight this fact. Such issues should also need to be built into candidates training cautioning against making commitments that are not in their role to fulfill.

- ***Violence against women in elections***

**Ensure stringent laws to address intimidation and violence against women:**

Review the laws on *Assaults Act 1861*, *Public Order Act 1965*, and the *Offenses Against the Persons Act 1861* to propose more stringent measures in preventing and addressing electoral violence, with special emphasis to measure and maintain records on violence against women.

**Ensure robust security arrangements, with especial focus to protection for women against intimidation and violence:**

In compliance with the ECOWAS Action Plan on Elections Observation, Sierra Leone should make special security arrangements to ensure that women are protected from harassment, intimidation and violence before, during, and after elections. There is a need to mainstream gender issues into the political and national agenda and designing and implementing an integrated and comprehensive election security strategy that incorporates gender considerations.

**Ensure that the WSR incorporates measures to respond to incidents of violence against women:**

The WSR should include responses to gender-based violence as part of its core mandate. Such response mechanisms should particularly target violence against female aspirants. It should provide counseling and guidance to victims. Ensure that the reported cases in WSR are followed up post elections, and information shared in regard to its investigation, findings and actions.

**Ensure collection of gender data on intimidation and violence issues:**

Generate, analyze and share gender data on the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence against female voters, aspirants, electoral officials and workers, and observers.

- *Electoral security and gender considerations*

**Training for security personnel:** Ensure that gender and human rights trainings are included in all the trainings provided to security personnel as a cross cutting theme. Specialized training for gender and elections to be provided well in advance to the elections to ensure adequate time and attention from both the organizers and the participants.

**Gender considerations in security planning:** Ensure that all security planning and implementation takes into consideration the gender aspect in order to competently respond to the safety and security needs of women voters and candidates.

**Gender data collection:** Ensure that the security sector collects gender data on security deployment. Also, gender data and information are to be collected to identify the extent to which women are victimized in the electoral context, and prevalence and nature of violence, including the security responses provided to women.

**Provide clear, concise and timely information on security to public:** Information such as vehicular restrictions, and availability of vehicle services for polling day to be provided clearly and in advance.

- *Gender considerations in electoral observation*

**Ensuring greater number of women observers:** Ensure that the substantial presence of women amongst observers in this election is further improved upon and minimum numbers maintained. Subsequently, work must continue in earnest with necessary efforts to this end.

**Training of women observers in technical capacity:** Ensure that potential women are identified and trained in to observer in technical capacity, in addition to long-term and short-term observers.

**Observation on gender-based violence:** Ensure prior to, during and post electoral observation includes observation on gender-based violence and provides sufficient information and analysis; drawing attention to the prevalence and seriousness of the issues.

- *The Media-Gender Responsive Coverage*

**Develop a Media Gender Policy to promote gender responsiveness in the Media**

The media in Sierra Leone, through the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, the umbrella body for journalists, must consider crafting a gender policy that would guide journalists to adequately consider gender in all their media reporting and

coverage. Media institutions should adopt gender policy (with SLA) taking the lead, and possible implementation by all affiliate bodies and media institutions in general). Incorporate within the gender policy the issue requiring payment to be covered by media, or in line with affirmative action for women absolving them from payment. Subsequently, recommend that the media also play a more supportive and mentoring role as they do within society to educate the men to be more emancipated by empowering their women and encouraging them to come out of their shells to strengthen the very fabric of society for a better Serria Leone

### **Gender training for Media**

Accordingly provide trainings for media persons on Gender Reporting and other emerging issues on gender. Technical training for journalists is needed; and pre-interview discussions before the interview process on air/publication for women candidates should be a must. Ensure both gender exclusive trainings, as well as gender incorporated as a cross cutting theme must be promoted for the media training. Refrain from the approach of conducting event-based trainings. Explore opportunities to liaise among media coordinating body MRCG, the media houses, and other relevant institutions to create a regular learning platform for journalist on a cost-sharing basis, and in a cost-effective manner.

- *Support to women's political participation from women's groups*

### **Maintain visibility and consistent advocacy with political parties**

Ensure that the women's group enhances their advocacy and visibility on legislating affirmative action provisions, and promoting an enabling environment for women's political participation, and extend support to both women candidates, as well as elected representatives.

### **Focus on rural women**

Ensure greater focus on potential women in rural areas, and those that are among vulnerable group such as individuals with disabilities, by supporting them in their aspiration to participate in politics.

Annex 1: Participants List

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