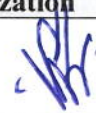




Minutes of Liberia Electoral Support Project Board Meeting

Meeting Type:	Project board meeting		
Date of Meeting:	21-Apr-14	Time:	11:00 -13:00
Chair:	Hon. Augustus Flomo, Deputy Minister of Economic Management (MFDP)	Location:	Virtually via Zoom
Co-Chair:	Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansannah, Chairperson, National Elections Commission	Co-Chair:	Mr. Stephen Rodrigues, Resident Representative, UNDP Liberia
Minutes Recorded By:	Maggie Lamb, Communications Specialist – Elections		
Name	Title	Organization	
Hon. Augustus Flomo	Deputy Minister of Economic Management, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning	MFDP 	
Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansannah	Chairperson	NEC 	
Anthony Sengbe	Executive Director	NEC	
Mr. Stephen Rodrigues	Resident Representative	UNDP	
Jyrki Tornii	Team Leader, Governance	EU	
Laura Virgili	Programme Manager	EU	
Fohn T. Gborweah, Sr.	Sr. Economist-Special Assistant/Chief of Office Staff	MFDP 	
Jim-Ngormah A. Kamara		MFDP	
Lenka Homolkova	Chief Technical Adviser, Elections	UNDP	
Jeremie Kouakou	Finance Specialist	UNDP	

Topic for discussion	Discussion/Action/Decision	Responsible entity
Opening & Welcoming Remarks	<i>Hon. Augustus Flomo, Deputy Minister of Economic Management, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)</i> , welcomed the participants and thanked partners for their support to strengthening democratic processes in Liberia. He stated that all of the partners continue to work together in the interests of the people of Liberia. Elections are a critical subject as Liberia gradually matures its democratic practices and support to electoral processes provides an opportunity to help the country sustain democratic practices and gains. As we position ourselves to look to the future and the next round of support, we look forward to continuous engagement to improve elections and the practice of democracy in Liberia.	MFDP
Remarks of Co-Chairs	<i>Mr. Stephen Rodrigues, UNDP Resident Representative (RR)</i> , acknowledged the excellent work by the National Elections Commission (NEC) in conducting the 2020 Special Senatorial Elections and Referendum, despite difficult circumstances, and with limited support from the development partners. He noted that the Project had been supported by the EU, Sweden, Ireland, and Canada, as well as by Japan and Germany, and had worked closely with other partners such as IFES, NDI, International IDEA, ECOWAS, and the African Union, building synergies and mutually reinforcing programs through a multi-partner approach. He said that the Project worked to enhanced democratization processes by improving electoral institutions and processes. The 2017 and 2020 elections were conducted mainly in compliance with international standards and practices showing these objectives to be largely fulfilled. Key areas of support included building institutional and professional capacity, providing technical advice and support to electoral logistics and preparations, and the inclusion of women, youth,	UNDP

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	<p>and vulnerable groups in the electoral process. The Project 2020 Summative Evaluation concluded that the Project was highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the NEC, electoral stakeholders, and future electoral cycles of Liberia, and made valuable contributions, but there are still numerous challenges. These include the need to strengthen NEC's automated accounting system for donor reporting, to enhance monitoring and evaluation of the project deliverables, to strengthen the visibility strategy, to improve the retention of qualified staff, and noting that the 30% gender quota for women candidacy in elections was not implemented.</p> <p>In conclusion, Mr. Rodriques reaffirmed the UNDP partnership with NEC to further nurture and sustain democracy in Liberia, and acknowledged the great partnership and collaboration with the Government of Liberia, Sweden, Ireland, EU, Canada, Germany, and Japan during the previous project cycle and looking forward to further collaboration.</p>	
	<p>Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansanah, Chairperson, National Elections Commission (NEC) also welcomed the participants.</p>	NEC
Special Remarks — Partners	<p>Mr. Jyrki Tornii, EU Governance Team Leader, noted that investments in electoral processes had 'yielded fruit' and Liberia is on the track of peaceful democracy. He said he was very happy that support to elections is included in upcoming EU programme, but he does not yet know the volume of that assistance. This information will come from Brussels by the end of the month.</p> <p>He thanked UNDP colleagues for their project effort, observing that he was pleased to see Lenka arrive in the middle of postponing elections, COVID-19 and other challenges, and getting the work done, including building warehouses in the rainy season. Her efforts are part of why the EU is comfortable being involved with UNDP in the future.</p> <p>He shared that consultants for an EU electoral observation follow-up mission will arrive in a week to meet stakeholders and to observe how recommendations of the 2017 EU Election Observation Mission have been taken up. NEC is the lead in those discussions. Belgian Member of the European Parliament Marie Arena will also join the team in early May.</p>	EU
Presentation of the Project	<p>Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansanah, Chairperson, National Elections Commission (NEC), underlined some of the Project's key achievements, as well as weaknesses that need to be addressed going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP) was installed, but the NEC needs further support to ensure its full utilization by all relevant departments • 12 of 20 warehouses were improved, but seven Magisterial warehouses and the central warehouse still need attention • Despite training and capacity building of NEC staff, retention of qualified employees remains a challenge • The Project conducted several studies to inform NEC cooperation with other national institutions on implementing biometric voter registration • Political parties jointly signed the Ganta Declaration and subsequently agreed to regularly review the Code of Conduct to mitigate electoral violence • 21 political party dialogues on conflict prevention were conducted under the Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC) • The institutionalization of the IPCC has yet to take a concrete form and requires further support 	NEC UNDP

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- The Project published a compendium of election observers' recommendations and a compilation of Supreme Court opinions
- An electoral law reform process was initiated to bring the current legal framework closer to international standards and best practices

Going forward NEC will appreciate if the planning and implementation of activities of the new project will be done with the full involvement of the responsible departments and sections within the NEC.

Ms. Lenka Homolkova, UNDP Chief Technical Advisor, summarized the Project that ran from December 2015-August 2020, noting that the total budget received was US\$16.76 million and expenditures totaled US\$15.75 million (94%).

The request for extension reflected delays in delivery of some Project activities, notably under *Output 1* – infrastructural developments, aiming at rehabilitation of NEC magisterial warehouse facilities, and *Outputs 6 and 7* – completion of electoral reform, with the focus on women's political participation. Other activities (ERP, study tours, strengthening legal framework, IPCC, electoral violence prevention, youth summit, communication) were later extended to offer initial support to the 2020 SSE and Referendum.

The financial report is tentative pending the financial closure (12 months following operational closure/conclusion of donor contracts) and final agreement with EU regarding the costs incurred during suspension.

The project was a multi-donor model with implemented directly by UNDP with the NEC.

The Project's overall goal was to strengthen the capacity of NEC and core electoral stakeholders to conduct their core activities in an impartial, transparent, and sustainable manner and successfully carry out scheduled electoral processes within the electoral cycle 2015-2018. Electoral management systems and processes strengthened/ reformed to support free and fair elections.

Mr. Anthony Sengbe, NEC Executive Director, discussed the overall assessment of the Project.

On Expected Result 1, he observed that the Project supported professionalization of the NEC staff to strengthen, manage, administer, and conduct free, fair, and credible elections at all times for the people of Liberia. The international and local election experts hired contributed to building the institutional capacity of the NEC. The successful conduct of various by-elections, the 2017 and 2020 Elections have demonstrated that the NEC is capable of organizing elections with limited international support. However, knowledge at the lower level of the Commission as well as further capacity-building in advanced areas of electoral operations, such as Electoral Disputes Resolution (EDR), needs further improvements. There is also a need for further training in the use of the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System.

On Expected Result 2, he noted that the Project achieved the initial targets set up in the Project document. The feasibility study set up solid ground for the introduction of voter registration and a more effective future roll out.

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Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for effective specification, procurement, development, system trials, and amendments to the legal framework.

For Expected Result 3, while the Project implemented all activities envisaged in the Project document, further efforts need to be invested in long-term capacity development programs and gender sensitive civic and voter education, involving not only NEC, but also other stakeholders.

Regarding Expected Result 4, he stated that the Project mostly achieved its objectives. In general, all registered political parties regularly participated at the IPCC events. The MoU and subsequently the Code of Conduct have been signed; political parties by-laws drafted. The Project also achieved the target of organizing 20 workshops, with participation from community leaders, youth, and women's organizations.

Discussing Expected Result 5, he observed that the independent evaluation suggests that the Liberia National Police (LNP) benefited immensely from the Project's support, notably in terms of training and coordination. Despite the absence of UNMIL, national security actors were able to provide the security needed for the 2017 elections through this security coordination mechanism. The presence of security in 96% of polling precincts became a deterrent for would be perpetrators of conflict and violence before, during, and after elections, thereby contributing to the peaceful conduct of the 2017 elections.

On Expected Result 6, Overall, the project achieved its objective in developing the CVE toolkit but fell short in achieving sustainability, notably in the long-term CVE and more robust support to capacity development of CSOs and CVE-related platforms.

Regarding Expected Result 7, the Project met its overall target in supporting the codification of the legislation in 2016. Additional support was provided to the 2018 reform process, successfully conducting stakeholder consultations, and incorporating their recommendations into legal proposals, which were submitted to the Legislature but not yet passed. Constitutional amendments were not adopted. There is still a legal capacity gap within the NEC and generally on electoral disputes resolution. More continuous training is needed to advance knowledge of the electoral disputes.

For Expected Result 8, the Project has fulfilled the objectives, notably in its support to electoral logistics and training. Elections observers for the 2017 elections agreed that the election was well administered and attributed this substantially to the Project support for NEC and stakeholders. The Project capacity building initiatives had a clear positive impact particularly the NEC technical staff.

Mr. Anthony Sengbe then presented a synopsis of the lessons learned:

- Policy decision to digitize the operations of the NEC through the ERP
- Communication needed to strengthen electoral management systems
- Security coordination mechanism between NEC and Liberian police requires continued support
- Strengthen partnership between NEC and political parties and civil society
- Improve stakeholder relations
- Establish sustainable and more credible voter registration system
- Improve women's political participation

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve coordination between the donor partners and NEC • Improve Project's M&E and visibility strategy <p>Ms. Lenka Homolkova reflected on the above challenges and discussed how they are being addressed by the new Project. Moving forward, the Project seeks to further support the enterprise resource planning (ERP), working with NEC to strengthen partnerships, communication and improve CVE, and partnering with UN Women to improve inclusive political participation.</p> <p>She also provided a financial analysis of the Project, noting that while it appeared that the bulk of expenditures were on project management, that figure also included key technical experts. She also stated that the new Project takes into consideration the need for better coordination between donors and the NEC and includes regular interactions, which was taken into consideration in the new 2020 – 2024 Project document.</p>	
Discussion/ Comments	<p>Mr. Stephen Rodrigues thanked the team for highlighting challenges that remain, and what the unfinished agenda looks like. He noted that it was an honest assessment of what needs to be done. UNDP is committed to continue in this collaborative manner of work with its partners, viewing this not as a project, but as a joint action with partners, NEC, and Government. In the coming months there will be an opportunity to sit with NEC, seek solutions and create a work plan.</p> <p>EU Programme Manager Ms. Laura Virgili requested clarification on what appeared to be discrepancies between the presentation and documents received. EU cannot approve today pending the final financial statements, but that does not indicate disagreement.</p> <p>Ms. Lenka Homolkova explained that while the Project is operationally closed, there remains a 12-month window to finalize payments, close out purchase orders, etc. There may be small changes in the final financial report, also noting that the negotiation is concluding between UNDP and EU on eligible costs prior to the suspension of contract on 7 May.</p> <p>Hon. Augustus Flomo noted that the resources deployed in electoral processes were a challenge in a small economy, voter roll updates and logistics being very costly. There is a need to reduce costs as much as possible while still being transparent and inclusive in elections. There is also a need to look more into voter education as evidenced by spoiled ballots. There is a general concern about logistics and transportation, which needs more sustainable solutions. It is important to ensure that aid resources are used in line with Government priorities, and to allow key technical people to participate in project design.</p> <p>Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansanah observed that there is a longstanding debate on biometric voter registration and the place of the National Identification Registry (NIR) in the voter registration process. In terms of cost effectiveness, biometrics will pay off in the long term, but is initially expensive. Moves toward getting NIR to register voters would require a change in the law that names NEC as the only institution that can register voters. The Commission also thinks it is a good thing, but an assessment would be needed to determine if NIR is ready to do this, and to determine who takes responsibility for the credibility of the registration.</p>	UNDP NEC EU MFDP
Resolution/ Approval	Mr. Stephen Rodrigues moved to accept the report with the understanding that the final financial closure of the project was pending. NEC, EU, and MFDP agreed.	Board

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	<i>Mr. Rodrigues</i> then tabled the motion to transfer the Project's remaining assets, pending final financial closure, to the new Project. The Project Board unanimously approved the transfer with no additional comments or reservations.	
Closing Remarks	<i>Hon. Augustus Flomo</i> thanked the NEC and UNDP for an informative presentation and expressed his appreciation for the partners continued support.	MFDP

Government/GoL	UNDP	Responsible Partner
Hon. Augustus Flomo Deputy Minister of Economic Management, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)	Mr. Stephen Rodrigues Resident Representative, UNDP	Hon. Davidetta Browne Lansanah Chairperson, National Elections Commission (NEC)
Signature: 	Signature: 	Signature: 
Date:	Date: 23/4/2021	Date: 22 April 2021

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