NEC Completes First Stage of Electoral Law Reform Consultation throughout Liberia

The National Elections Commission (NEC) has completed a nationwide Electoral Law Reform Consultation, which took place in four regions of the Country with the last (bringing together Nimba, Lofa and Bong Counties) held in Gbarnga, Bong County.

Like the three other meetings in Tubmanburg, Buchanan, and Zedwru, the last consultation was well attended by paramount chiefs, superintendents of the three counties, women and youth groups, and lawmakers of both Houses of the Legislature, as well as, NEC Commissioners led by Chairman Jerome Korkoya.

The Commission embarked on the nationwide consultations in July 2019 to solicit inputs on electoral reforms. Since then, citizens of the 15 political subdivisions of the country have made several recommendations on both the new elections law of 1986 and the constitution of Liberia.

The some of the citizens, including local government officials, and youth and women groups, during the four regional meetings (Tubmanburg, Bomi County, Buchana, Grand Bassa County, Zewdru, Grand Gedeh County, and Gbarnga, Bong County) called for increase in the application fees for aspirants for the House Representatives, Senate, and the Presidency. Some also called for the amendment of the law on by-elections. There were mixed views on article 27 of the Liberia constitution, which talks about only “Negroes or of Negro descent
shall qualify by birth or by naturalization to be citizens of Liberia”. Some want it changed while others want it maintained.

Election date, timeframe for post-election appeals, women’s representation, establishment of electoral districts or constituencies, guaranteeing the NEC’s funding, and ensuring an appropriate legal framework for voter registration were key among the issues deliberated on during the consultations.

The most recent recommendations were made in Gbarnga, Bong county where citizens were gathered from Lofa, Nimba, and host Bong Counties from September 11-13, 2019. The NEC used the consultations as part of the electoral reform drive.

The consultations are bordering on the General Administration of NEC, Voter Registration, Electoral Justice, and Constitutional Issues for Long Term.

Following the 2017 presidential and Representative elections, both local and international observer groups, totaling 102, recommended for 144 legal electoral reforms. Of this amount, 107 recommendations came from Liberia observer groups. These recommendations were addressed to the NEC and the Executive and Legislature branches of government of Liberia. They were also made to the Liberian National Police (LNP) and stakeholders including political parties and civil society organizations.

Considering the importance of the recommendations and pursuant to 2.9 (c) of the New Elections Law, the Board of Commissioners of the NEC constituted a Technical Working Group (TWG), headed by the deputy Executive Director for Programs of NEC, Nathan Garbie. The mandate is to review the recommendations
particularly directed at NEC to identify a “Reform Agenda” to undertake in the period 2019 – 2023.

The TWG considered 84 recommendations of the 144, accepted 59, declined 10 and decided to refer 15 to other institutions for their considerations. Of the 59, 32 can be actioned through adoption of regulation (without prior change in legislation) adoption of policy or though strengthening implementation strategy.

The remaining 27 of the 59 requires changes to the Legislation (statute) and Constitution of Liberia.

The consultations (two days per region) brought together high profiled and relevant stakeholders including the Legislature, which was led by the chairman on the House Committee on Elections and Inauguration, Representative Alex Grant. The Superintendents of all 15 Counties, as well as, representatives from the Law Reform Commission, and the Justice Ministry.

In his opening statement marking the start of the last of the consultations in Gbarnga, NEC Chairman Jerome Korkoya urged the participants of the three counties to consider their inputs as very important in the election process. He underscored the importance of law reform and why the citizens themselves are being involved. In separate remarks, Representative Grant of Grand Gedeh and Senator Milton Teahjay of Sinoe, encouraged the participants to add their voices in making the elections law better for them. They said it is important for the citizens to get fully involved since the law is meant for them.

Making remarks, the Superintendent of Bong County, Esther Walker, thanked NEC for getting the people of Bong county involved in the process of trying to make the elections law better.
The second stage of the consultation drive is expected to continue shortly in Buchanna, Grand Bassa County with Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations, and the Media and Religious Groups.

The sponsorship of both stages of the electoral Law Reform Consultation are being led by UNDP and USAID.

Upon completion of consultations, a draft proposal, after validation, will be submitted to the Legislature for enactment.