A MESSAGE FROM

Chairman Cllr. Jerome G. Korkoya

The October 10, 2017 elections are crucial to the sustenance of peace and stability in Liberia and the peaceful transfer of power from one elected President to another since 1944. Given the critical nature of the elections, the National Elections Commission (NEC) is exerting every effort to ensure the active participation of all eligible Liberian citizens, especially marginalized groups such as women, youths, and the physically challenged. The NEC is assessing all polling centers with the goal of making relevant adjustments to ensure easy access to all voters on Election Day.

Consistent with its desire for broad-base participation in the 2017 elections, the NEC has solidified its relationship with political parties through the NEC-initiated Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC), and renewed partnership with the Angie Brooks International Center’s Women Situation Room in promoting a violence-free election.

The NEC has put in place the necessary mechanism for a robust civic and voter education campaign for the 2017 elections by revamping its website, updating its Twitter and Facebook accounts, and establishing a digital billboard at its Headquarters. And thanks to the continued support of the partners, Board of Commissioners, and staff of the NEC, the Commission continues to execute its statutory mandate with integrity and respect for rule of law.

The successful conduct of the 2017 Voters Registration Exercise and the February 2017 District #1 Representative By-Election in Lofa County are glaring examples of NEC’s commitment in this regard.

The next critical stage of the electoral process is the Exhibition, scheduled for June 12-17, 2017. The Exhibition will provide the opportunity for inclusion, exclusion, and corrections to the VR data aimed at producing a final register that is accurate, credible, and acceptable to all. Therefore, the NEC encourages the active participation of all eligible voters in the Exhibition and other subsequent electoral activities, as the Commission endeavors to deliver free, fair, transparent, and credible elections in October 2017.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Jerome G. Korkoya
Chairman, NEC
A MESSAGE FROM

LEPT, implemented by International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), works to make Liberia’s democracy stronger and more effective providing technical assistance to the elections commission and civil society organizations. The NEC recently completed the seven-week voter registration period. To ensure that all Liberians were aware of voter registration LEPT supported and trained local organizations to conduct civil and voter education. These programs included workshops, sticker and poster campaigns and catchy jingles for urban and community radio encouraging citizens to vote and targeted groups of Liberians that have historically participated in low numbers including women in rural communities, people with disabilities and young people who are likely to be first time voters.

USAID got to see the fruit of that work as staff participated in U.S. Embassy Monrovia’s international election, traveling to every county in Liberia. In the first few weeks of the registration period, international observers saw long lines of eager voters; local NEC staff helping registrants understand eligibility requirements and their civic responsibilities, and electoral supervisors getting feedback and forms to take back to the NEC headquarters in Monrovia. At the end of March the NEC was still processing the forms, but the provisional voter roll will be exhibited in June, allowing Liberians to check the list for inclusion and accuracy.

Inside this Issue

Pg-3: Modernising Voter Education
Pg-4-5: Successful Completion of VR Process
Pg-6-7: NEC Conducts Lofa By-elections
Pg-8: First Women’s Situation Room of Liberia
Pg-9: Gender Section’s Workshop on Inclusion
Pg-10: IPCC discusses Access for PWDs
Pg-11: CVE Lessons Learnt Workshop
Pg-12: NEC Prepares For Exhibition

The Ballot is Published By National Elections Commission
Cllr. Jerome George Korkoya Chairman
Cllr. Sarah Toh Co-Chairperson
CA Lamin Lighe Executive Director
Joseph Nyesuah Director of Communications
James Salley Photographer

Edited and Designed by IFES (USAID)

2
Evolving with changing time, the National Elections Commission widened the spectrum of the Civic Voter Education (CVE) tools employed for the 2017 Presidential and Representative Elections. Having traditionally used flyers, street theatre, town criers and similar platforms for information dissemination, the NEC also added modern information dissemination tools social media to its media mix. As radio forms the spine of traditional information dissemination in Liberia, NEC, with funding from USAID, through IFES, launched an extensive CVE campaign on the national radio station of the country. Recognizing the space for well-produced, quality broadcast content, IFES selected a reputed, highly experienced, local production company, New Liberia Media Initiative (NLMI), for the execution of 50 episodes of NEC’s flag-ship talk show “Elections & You”, 50 radio dramas and a set of Public Service Announcements (PSAs), dedicated to promoting CVE messages till the end of this electoral cycle. The show covers topical issues, parallel to the NEC’s electoral timeline, such as encouraging citizens to register to vote, establishment of extra VR centers, messages to enhance women’s participation in the electoral process, the rampant crime of trucking, a practice in which voters are transported to vote in other parts of the country heavily impacting the integrity of the elections. Issues such as inclusiveness and voter apathy remain part of the discussions and are core messages for short radio skits and PSA’s. This content reinforces NEC’s moto for 2017 Elections-- “Election is everybody’s Business” (sic.). The radio skits and PSAs are local in their tone and attempt to capture the rhetoric of voters, making them relatable to the listeners. Liberian youth are more receptive to visual media and are extremely active on social media platforms. The Facebook and Twitter pages of the NEC were created to utilize the booming number of Facebook users in the country by using storytelling and local narratives to encapsulate electoral messages targeting specific audiences. This was achieved through videos produced in collaboration with IFES featuring NEC executives discussing their respective areas of expertise, such as the CVE Director addressing first time voters and the Director of Communications discussing the damage caused by rumor mongering; another captured a message from the head of the National Union of Disabled issuing a request to the disability community to register in large numbers. Another set of videos targeted young football fans to register to vote dealt with the priorities specific to a sub group, such as young football fans likening registering to supporting the Liberian National team and stay-at-home mothers to get involved with the “voting business” for the sake of their children. These videos have a cumulative reach of over 28,000 people so far and have laid the foundation for the content to be created for the electronic billboards erected recently at the NEC headquarters. The billboards further embody NEC’s diverse efforts to direct people’s attention to important electoral information.

The NEC’s efforts at spreading awareness about the Voter Registration exercise have been commendable, despite logistical impediments. Adding new dimensions to the way civic voter education is approached historically in Liberia has helped break the barriers of illiteracy and lack of access. As Liberia enters such a significant time in nation-building, it is expected that the outcome of these activities and efforts are reflected in the voter participation in this monumental exercise.
Successful Voter Registration Exercise Lays Foundation for 2017 Elections

On February 1, 2017, the National Elections Commission inaugurated the National Voter Registration exercise. The theme for 2017 elections, “Election is Everybody’s Business” (sic.) became the catchphrase of the country during the VR period.

During the VR process the Commission undertook extensive CVE initiatives and made a concerted effort to disseminate information about the VR process to the urban and rural areas across Liberia. It was the first time in the history of the NEC to directly provide funding to work with faith based institutions to spread CVE messages on the VR. Political parties and proposed independent candidates also galvanized their support base to carry out outreach for the VR. CBOs, CSOs and religious groupings came out in their numbers to buttress the efforts of the CVE section in reaching out to their constituents. These institutions have historically supported the NEC’s CVE efforts. However, during the VR period their efforts were more organized and therefore, commitment was exhibited. In Liberia, donors have supported CBOs, CSOs and these religious institutions to disseminate electoral messages.

On the morning of February 1, 2017, 2,080 VR centers opened across 73 Electoral Districts. This year the NEC had added 300 new centers to facilitate access of citizens who are located in distant, rural parts of the country. As could be the case with any other nation-wide exercise of this scale, some initial glitches were faced due to malfunctioning of some imported equipment, however, swift actions taken by NEC and partners resolved the issue in a brief time. The NEC regularly updated the press and the key stakeholders about the developments in the VR process while also issuing severe warnings to entities engaged in illegal activities like trucking of voters and sale-purchase of voter ID cards.

“The use of social media, mobile phone call centers in Monrovia and other parts of the country played a pivotal role in providing much needed coverage to the CVE outreach efforts. Finally, the NEC collaborated with the reigning Miss Liberia 2017 as a Voter Registration Ambassador visiting universities and secondary schools and reaching out to women and girls especially first time voters to be a part of the VR exercise.” reported the Director of CVE, Mr. Senesee Freeman.
The NEC was also very proactive, along with Liberian National Police (LNP) and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, in countering any malicious activities that were reported.

The VR exercise was slated to end on March 7, 2017 but lasted until March 14, 2017 due to an extension of seven days to accommodate those women, physically challenged and elderly persons who had to travel long distances to register and also to compensate for the slow start of the VR process because of equipment malfunction in some centers. The exercise concluded on March 14, 2017, without any reported incidents of violence which is a positive sign for the upcoming electoral processes.

The 2017 Voter Registration Exercise was successfully completed on March 14, 2017 at all of the 2,080 centers across the 73 Electoral District in the 15 counties of Liberia.

The Commission, during the process of retrieving registration forms and materials from the field, released the first figures on March 23, 2017, informing the press that 2,026,426 (Two Million Twenty Six Thousand Four Hundred Twenty Six) forms had been received and recorded across 11 of the 15 counties. The Data Center at the NEC also reported that of the almost 700,000 scanned forms, Male registrants account for 53% of scanned forms while females represented 47%.

Addressing the media recently, the Chairman provided a graphic picture of the scanning process of the forms to give the stakeholders an appreciation of the enormity of the task at hand. He also called on political parties to cooperate by asking their supporters to review the provisional lists during the Exhibition Period to correct the voter roll. He also congratulated the men and women of Liberia on making the VR process a success, heralding it as a sign of Liberia’s coming-of-age as a democracy.
NEC CONDUCTS BY-ELECTION IN LOFA DISTRICT #1

Conducting elections is a task of immense responsibility and complexity. Irrespective of the level for which the elections are being held, adequate planning, foresight and constant vigilance are paramount for them to succeed. It was therefore a display of professional strength that the National Elections Commission conducted the Lofa County By-Elections successfully in record time despite their engagement in the National Voter Registration exercise.

Due to the unfortunate demise of Representative Eugene Fallah Kparkar from Lofa County Dist.#1 in December his seat was left vacant. The Commission was advised to hold the By-Election within 90 days, in accordance with Article 27 of the Liberian Constitution. With effective planning and quick decision making, the Commission mapped out a feasible timeline for the process without compromising on the on-going voter awareness campaign. The Writ of the By-Election was issued in a ceremony held at the Commission on 30th December, 2016, mandating the election to be conducted on February 28, 2017. The responsibility of the execution of the By-Election was entrusted on Atty. Nathan P. Garbie, Deputy Executive Director (Programs). A Steering Committee dedicated to the exercise was created under the direction of the Board of Commissioners, with Atty. Garbie appointed as the Chairman. Under his able guidance, the Commission launched the process that led up to the By-Election.

The civic and voter education campaign for By-Election was launched on January 7, 2017 in the Foya City Hall, Foya District. A total of four Civic Educators and two Gender Mobilizers were contracted to carry out intensive awareness campaign in the district. Their main agenda was to engage the community through a host of activities aimed at educating them on the importance of replacement of lost and damaged Voter I.D cards, providing them with information on how and where they replace their lost and damaged cards. They also engaged the community on how to mark their Ballot on Election Day using the “Know Your Candidate” Posters. These activities were done through group discussions, face to face engagements, and sporting events. A cultural troupe was also hired to attract the attention of the public towards information about the By-Election. On February 22-23, 2017, a Road-Show was held across the Electoral District #1. On February 23, 2017 a Town-Hall forum was held in the Foya City Hall, Lofa County. Both the events were remarkably well-attended. Present at the programs, were the District Commissioner for Foya District, women and youth leaders, a large number of persons with disabilities, security agencies, political party representatives and a cross section of the society. Meanwhile, the nine qualified candidates actively increased the pace of their campaigns to ensure maximum...
On Thursday, February 16, 2017 the National Elections Commission received 40,150 (forty thousand one hundred and fifty) ballot papers for the Lofa County District #1 By-Election. Along with other preparations to ensure smooth execution, NEC also trained over 219 persons as polling staff who were deployed in the field on 26th February, 2017.

The polling centers in Lofa Dist. #1 opened at 8am on the day of the by-election. People lined up to cast their ballots and the entire process was completed in a thoroughly peaceful and democratic manner. A total of 10,603 votes were casted, of which 771 were invalid, while 9,832 were counted as valid votes.

The results for the By-Elections were declared on March 2, 2017 and the candidate of the Union of Liberia Democrats, (ULD) Mr. Francis Sakila Nyumahn, Sr. came out as the winning candidate. He obtained 32.0% of all valid votes, leaving behind the candidate of the Movement for Economic Empowerment (MOVEE) by a narrow margin of 1.5%. The candidate for MOVEE party, contested the results, alleging that the votes cast in favor of their party were counted as invalid in four precincts. However, due to lack of evidence, and eventual dropping of the claim by MOVEE, Hon. Francis Sakila Nyumahn was declared the winner of the Lofa County District # 1 By-Elections.

In a ceremony held at the NEC headquarters in Monrovia on March 22, 2017, NEC Co-Chairperson, Cllr. Sarah Toh certified the winner of the election, Mr. Nyumalin of the ULD Party. The credibility of the entire process was lauded by observers and voters alike. The peaceful and enthusiastic manner in which the people of Lofa participated in the elections was commended by the Commission and all stakeholders. The By-Election was a perfect precursor to set the trend for the upcoming Presidential and General Elections, embodying the fairness, the transparency and the non-violence which should ideally mark the 2017 electoral process in Liberia.
The launch of Liberia’s First Situation room call center: A big step towards preventing electoral violence

Liberian elections have historically been marred by instances of violence against women. To counter their occurrence and prevent episodes of gender violence, the Angie Brooks International Centre (ABIC) and UN WOMEN launched Liberia’s first Situation Room Call Center. This intervention, the first of its kind in the country’s history, is meant to add credibility to & strengthen accountability of Liberia’s VR Process.

The Women’s Situation Room (WSR) provided a toll free phone number, “1010”, to report Voter Registration irregularities. Liberians were encouraged to call in at the number if they were a witness to any irregularity, violence, or potential for violence – especially in case of women. According to a press statement issued by ABIC, “The Women’s Situation Room is a nation-wide conflict mitigation process implemented via a series of women/youth led peace interventions that span 7-8 months and culminate into a physical room.”

The nerve center of the WSR is a Call Center run by a WSR team of “Eminent Women”, who receive and record incident reports from the field for intervention. This team of Eminent Women work with key stakeholders in the electoral process, the NEC, Youth Leaders, Liberian National Police (whose representatives are stationed in the room on a 24 hour basis) to give guidance and provide advice to mitigate violence in case such a situation arises. Synergy between the various institutions and organizations is essential for their success in maintaining peace, before, during and after the election period. The opening of the WSR was lauded by NEC and the local and international partners as it is expected to lay the foundation for mitigating gender based violence during elections in Liberia.
The Inter-Party Consultative Committee (IPCC), convened by the Political Affairs section at the NEC, in collaboration with USAID/IFES, conducted a Round-table Discussion on “Providing Access for Persons with Disabilities in Political Processes in Liberia”. The discussion was attended by representatives from the Liberia United Association of the Disabled and the Liberia National Association of the Physically Disabled, Inc. NEC Chairman Cllr. Korkoya provided international good practice examples on increasing inclusion of persons with disabilities in Political Parties as members and leaders. Two persons with disability, who were members of Political Parties provided personal experiences that helped in engaging the participants of the meeting. All attendees engaged in an interactive discussion on inclusion. This was the first IPCC dedicated to the issue of inclusive leadership and the event successfully brought it to the attention of the political parties.

Validation Meeting On WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN LIBERIAN ELECTIONS

The Gender Section of the National Elections Commission of Liberia held a one-day validation meeting of a Research Report on Women’s Participation in Elections from 2005-2010 and in political parties’ hierarchy presently, sponsored by UNDP, Elections project. In attendance were political parties representatives, CSOs and relevant Government Ministries & Agencies, who expressed their gratitude and appreciation towards the NEC through the Gender section for such a report. They made meaningful contributions during the meeting. Concerns with in the report were discussed and the Consultant ensured that they would be addressed. The final version of the report is awaited.
In coordination with the NEC Gender Section, USAID/IFES organized two one-day workshops on “Empowering Persons with Disabilities to Participate in Elections”. The workshop was facilitated by IFES Inclusion Officer Rebecca Aaberg and was attended by NEC officials and representatives of Disability Rights groups from all over Liberia. The workshop included interactive sessions on the topics of barriers to persons with different types of disabilities, good inclusion practices in polling stations, legal rights according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 29, and inclusion throughout the electoral cycle.

“Thank you to IFES for organizing such a great workshop that was an eye opener for us.”
– DPO training participant

A review game played at the end of the day also reinforced new knowledge and provided organizers with a sense of how well the information had been remembered. This training raised participants’ knowledge levels about the rights of the Persons with Disability about voting and participating in political life more broadly.
NEC and Partners Conduct CVE Lessons Learned Conference

The National Election Commission held a two day Civic Voter Education (CVE) Lesson Learned Conference after the completion of the Voter Registration exercise for 2017 Presidential and General Elections. The Conference was officially inaugurated with an address from Commissioner Samuel Z. Joe, responsible for CVE oversight. The conference was a platform to synergize the lessons learned by the CSOs deputed by NEC’s international partners to enhance CVE outreach. Commissioner Joe commended the efforts of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), National Democratic Institute (NDI), and United National Development Program (UNDP) for providing sub-grants to CSOs who conducted outreach activities targeting various groups amongst the electorate through a variety of tools.

The Director of CVE, Senesee Freeman, in his brief overview of the event, stated that the purpose of the gathering was to look at the collaboration between NEC field staff and CSOs supported by International partners and critically assess the operational issues faced by the NEC, including funding of CVE program by the government and partners. He discussed the importance of evaluating the impact of deployment of NEC Civic Educators and Gender mobilizers during the VR exercise.

The two day conference was packed with presentations from the various CSOs that had conducted awareness activities across various media. The organizations used a host of information dissemination tools to increase the reach of their efforts ranging from door to door campaigning, radio shows, sports events and call banks. During their presentations, each organization discussed their experiences and the challenges faced by them during execution of their projects and provided recommendations for further improvements, based on their experiences on field.

Interestingly, most organizations reported similar challenges that they encountered on the field during the VR process. Bad roads across the country, especially in distant counties, made it difficult for them to reach out to the rural communities. Poor connectivity had a much deeper impact on the turnout at various VR centers that were hard for the registrants to reach. The lack of CVE material on display at the VR centers, identifying their locations, or just giving out important electoral messages, diluted the impact of increasing in the number of Registration Centers. Another issue highlighted at the workshop was the deployment of staff at the VR centers who did not belong to the communities that they were registering. The CSOs believed this to have caused delays in registrations and also caused acrimony between the NEC field staff and the registrants.

Radio, sports events and door to door campaigning were heralded as the most effective media for information dissemination. Town Hall events and use of cultural performances were also identified to have immediate impact by facilitating peer to peer discussions about elections. While short message service (SMS) campaigns were mentioned as being highly effective to reach out to people with physical disabilities, and social media to capture the attention of first time voters, both these media fell short in areas with low mobile connectivity.

In their recommendations to the NEC, the organizations emphasized the need for better and timely distribution of CVE material so that they can be disseminated effectively. Participants also recommended strongly that field staff should be hired from within the local communities to avoid miscommunication and confusion caused by language differences. Need for better monitoring of the process was also highlighted. Some organizations pointed out that procuring t-shirts, caps and other branded elements that could help identify NEC field staff might also help in gaining people’s trust.

A working group session to collate the feedback and recommendations proved to be an excellent reflection exercise for the NEC. The Commission thanked all the participants for their keen observations and efforts to help the NEC make 2017 Elections fairer and more inclusive.
NEC GEARS UP FOR EXHIBITION PERIOD

After a successful VR process, the National Election Commission is now preparing for the Exhibition of the Provisional Voter Roll across the 73 Electoral Districts of the country. The dates for the Exhibition exercise are 12 to 17 June, 2017.

Designed to correct errors captured on the particulars of registrants during the VR exercise, the exhibition exercise is a platform for corrections and objections, if any, to the information on the Voter Roll. This may include objection to registration of someone who is a non-Liberian or had not attained the age of 18 years by the time they registered.

The exhibition period is essential to the fairness and transparency of the electoral process as it also offers an opportunity to the electorate to verify their information and to report on any illegal registrants that they observe on the voter rolls. Communities are encouraged to check information of registrants from their respective electoral districts to weed out errors. This also helps check double registration.

The CVE for the exhibition period begins on May 17, 2017 and will carry on till the end of the activity. The final figures of registered voters in the country are expected to be released by July 15, 2017.