An Assessment of Election Management Bodies and Political Parties Preparedness for Women’s Participation in 2023 Electoral Processes.
AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ELECTIONS MANAGEMENT BODIES AND POLITICAL PARTIES PREPAREDNESS FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 2023 ELECTORAL PROCESSES.

Campaign for Good Governance
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CAMPAIGN FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE (CGG) exists to increase citizens' political participation in governance through advocacy, capacity building and civic education in order to build a more informed civic populace and a democratic state.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was completed with the cooperation of personnel from Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in Sierra Leone. They did spare their valuable time to be interviewed and provided pertinent documents. CGG would like to acknowledge the Gender Officers of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), Gender Officer and the National Security Coordinator, Office of National Security (ONS), the Gender Officer and the Inspector General, Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Gender Officer and the Operations Officer, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Communication Officer, the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, Chairman, National Election Watch (NEW), Women National Leaders/Executive Members of the four Political Parties in Parliament, President, All Political Parties Women Association (APPWA), Women in the Media, President, 50/50 Group, President, Women's Forum and Vice President of the Women Shadow Parliament-Sierra Leone.

CGG acknowledges the Consultant's (Hon. Dr Bernadette Lahai) professional efforts in getting work done. The management of CGG remains grateful to Irish Aid and Trocaire for supporting CGG to assess EMBs and Political Parties’ preparedness for women’s participation in the 2023 multitier elections.
FOREWARD

Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) is very proud of this novel consultancy idea of assessing Election Management Bodies' preparedness regarding women’s full and genuine participation in the 2023 elections in Sierra Leone.

The focus on EMBs’ preparedness for women's participation in the forthcoming 2023 elections was deliberate. Since 1996, every Election Observation Mission Report on Sierra Leone has observed a high percentage of women registered voters, yet an insignificant number voted for Parliament and Local Councils or appointed ministers. These Missions Reports recommended in the light of Article 9 (1b) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which Sierra Leone has signed and ratified. This legal framework provides affirmative action to promote the representation of women in both elective and appointive positions. Other recommendations include

1. the reduction in candidature fees to an affordable amount for women;
2. political parties to set aside a percentage of their income to provide capacity building/strengthening for female party members;
3. Political Parties Regulation Commission, Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone and political parties to ensure those violating the rights of female political party members, aspirants and candidates are brought to book;
4. Revised laws on ban on dual citizenship for participation in the election, which disproportionately affected women;
5. Involve working with CSOs on promoting women in politics;
6. Have communication strategies specifically on women and participation in politics as a fundamental right;
7. promoting women's participation during all stages of the electoral process;
8. And consider removing or suspending the constitutional provision for civil servants resigning 12 months before the election to allow them to contest, which affects women immensely.

Among others, it was prudent to ascertain the extent to which EMBs preparing for elections have taken on board some of these recommendations. Thus in operationalizing EMBs' level of "Preparedness" in enhancing women's full participation in the 2023 elections, some of the above recommendations were used as variables, such as a) development of new/reviewing of existing legal frameworks to make provision for women's participation and enforcement of provisions; b) establishment of new/strengthening of existing structures; c) assessments/studies conducted to gain more insight for better planning; d) recruitment/promotion of new/existing personnel); e) capacity building/strengthening and training measures put in; f) mobilization of financial and logistic resources; g) forging new/strengthening existing collaborations/networks/partnerships; h) safety measures put in
place for women, especially throughout the electioneering processes; and i) instituting/strengthening measures for collection, processing and analyzing of gender-disaggregated data.

CGG plans to share this report with other key stakeholders, especially those planning to monitor and observe the 2023 elections, to plan their election observation and monitoring activities and information gathered with some of these variables in mind.

CGG hope to use information collected during the 2023 elections on these variables in their post-election assessment of the level of women's participation in the elections and to assess the level of effectiveness of the preparations put in place as reported by EMBs to enhance women's involvement in the elections as voters, candidates and staff and appointment into various public offices.

Future election planning and preparations by EMBs could be significantly enhanced by such information as it will highlight their successes and shortcomings and accordingly take appropriate actions to re-enforce best practices while revisiting and amending those actions that did not work well.

CGG hopes to add this exercise as part of its future pre and post-election agenda to build accumulated empirical knowledge, skills and experience regarding EMB's preparedness for effective women's participation in elections in the country is concerned.

CGG is very thankful to Trocaire and Irish Aid for their financial facilitation for this maiden and novel consultancy. We are also grateful to the Consultant, Hon. Dr Bernadette Lahai and all those who availed their valuable time to be interviewed and provided the needed documentation for the study.

Mrs Marcella Samba
Executive Director
Campaign for Good Governance
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INTRODUCTION

Section 31 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone states that:

"Every citizen of Sierra Leone eighteen years of age and above and of sound mind shall have the right to vote, and accordingly shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for public elections and referenda."

The fulfilment of this right is vested in the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone as enshrined in Section 33 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, which states that:

"Subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the Electoral Commission shall be responsible for the conduct and supervision of the registration of voters for,

and of all public elections and referenda; and for that purpose, shall have the power to make regulations by statutory instrument for the registration of voters, the conduct of Presidential, Parliamentary or Local Government elections and referenda, and other matters connected in addition to that, including regulations for voting by proxy."

In addition, the same Constitution in Section 34 created the Political Parties Registration Commission, with the mandate to register all political parties and make laws and regulations necessary to discharge its responsibilities under this Constitution.

Furthermore, Section 35 makes provision for the establishment of political parties:

“to participate in shaping the people’s political will, to disseminate information on political ideas, and social and economic programmes of a national character and to sponsor candidates for Presidential, Parliamentary or Local Government elections.”
In addition to these constitutionally established institutions, there also exist in Sierra Leone other Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and political party associations, who also have, as part of their mandates, the monitoring of public elections and working with political parties to improve citizen's participation, especially women and youth, and governance.

International Election Observation Missions have also been mandated to observe elections, report on political parties' activities, and assess whether internal democracy confirms best practices, nationally and internationally, in terms of inclusivity. For example, all the Election Observation Missions to Sierra Leone – European Union, African Union, Carter Foundation, ECOWAS, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), National Election Watch have observed a high percentage of women registered voters and yet an insignificant number are voted for Parliament and Local Councils or appointed as Ministers. These Mission Reports recommended in the light of Article 9 (1b) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which Sierra Leone has signed and ratified, have called for the revision of this legal framework to provide for affirmative action to promote the representation of women in elective positions. The draft Gender Empowerment Bill was heeded to that call in preparation for the 2023 general elections.

The EU Election Observation Follow-Up Mission observed that in the current parliament, 12% of the elected MPs are women, contrasted with women accounting for 52% of the population in the country. Sierra Leone ranks 156 out of 187 countries for representation of women in the national legislature. To promote women's participation in public and political life, the 2018 EU EOM prioritized recommendation 22. It called for a legislative mechanism to increase women's representation through a temporary quota to ensure women were selected to compete in winnable seats. The present Government's commitment at the highest level to the principle of more excellent representation of women in elected and appointed offices is welcome. The EFM notes that progress has been made in appointing women to positions of power in both the Government and broader administrative positions. It also welcomed the Government's effort to put forward a Gender Empowerment Bill in October 2021, which has turned attention to the pressing need for women's representation in Parliament and local councils. The Bill, if adopted and successfully implemented, would fulfil recommendation 22.

In addition to welcome measures designed to ensure that women would hold at least 30% of positions of responsibility, it foresaw a quota of 30% reserved seats to be open solely to female candidates on a rotational basis. To enforce the reserved seats, the sanction foreseen for non-compliance is the disqualification of the list by NEC. As the rotational reserved
seats entail a de facto term limit on all parliamentary seats, both government and opposition MPs raised objections to the current proposals in the House and meetings with the EFM. Since the method for assigning reserved seats has yet to be established in the Bill, the Mission cannot fully assess the proposal at this stage. The date of the Second Reading, when substantive discussions should occur, has yet to be set at the time of writing. Participants at the October conference also agreed to a 30% gender quota for their party executives at all levels, which, when implemented, would also address an aspect of recommendation 22. The President has also made explicit commitments to appointing women to be ministerial and other official positions of responsibility, which will be increased to a 30% minimum quota for a future administration if re-elected. These commitments can be achieved by the parties and government on a voluntary, non-statutory basis, regardless of whether the Bill is passed. The report also applauded the revision of the candidature fees using the minimum wage formula, which will significantly reduce the burden on candidates, especially females.

These Reports also recommended: a) refund of candidature fee after a candidate secures a certain percentage of the vote cast for that constituency; c) political parties to set aside a percentage of their income to provide capacity building/strengthening for female party members; d) PPRC, ECSL and political parties to ensure those violating the rights of female political party members, aspirant and candidates are brought to book; e) revised laws on ban on dual citizenship for participation in election, which disproportionately affected women; f) enact Affirmative Action laws to empower women to participate fully in governance; g) involve working with CSOs on promoting women in politics; h) have communication strategies specifically on women and participation in politics as a fundamental right; i) promoting women's participation during all stages of the electoral process; j) consider removing or suspending the constitutional provision for civil servants resigning 12 months before election to allow them to contest, which affects women immensely; and k) Some of these recommendations have been accepted and incorporated in the Public Elections Act 2022, the draft Political Parties Registration and Regulations Act 2022, and political parties' constitutions and rules and regulations governing elections and symbol awards. For example, the Political Parties Code of Conduct is now part of the draft PPR Act, while Section 59 (2) of the PEA, 2022, provided 33% of Reserved Seats for females. Strong laws now exist for failure to comply with the above provision by rejecting political parties’ candidate lists by ECSL and PPRC. The Dual citizenship ban on contesting presidential and parliamentary elections and the reduction of the 12-month requirement for the resignation of civil servants to six months were vehemently rejected.
ROLE OF EMBs IN ENHANCING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL CYCLE.
ROLE OF EMBS IN ENHANCING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL CYCLE.

EMBs have a critical role in promoting women's electoral and political participation. They are responsible for conducting and managing all the stages in the lead-up to the election-voter registration, candidate registration, polling preparations, and voter education and outreach. The personnel of EMBs are required to abide by service values that prioritize impartiality, probity, accountability and the highest ethical standards. Voter and donor confidence in the outcome of an election is highly dependent on the professionalism, transparency, integrity and trust of an EMB and how it administers the election.

EMBs play a crucial role in the design and implementation of electoral policies. Given their knowledge of laws governing elections, they are uniquely positioned to support gender equality and women’s empowerment in the electoral process. Therefore, EMBs need to closely examine their institutional structures, processes, rules and norms to identify ways and mean to increase women's participation and address any real/potential obstacles that continue to perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination.

It is the view that those EMBs that have created the enabling environment for women's participation have put a premium on advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in their institutions. More documented evidence of electoral administration and initiatives that have sought to empower women in electoral administration must be documented.

The goal of gender equality can be ensured in electoral administration through the integration of a Gender mainstreaming perspective in all the work they undertake, by assessing at every stage the differential impacts on men and women and by integrating gender-specific or gender-targeted interventions to tackle specific areas, such as through affirmative action measures.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
There is a pending general election in 2023 for which many preparations are ongoing by EMBs, Political, regulatory parties Body, Political Parties' Associations, Aspirants, and International organization and Donor Partners.

For example, parliament has passed the new "Public Elections Act 2022 based on recommendations mostly from the Election Observation Mission Reports and national consultations of citizens and political parties; the presentation in Parliament of the new Political Parties Registration and Regulation Bill 2022, which is awaiting passage; revision of political parties' Constitution and Rules and Regulations governing elections-executives, presidential, parliamentary, local Government. As of the time of writing this report, voter registration and delimitations of Ward and Constituency boundaries are ongoing, having recently conducted a population and demographic Census in 2012, among others.

Given that women's participation in governance is imperative, from both the point of justice and demography, there is a need to assess the level of preparedness by EMBs, political parties, regulatory bodies and political parties' associations of women's participation in the 2023 electoral processes.

To this end, on 15\textsuperscript{th} August 2022, the Consultant (Hon. Dr Bernadette Lahai) signed a contract with Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) to, among other things:

- Assess the current state of Electoral Management Bodies(EMBs) and political parties’ preparedness for women’s participation in the 2023 electoral processes;
- Assess the socioeconomic and political status of women for gender-inclusive elections; and
- Develop road map/recommendations to enhance women's socioeconomic and political empowerment for the 2023 electoral processes.
Based on the aims of the assessment, both primary and secondary data sources were used, including:

**Secondary Sources**

- Desk research and analysis of public reports from government departments and other state institutions;
- Political Parties and Political Parties Associations’ Constitutions and other legal frameworks;
- Internal documents and published data of EMBs-ECSL, PPRC, Police, Army, ONS, Judiciary, Political Parties, Election Observation Missions Reports, and Women CSOs reports.

**Primary Sources**

- Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with competent personnel from the following organizations: Gender Officer, Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL), Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), Gender Officer and the National Security Coordinator, Office of National Security (ONS), the Gender Officer and the Inspector General, Sierra Leone Police (SLP), the Gender Officer and the Operations Officer, the Republic Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Communication Officer, the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, Chairman, National Election Watch (NEW), Women National Executive Members of the 4 Political Parties in Parliament, President, All Political Parties Women Association (APPWA), Women in the Media, President, 50/50 Group and President, Women's Forum;
- Analyse and discuss data collected from the two primary sources;
- Produce a draft report and submit it to CGG for their views and comments; and
- Review the draft report based on comments from CGG and submits the final report.
OPERATIONALIZATION OF EMB AND POLITICAL PARTIES PREPAREDNESS

Within the framework of this investigation, "preparedness" is the preparation made by EMBs to enhance women’s full participation in the 2023 electoral processes. In operationalizing the level of EMBs' "preparedness" in enhancing women's full participation in the 2023 elections, the following were considered:

a) Development of new/reviewing of existing legal frameworks to make provision for women’s participation and enforcement of provisions;

b) Establishment of new/strengthening of existing structures;

c) Assessments/studies conducted to gain more insight for better planning;

d) Recruitment/promotion of new/existing personnel;)

e) Capacity building/strengthening and training measures put in;

f) Mobilization of financial and logistic resources;

g) Forging new/strengthening/existing collaborations/networks/partnerships;

h) Safety measures put in place for women, especially throughout the electioneering processes; and

i) Instituting/strengthening measures for collection, processing and analyzing of Gender disaggregated data.

To this end, the literature review findings and the Key Informants' Interviews are discussed under the various preparedness indicators.
FINDINGS

DEVELOPMENT/REVIEWING OF NEW/EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO MAKE PROVISION FOR WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF PROVISIONS

Legal frameworks constitute Sierra Leone’s commitments to all national and international laws, treaties, conventions and policies governing elections and gender equality. These include, but are not limited to, international treaties, the national Constitution, EMBs’ legal frameworks, laws, policies, practices, code of conduct, political parties and related associations' constitutions, rules and regulations governing executive elections, award of party symbols, code of conduct, gender policies and media code of ethics. These instruments provide technical advice on the planning, implementing and managing all electoral processes. Before elections, based on the election observation mission and EMB reports, there may be a need to revise existing/develop new instruments for effective implementation of future elections.

Findings from both desk review and KII revealed ongoing efforts by the institutions interviewed to review existing and develop new legal frameworks for the forthcoming 2023 public elections. For example, parliament enacted the new Public Elections Act 2022. This section could increase women’s Parliamentary Representation over and beyond the status quo. However, three issues have been raised by women and some concerned individuals and groups. Firstly, this provision does not include females running for local councils and political party executives. "Will different electoral formulas be used to elect female parliamentarians and councillors?" women ask. Nomination does not guarantee election, women argued and posit that "unless purposive legislation provisions are enacted, women will continue to face the barrier inherent in gender-unfriendly electoral processes" (Press Release by Technical Committee, in August 2022).

Secondly, it is argued that the provision cannot substitute the Minimum 30% Quota Representation that women have advocated for at all levels over decades to advance women’s political, economic, social and cultural rights of inclusion and representation.
Further, the Draft Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Bill 2021 calls for affirmative action for all appointive and elective positions and recommends sanctions for non-compliance. Thirdly, the law risk limiting women’s participation to the stipulated minimum of “every 3rd” position. It was recommended that the word "at least" be added to ensure that political parties can nominate more than 33% of female candidates for elections. Women then sought clarification on the type of electoral system used since the FPTP does not guarantee a minimum of 33% of elected women.

The candidature fees have been reviewed and made affordable, especially for female candidates, who are generally less economically empowered than their male counterparts. This will significantly increase the number of women aspiring for elective positions and improve their chances of being awarded party symbols.

ECSL has a Gender and Disability Unit headed by a Gender Officer. From both the literature review and Key Informant Interview, it was understood that ECSL, under the leadership of the Gender and Disability Unit, developed a stand-alone Gender and Disability Unit in 2013 to spearhead ECSL’s work on these areas. This was followed in 2014 by the development of the Gender Policy to help ECSL include gender components in its work. However, this policy was never formally adopted until 2018, following recommendations from the gender assessment exercise (NEC, 2018). The main objective is to “improve the participation of women in the country’s electoral and political life, especially their participation in the electoral process as voters, candidates, party agents, observers and employees. ECSL makes commitments in the policy to advance women’s participation in elections in the areas of improved equal employment opportunities for women employees; improved access to ECSL services for women, including Gender mainstreaming in all departments, policies, procedures and activities; collaboration with organizations working directly on gender issues throughout the electoral cycle; and the provision of a safe and secured working environment for Commissioners and staff. Some of the policy actions to achieve these commitments include gender quotas for employment; ensuring upward mobility/promotion for both men and women employees; ensuring a gender-equal working environment; a collection of sex-disaggregated data on all ECSL activities; identification of improvements to women’s access through the review of polling procedures and training materials; develop women-friendly voter education, information materials and delivery channels; provision of technical advice on proposals to enact special measures for women's representation in elected positions, training and development, nationally and internationally; and ensuring a conducive environment free from violence, intimidation, provocation, molestation, unlawful arrest, sexual and secret societal harassments of staff and female candidates and party supporters.

There is also the Disability Policy, 2018, to improve the accessibility of PWD to the country’s political life, specifically their participation in the electoral processes as voters, candidates, observers, party agents and employees. Despite the existence of a Gender Policy, observations are that the Disability Policy does not deal with the unique needs of females that are disabled (NEC, 2018).

Without specifically targeting women with disability in the Act, they risk triple marginalization- as women, disabled persons and disabled women. The Gender and Disability Officer is hopeful the Act will be amended sooner or later.
On the G&D Department's preparedness for 2023 elections with regards to women's participation, the Gender and Disability Director reported that:

"We are engaging the political parties to ensure that the PEA, 2022 is implemented by the letter; attend meetings organized by other government departments and CSOs to sensitize women and encourage women to register and come out to contest for elective positions; an online WhatsApp group has been formed to continue the work of the G&D Department; and monitor how many women have registered."

The content of the PPRC Act 2022 was analysed concerning the subject of investigation. Part VIII—Conduct of Political Parties—admonishes political parties or their members, supporters or candidates to refrain from violent conduct, thuggery, use of profane and obscene language, provocative songs, use of incendiary and inciting statements, including hate speech, obstruction of activities of political opponents, including the destruction of campaign materials. Penalties for violations include a written warning, fine not exceeding Le30,000,000/NLe30,000, suspension or de-registration.

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties, previously a stand-alone, non-binding and non-enforceable document, now forms part of the Bill as Schedule A, which, when enacted, will be very much enforceable. The full implementation of this provision will ensure the complete protection of, significantly, women supporters, members and candidates of political parties against violence and intimidation and increase their participation in 2023 and all subsequent elections.

Part IX of the Bill on Political Inclusion makes provision in Articles 41-44 calls for the award of symbols to a minimum of 30% of females across all electoral districts in Sierra Leone and in all executive positions from the Ward to National levels. Political Parties are also called upon to endeavour to make adequate provisions for the election of persons with disabilities, which also include women, in the executives from ward to national levels. These provisions can increase women's participation in, especially, elective positions, quantitatively and qualitatively. A fine of not less than Le25,000,000/NLe25,000 will be levied against any political party for failure to comply with these provisions.

The Consultant interviewed the National Coordinator and the Head of the Gender Affairs Unit of the Office of National Security (ONS). It was revealed that there is a draft Gender Policy that is awaiting validation and finalization. In the draft, the following issues are addressed: integration of Gender mainstreaming in the entire electoral cycle;
FINDINGS

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT ACT 2022

The Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act, 2022, is a means of the Government's preparation to ensure that more women participate in not only the 2023 elections but in the overall governance agenda of the country. The original draft Bill provided for a minimum of 30% of women in elective and appointive positions and improved the mechanisms and environment for women's access to financial services and resources at Government, non-governmental, and private sector levels. There were to be reserved seats for women at the Ward, Constituency and District levels. It called on political parties to comply with these provisions, especially for elected positions, such as Members of Parliament and Councillors, failure which their candidates' list will be rejected by the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone and the Political Parties Registration Commission. It is argued that until the Constitution is amended through a Referendum, any Reserved Seats for women will be against the Constitution as it discriminates against men. Given the hung nature of the current parliament, with no absolute majority held by any party, enacting a new Constitution was wishful thinking. It is to this effect that Section 59 (2) of the Public Elections Act 2022 was amended since it is not an entrenched Clause. It made provision for nominating a female for every two males nominated, with a penalty for non-compliance, by rejecting political parties' candidate lists by ECSL. The PR system of election was also invoked for the 2023 public elections. Based on these provisions and a nationwide consultation with, especially women CSOs and Parliamentarians, the original draft Gender Empowerment Bill 2021 was reviewed accordingly and enacted into law. The foundation is now laid for increased women's participation, especially for elective political positions.

According to the Director of Gender, as part of its post-war reform process, the SLP has introduced some policies and schemes to make the institution more Gender responsive. The SLP adopted in 2008 the twin policies of Gender Mainstreaming and Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment and introduced the accelerated promotion scheme and concerted efforts at recruiting more female personnel. In 2011, with the support of the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), a self-assessment survey of the gender responsiveness of the SLP was carried out, including an assessment of the twin gender policies. As a result of this assessment, the Gender Unit was created in 2012, with the mandate of making the institution more Gender responsive through mainstreaming Gender in all policies, programmes and projects. The revision of the twin gender policies to reflect current developments in the SLP and globally also formed part of the Unit's mandate. The twin gender policies were revised in 2014 and 2013, respectively.
The existence of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy in 2008 defined the scope of the application and outlined the operations, recruitment, retention, promotion, training, deployment, transfers, attachments, secondments, welfare, leave, representation and leadership, implementation and reporting mechanisms. Specifically, there is a 30% quota for qualified females for promotion, an advertisement for promotion should be shared with all, and 30% of all promotion interview panels should be females, including the Director of Gender, Human Resource Director to ensure that there is no less than 30% representation of each Gender in every deployment or transfer, vacancies for every new deployment or transfers be made available to both men and women, the Gender Unit and the Training Department to conduct training of all EMB and Heads of Department and Task Coordinating Groups to ensure that the leadership of the SLP are aware of the provisions of the Gender Mainstreaming policy.

According to the Director of Gender, the policy did not substantially improve the representation of females. By 2014, personnel strength was 82% and 18% males and females, respectively, despite the accelerated promotion scheme targeting female graduates' recruitment into the police service. It is reported that currently, there is 20% of females in the SLP, of which out of 9 Commissioner there are three females, there is only one (1) female AIG and four (4) females out of 31 Assistant Commissioners of Police. The Peace Keeping Policy was also revised in 2013 to address the issue of unequal access to Missions and training for all personnel, irrespective of their sex.

Additionally, the Policy on Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment was to “ensure that the SLP has a work environment free from sexual exploitation and sexual harassment and their behaviour towards the population is consistent with the high standards of conduct expected of them at all times on and off duty”. The findings, however, from the self-assessment revealed that the number of reported SEAH complaints was very low. Partly responsible for this were the unclear procedures for redress and an effective internal mechanism to monitor policy implementation. The revision was to ensure "a more effective and productive work environment and thereby increasing the security of both police personnel and the service recipients. The policy criminalized sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and called on all Local Commander Units and Heads of the Department to create and maintain a free sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment environment. Structures such as the Executive Management Board and the Complain Panel are in place to investigate and prosecute offences. Complaint procedures, resolutions, reprisals and false allegations are outlined-formal and informal. There are training/ dissemination and monitoring, evaluation and enforcement mechanisms for effective implementation. The new policy complements the existing Police Discipline Regulations 2001, the Police Act 1964 and the SLP Force Standing Orders (FSO).

RSLAF plans to review the Gender Policy to make it more integrative, inclusive and responsive, according to the Gender Officer.
The Judiciary has no Gender Policy, as reported by the Key Informant from the Judiciary. However, he explained that a Code of Ethics prioritizes women's empowerment for leadership positions across every cadre. As a result, more women are now occupying leadership positions in the Judiciary than before. He cited the examples of the Master and Registrar, who is the Vote Controller, Deputy Master and Registrar in charge of the Fast Tract Commercial Court, Court Operations Manager, Human Resource Registrar in charge of the Court of Appeal, Deputy Assistant Registrar, and Administrative Head for Ross Road Court, Senior Assistant Registrar all of whom are females. He further explained that there are 11 females out of 44 judges.

NEW has a Strategic Plan for elections that is Gender sensitive and inclusive. Gender considerations are part of the day-to-day activities of NEW, which helps to inform recruitment and training for taking part in elections. There is also a Code of Conduct that complies fully with gender sensitivity.

From the political parties' point of view, at the time of writing this report, only the SLPP, APC and NGC have revised their Constitutions. SLPP had already conducted all their lower-level elections and now has a flagbearer for 2023. APC and NGC are conducting lower-level elections, leading to National Party Conferences, where national officers and flagbearer candidates will be elected. The C4C Party was slammed with a court injunction in 2020. This injunction was lifted for a few weeks, only to be slammed by another injunction. The injunction prohibits all elected officers of the Party from holding any party meetings as they cannot review their Constitution and organize lower-level elections, leading to their national party conference, where national officials will be elected as well as their flagbearer candidate for the 2023 elections. The rest of the other political parties are at various stages of electing their party officials and flagbearer candidates.

The Constitutional Review and the rules and regulations governing election by political parties are not specifically in preparation to enhance women's participation in the 2023 elections. That notwithstanding, new provisions in the revised Constitution speak to women and their participation in government and democratic processes, of which regular, free and fair election is one.

For example, the new SLPP Constitution in Article 1 C (5) "Aims and Objectives" commits to promoting gender equality, although the strategies are not very well outlined in the Constitution.

The language of the revised Constitution is now very much Gender sensitive as it has adopted the pronouns "He or She" throughout the document. This is a sign of recognition of both males and females in the Party and an indication that any gender is eligible to hold party positions or contest in the public election as long as they are qualified to do so.

The Constitution has also revised the name of the Women's Wing" to the "Office of the National Women's Council". This office is under the direction of the National Women's Leader, with the mandate to provide support for the National Women's Leader in the execution of its mandate, as well as manage and coordinate the Council’s programmes and activities. A National Coordinator shall serve as Rapporteur for all Council meetings and
prepare monthly reports for the attention of the NWL and other staff with relevant qualifications and work experience, which the National Secretariat shall recruit on the recommendation of the National Women's Leader. The Office of the National Women's Council shall now conduct the elections of the officers of the Council, to be ratified in the National Delegates Council, unlike in the old Constitution, where the National Women's Leader and her deputy were elected during the Delegates Conference by all the delegates. In most instances, the elected officers may not be the preferred choice of the women in the Party. However, the first National Women's Council election in Kailahun Town was so marred by violence and intimidation that it was postponed, and the venue was moved to Freetown. There was a significant fallout after the election as it was alleged that the winner was not the choice of the women, as vote buying was alleged to be rampant and blatant.

The SLPP adopted the Gender Policy in 2009, but its implementation has been haphazard and limited mainly to a partial or complete waiver of candidature fees for women candidates. However, the political environment for elections remains the same, based on the "survival of the fittest" policy. As of writing this report, whether there will be a waiver or reduction of candidature fees for women candidates has yet to be determined.

Although the Gender policy has an affirmation action of a minimum 30% quota for women for executive positions, parliamentary and local councils, this is not reflected in the new Constitution. However, the new Public Election Act requirement of one-third female representation and that of the draft of the PPRC revised Bill will force political parties to revise their Constitution accordingly as political parties risk the rejection of the candidates' lists by ECSL.

**APC**

ARTICLE 7 (m) of the aims and objectives of the Party states that it is "To ensure and guarantee equitable participation of women in the socioeconomic and political life of the nation as well as enhance their capacity to compete in an open, competitive, democratic and free environment".

Although the APC did not adopt the gender policy developed by APPWA, it has included affirmative action in its new Constitution. ARTICLE 71 is on Gender and Affirmative Action. It posits that "In an endeavour to ensure that the elderly, persons with disability, women, young people and other vulnerable persons are adequately represented in all decision-making structures, the Party shall implement a program of affirmative action to ensure popular participation of elderly, disabled, women, young people and other marginalized groups in the work of the Party. The Party shall when in power, reserve at least 30 per cent of all its political appointments for women and encourage female participation to elective offices within the Party and for National Elections". While this is a good move, the minimum 30% should also be applied to all elective positions in the Party and for parliament and local councils.

In the rest of the Constitution, the status quo remains, as in all the structures of the Party, women's representation is limited only to the participation of the National Women's Leader and, in a few other instances, the Deputy National Women's Leader. This representation falls
far below the minimum 30% quota women are asking for. The Women elect their officials in a separate election, and winners are ratified during the national delegates' conference.

NGC

Section 5 (18) of the NGC Constitution on the aims and objective of the Party states that it is "To empower our women to participate at all levels for progressive nation building with a strong emphasis on girl child development". The language of the Constitution is neutral by not expressly referring to any one gender, except for the National Women's Wing, where women are particularly mentioned. The above notwithstanding, no affirmative action strategy in the NGC Constitution is similar to the SLPP. The two parties' structures have less than 30% of female representation. The Women's Wing of the Party is responsible for organizing elections for the Women's Wing Executives. The National Women's Leader and her deputy are ratified in the National Delegates Conference.

NGC Party has different Rules and Regulations for the conduct of lower-level executive elections. Like the Constitution, these Rules and Regulations lack specific strategies for increased women's participation and election to Party positions, parliament and the local Council or appointment in the executive branch of Government.

Despite the deficiencies in the party Constitution regarding gender sensitivity, a Key informant Interview of the leadership of the Party revealed the following plans for women's full participation in the 2023 elections: 50% waiver of party candidature fees for women; organization of training for women on campaign skills, resource mobilization and how to handle violence against women; signing of a Code of Conduct on violence against women; put women in safe seats to ensure increased representation in governance; deploy more women as party agents; and ensure that more women representation in the executives at all levels.

C4C

Unlike APC, SLPP and NGC, there is no mention of any commitment to gender equality or gender inclusion in the Coalition for Change (C4C) Party Constitution. Rather, most of the Parties’ structures have two statutory positions reserved only for Women—National Women's Coordinator and National Women's Secretary. It is not known how many women occupy the other party positions.

The National Women's Coordinator heads the Women's Forum. The Women's Forum Executive is also elected/selected at every National Women's Convention bi-annually. It is governed by its own rules and regulations that shall not be inconsistent with the provision of the C4C Constitution.

Despite the lack of commitment in the C4C Constitution to gender sensitivity, from the interview with the National Secretary General, their Party is very open, as their ideology preaches gender balance. "A woman also occupies our National Treasurer position", he reported. Going further, he recounted the following actions taken to ensure women's full participation in the 2018 election: 30% of candidates in the Western Area were females; women are encouraged to contest for any position in the Party; waived candidature fees for
women candidates; paid nomination fees for all women candidates; protection of women and women candidates is a vital policy of the Party; hence the party Slogan “You touch one, you touch all”.

Regarding preparations for women's participation in the 2023 election, it was reported by the Women's Leader that due to the injunction slammed on the Party on 7th August 2020 and, most recently, 16th September 2022, executives at all levels cannot meet to plan. Party activities that the injunction has seriously inhibited include the inability to sensitize their members to register; the inability to observe the ongoing voter registration; unable to review their Party Constitution and Rules and Regulations Governing Lower Level Elections; and; the inability to hold national party delegates conference to elect their national officers and flagbearer candidate.

Despite the above, it was reported that the Party has plans to increase women's representation in parliament to over 30% and go on a vigorous campaign for women to come out and contest for any executive positions, parliament and local councils.

The National Women's Leaders recounted the significant challenges facing women in her Party as follows: as the 3rd largest Party in parliament and the local Party, the Party has attracted the attention of the two major parties-APC and SLPP- and, as such, has been targeted by violence, especially against women; the injunction has dampened women’s zeal and enthusiasm to contest the 2023 elections; and the Party is cash trapped due to the injunction, which has affected funding for party and women candidates.

APPWA

The All Political Parties Women’s Association (APPWA) was established in 2010 to “foster tolerance and political women solidarity to advocate for a just course, to ensure women’s participation in all spheres of governance” (PPRC, 2015). The key objective of APPWA “is to build the capacity of women in political parties and sustainable peace, stability and non-violence and advocate for the inclusion of women in politics, decision making and governance at all levels of governance”.

APPWA has a Constitution, Code of Conduct and a generic Gender Policy, which is to be adopted and ratified by the highest decision-making body of political parties. Only two parties-SLPP and NDA have adopted the Gender Policy, although implementation of its provisions is haphazard and very selective. All these documents are overdue for revision to be aligned with current and emerging gender issues nationally and internationally. The enactment of the draft PPRCA will be crucial and very instructive for these revisions, given the PPRC's facilitating role in the establishment and operations of APPWA. There is a draft Strategic Plan awaiting finalization and validation.

To strengthen and capacitate APPWA, in preparation for the 2023 elections, the UN Women, according to the President, recently fielded a consultancy to identify current challenges facing APPWA and make recommendations on how to address these challenges. They are awaiting UN Women for the next steps after the Consultancy report has been finalized and submitted to the UN Women.
Meanwhile, the President of APPWA reported that “we are continuing with our radio discussions on encouraging women to come out to aspire for executive positions in their parties and to contest for parliament and the local councils as well as advocate the political parties for voluntary party quotas for women candidates”. Continuing, she revealed APPWA's plan to visit the 1st Lady to request financial assistance from her office to help them popularise the Public Elections Act 2022.

Regarding voter registration, the President reported that PPRC supported them for five days to visit the regional headquarters cities/towns to sensitize women to register and observe voter registration. They plan to continue with their peaceful and violent-free messages on the media and in person.

**Women’s Forum**
The Consultant interviewed the President of the Women's Forum, the umbrella organization for all women's non-governmental organizations in the country, on their preparedness to ensure that women participate fully in the forthcoming 2023 elections. It was reported that with funds from the UN WOMEN, the Forum undertook nationwide sensitization of women to vie for executive positions in their parties other than the position of the National Women's Leader and Deputy National Women Leader for parliament and the local councils. Women aspirants were encouraged to register with the Women's Forum. At the time of the interview, it was reported that the compilation of the aspirant list was ongoing.

Asked what role the Women’s Forum played in the recently concluded voter registration, it was revealed that as a result of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Forum and ECSL, they were able to secure sixty (60) accreditation for members from ECSL to observe and monitor the voter registration in the Western Area. Funding limitations did not allow them to observe voter registration outside the Western Area.

Asked for their plans for candidates’ capacity building, it was posited that funding proposals are being prepared and sent to prospective donors for capacity building of candidates in preparation for symbol awards and the campaign proper.
ESTABLISHMENT/
STRENGTHENING OF
NEW/EXISTING
STRUCTURES
Election preparedness can also take the form of establishing/strengthening new/existing structures to ensure that women participate effectively in the 2023 public elections. This activity may arise from the shortcomings of existing structures or the need to create new structures to enhance women's involvement in the electioneering processes.

According to the Director of Gender and Disability at the ECSL, a District Stakeholder Coordinating Stakeholder Working Group has been put in place, which focuses on advocating and addressing, ensuring, and enhancing the advancement and empowerment of marginalized voters in the electoral processes as a way forward in promoting equal participation. This Group, among other things, is charged with the responsibility for the joint implementation of Gender and Disability policies; approving prioritization of interventions by stakeholders; tracking and monitoring the progress of mainstreaming on all electoral activities executed in the district, addressing gaps and lack of operational cohesion; collaboration to minimize barriers to enhance participation of marginalized persons in the process; submit sex-disaggregated information on all operational activities to Gender and Disability Department; and submit quarterly reports to G&D through Operational Department. It is expected that the District Stakeholder Group collaborates with the EC district office to share the concerns of women and PWD directly and on a sustained basis with the ECSL national and district levels; serve as a forum for EC to report on its work, further inclusion of vulnerable voters with the key beneficiary groups and how to address specific concerns raised by these groups; to achieve critical objectives of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan (Pillar 8: Inclusion, Participation and Equity) and in the Gender and Disability Policies; and to find standard solutions and approaches to addressing the issues of participation, both nationally and within specific areas of the country. To this effect, Key Informants were asked to identify any new structures created or activities undertaken to strengthen existing ones to enhance women's participation in the forthcoming election.

The National Security Coordinator of ONS reported the existence of a National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCCG) coordinated by the ONS for the interventions of all election management bodies for the development of intelligence gathering, resource mobilization, training, and communication strategies. This 25-member Coordinating Council includes all the primary security institutions-SLP, RSLAF, Fire Force, Corrections Centre, Internal Affairs and Local Government Ministries. The Council also incorporates CSOs such as CGG, NEW, IGR, CARL, and development partners USAID and British High Commission.
However, the NSC lamented that the Council has been dormant for some time now, and there is an urgent need for the resuscitation of the Council to carry out its mandate effectively.

With regards to the role of the SLP in elections, it was revealed that at every Police Station, the SLP investigates reports of threat/violence, especially of female candidates and voters. To this end, it was reported that a particular election investigation unit is set up during every election, different from the regular investigation work, to investigate all election-related complaints and reports are sent directly to the Assistant Inspector General (AIG) at the District/Regional levels.

From interviews with the PRO of the Judiciary, in preparation for public elections generally, the electoral courts are usually established six (6) months before and six months after the election to try election offences brought before it, as provided for in the Public Elections law. For the 2023 public elections, the Judiciary, the Key Informant explained, has used the existing structures to establish an Electoral Counsel with a dedicated Court Registry to manage all electoral cases, both in the capital city, Freetown and the Provinces. Magistrates would sitting on all electoral cases, including in Waterloo. It was further reported that all electoral offences would start with the Police and the charges would be brought to the Magistrate for arbitration. It was revealed that the Electoral Offences Court would be launched between December 2022 and January 2023.

Concerning election structures, the Chairperson of reported that NEW is represented on the District Security Sector Council. Also, Tow (2) representatives (1 male, 1 female) sit on the multi-stakeholder platform formed by the ECSL. The Chair of the ECSL Steering Committee is the NEW Chairperson, a female. The Chairperson attributed this to opportunities created in NEW for women to be part of the administrative and operational organs of the organization at all levels.
FINDINGS

RECRUITMENT/PROMOTION OF NEW/EXISTING PERSONNEL

Recruitment/promotion of new/existing personnel: Preparedness was also operationalized as efforts at recruiting and promoting new and current personnel to facilitate women's participation in the forthcoming elections.

To this end, the NSC of the ONS reported the recruitment of a Gender Affairs Officer in September 2021 to provide technical direction for all issues relating to Gender in the Secretariat. Being a female, she ensures that Gender is mainstreamed in all ONS activities. At elections, she works closely with all EMBs on all gender-related issues, reports to ONS, and develops strategies for improving the security environment for women especially female aspirants and candidates.

Interviews with the RSLAF Gender and Equality Officer revealed that plans are underway to recruit a minimum number of Specialists, including women-medics, logistics, engineering, and tailors -to be trained as a regular soldiers to help beef up the election staff, after which they are deployed to their regular duties.

From the IG, it was revealed that 2,500 new recruitments (Police, military, fire force, correctional services, Native Administration (NA), are ongoing to increase personnel strength given the increase in polling centres/stations.

According to the PRO of the Judiciary, officers will be recruited and attached to all Courts throughout the country to inform the public impartially. Plans are underway to open these courts to the public soon.
FINDINGS

ASSESSMENTS/STUDIES CONDUCTED TO GAIN MORE INSIGHT FOR BETTER PLANNING

Better insight into the election environment, key players, and their agenda through conducting assessments/studies/mapping is a sine qua non for better planning. Some EMBs reported several such assessments. For example, the ONS reported conducting a “National Elections Threat Assessment/District risk mapping for the 2023 General Elections between November 2021-April 2022, covering all 16 electoral districts with funds from Irish Aid. Elections

It was postulated that the Threat Assessment Report "has wider ramifications for peace and security in Sierra Leone and can make or break the foundation of peace and stability in a State" (ONS, 2022). A thorough understanding of threat dynamism is imperative for the successful conduct of free, fair and credible elections.

Threat assessment helps build the capability of EMBs to conduct credible elections and citizens' perspectives of such elections. It also strives to classify the threats and risks that the 2023 elections are prone to and the degree of preparedness of electoral management bodies and stakeholders to ensure safer, peaceful, free, fair and credible elections. Usually, threat assessment is carried out 12 to 18 months before every election.

Two categories of threats were identified—generic, which cut across all 16 districts in the country, and district-specific threats. A 17-point summary of the findings was presented ranging from political intolerance, and intimidation of opponents by political parties, supporters and traditional leaders, through hate speech, misuse of traditional and social media to misinforming gullible populace, divisive tribal and regional political messages, use of Marshalls by political parties, open support of political
parties by some Paramount Chiefs, use of the male secret societies to limit women's participation in elections; unprofessional conduct of some security sector personnel, provision of hard drugs by some politicians to youths, intra and inter-party intolerance that breed violence and intimidation during elections, parallel announcement of election results by contesting political parties, defiance of some state functionaries and non-accredited politicians against entering polling centre, especially during bye-elections, winner takes it all syndrome that is a threat to national cohesion and stability, security personnel afraid to enforce election laws infringed upon by ruling party members, violation of campaign timetable by political parties leading to violent clashes, defacing or destruction of opponents campaign materials, campaigning on polling day by politicians and politicization of party colours leading to intimidation, marginalization and physical assault of persons wrongly targeted.

Recommendations proffered from the assessment to reduce election threats and risks include: discouraging the formation of political camps/thugs, placing a ban on all political and cultural songs that limits the participation of women in politics, conducting conflict management sensitive reporting training for the media, sensitize all youths on the need to be peaceful during and after elections, conduct professional training pertinent to policing elections for the security sector, impartial enforcement of electoral laws, provide adequate resources for the Police and other security agencies and EMBs, modify the political style of campaigning from rallies to a central gathering to avoid violent confrontations between political opponents, rigidly enforce the ban on the use of Marshalls and outlaw the use of thugs.

The SLP reported conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis to provide information for adequate preparation for the electioneering processes. For example, it was reported that some of the contents of the SWOT analysis were used in developing training modules for capacity-building exercises of the SLP.
CAPACITY BUILDING/STRENGTHENING AND TRAINING MEASURES PUT IN PLACE FOR STAFF AND WOMEN VOTERS ON NEW POLICIES/ TECHNOLOGY/ SKILL

Capacity building/strengthening of EMB personnel, aspirants/candidates and the general populace is vital for the smooth conduct of elections, as it affords the trainees a good understanding of their roles, responsibilities and obligations before, during and after elections.

According to the Gender Officer of the ONS, unique pieces of training will be done to a) expeditiously treat sexual violence and sexual abuse cases after elections, b) for female security officers to know how to relate to female counterparts from a right-based perspective, and professionalism have been planned; c) for more female security personnel to be involved in the operational wing of the security forces to take leadership positions and d) modalities put in place to take into consideration the unique needs of female security personnel during the electioneering processes. Capacity building also included sensitization meetings organized to solicit families' support for women's involvement in elections; and the development of messages targeting men/husbands to allow their female members/wives to participate in politics. ONS also reported a planned Training of Trainers in October 2022 for all security personnel on elections.

ONS Security Coordinator also informed that two (2) National Conferences would be conducted with political parties and traditional leaders to build confidence, ensuring legitimate use of security apparatus and not political party Marshalls, to de-escalate traditional leaders' conspicuous involvement and interference in politics, which has sometimes resulted in some Paramount Chiefs been temporarily ex-communication from their chiefdoms; and the review of the Code of Conduct for Paramount Chiefs accordingly.
The RSLAF reported organizing the following capacity-building events: a dialogue session was being planned on 29th September 2022 by the African Union, European Union, DFID, UN Women, CGG and the Security Forces to identify strategies to make Gender mainstreaming more proactive rather than reactive and to learn more best practices from this expanded network.; training on the Training Manual and the revised Gender and Equality Policy; encouraged every potential voter to register very close to their homes to ease personnel deployment of both male and female personnel and transportation since there will be a restriction on non-essential vehicular movement on election day;

Regarding information management to the public, the Information Officer explained that part of the Judiciary website would house all election matters and petitions. When asked whether there exist any special measures on capacity building for women, the Information Officer of the Judiciary was very categorical, saying there is no special treatment for women as the law "is no respecter of persons". He posited that the same punishment would be prescribed for male and female offenders. The Courts should not be seen to be selective. That notwithstanding, he revealed plans to train all Judges on gender issues to ensure a fair trial for all.

NEW also reported benefiting from the training of their members due to their membership of other external agencies. Two personnel (1 male, 1 female) from the Secretariat benefited from the youth programmes for the 2023 election observation.

On the part of the SLP, the IG explained that the role of the SLP at elections is to give security to the citizens of Sierra Leone— aspirants, voters, polling staff, party agents, election observers, and any other duty-bearers working on elections matters at the voting centres/stations. To this end, the IG informed that usually all the security operatives that will be involved in elections are given training at specific times of the electoral processes on their roles and responsibilities, public order management, for example, during political party rallies, police-community relationship, how to conduct themselves at election centres. The training aims to secure and give confidence to voters to come out and vote without any intimidation. The UNDP usually funds these pieces of training. During these pieces of training, the timetable for the elections is given to them, including where and when they will be deployed, a list of hotspots and trouble-shooters.

On capacity enhancement of the SLP, the IG also intimated that a 4-person team from the USA were in Sierra Leone to help the SLP plan for the election, reassess the training modules for election training, develop training packages, conduct Training of Trainers (TOT) and to provide mentorship by attaching the members of the team to different Directorates. EU and British also provide training on various issues such as intelligence and information gathering, quality assurance and processing.
FINDINGS

MOBILIZATION OF FINANCIAL AND LOGISTIC RESOURCES

Adequate and timely disbursement/availability of funds is crucial in the preparation of elections, in general, and for women's participation in particular. As reported by the SLP, given the increase in polling stations by 20% and a total police force strength of 14,000, there is a shortfall of 12,000 personnel to man between 24,000-25,000 polling stations. As a result, ONS reported that the Government had given clearance to the SLP to recruit 3000 security personnel for elections. The other primary security forces will fill this shortfall. UNDP is procuring ICT infrastructure to address the ICT challenges faced by the early warning structures DISEC, PROCES and CISEC; the Government has ringed-fenced some basket funding to jump-start the rolling out of the communication plan.

To ensure speedy action, the SLP hopes to connect every region digitally to ensure speedy communication. To this end, there is ongoing procurement of state-of-the-art digital communication equipment/gadgets; and government and donor agencies procure 25 new vehicles to ease the transportation shortages, especially during elections.

NEW reported enjoying financial and personnel support from donors for voter registration, voting and capacity building/strengthening. For example, the EU gave NEW some funds for technical support using foreign experts for voter registration. Investment in capacity building of NEW staff, especially before every election observation, has changed the outlook of election observation in terms of dynamism and gender inclusiveness.

The Women's Forum recently reported accessing funds from UN WOMEN to sensitize women nationwide on the need to register to vote in the 2023 public elections and vie for elective positions in parliament and local councils.
FINDINGS

FORGING NEW/ STRENGTHENING EXISTING COLLABORATIONS/ NETWORKS/PARTNERSHIPS

On collaboration/networking and partnership, the President of the 50/50 Group reported working with the Gender Office, under the Office of the Vice President, to do a national education on the content of the new Public Election Act (PEA), 2022, the First-Past-The-Post and Proportional Representation (PR) system of elections provision in the 1991 Constitution and to encourage women to come out and contest for either the local Council or parliament.

A good knowledge of the new content of the PEA by women, especially, will lead to making an informed decision regarding elections. Campaign for Good Governance, the 50/50 Group, SEND with support from Irish Aid, Christian Aid, Action Aid and Trocaire are reviewing the existing 2018 Women's Manifesto in the light of new and emerging national and international issues that have the potential to impact on women and girls. The Women's Manifesto will be shared with all political parties, encouraging them to incorporate some, if not into their campaign Manifestoes and development agenda when in Government.

The Women’s Forum reported signing a Memorandum of Understanding between them and the ECSL to work together to ensure that women's knowledge and understanding of the electoral processes, especially the new Public Elections Act, 2022 is enhanced to encourage more women to register and vote; and observe, monitor and report the 2023 elections, paying particular attention to specific Gender-related election issues.
FINDINGS

SAFETY MEASURES PUT IN PLACE FOR WOMEN.

Election-related violence against women electorates, women aspirants/candidates before, during and after elections, as well as within and without political parties, has been observed and reported for every election that has taken place in Sierra Leone since 1996. Most important among these threats are: the use of male secret societies to intimidate women voters, supporters and candidates; the use of invectives and unprintable language against women voters, supporters and candidates by male opponents; physical abuse, rape and gang rape, especially, after elections by winning political parties; case in point is the Kailahun, Mile 91, and Masingbi incidences of alleged rape, gang rape and sexual abuse after the results were called. These threats have had a negative impact on women's participation in elections and, subsequently, on the governance of the country. What has been disheartening is the fact that redress has been slow and, most times, unattainable, which has emboldened perpetrators. Ensuring that election-related violence against women is speedily addressed and curtailed to the barest minimum is imperative for the 2023 public elections.

On the question of what preparations EMBs are doing to curb election-related violence, in general, and against women, in particular, these are some of the findings. According to the SLP, special gender-specific protection measures have been/will be put in place, among which are: attaching specific physical security to women aspirants who report facing threats from a male opponent, especially; heightened post-election security
patrol; and banning all cultural and societal practice/initiation rites, especially for the male secret societies at voter registration, campaigning and voting, which is used to intimidate and scared away female aspirants and their supporter from the electoral processes; provision of protection and coverage to political parties doing their lower level elections and national party delegates conferences; and provision of security coverage for voter registration at all registration centres; and encouraging electorates to give preferences to pregnant women, lactating mothers, persons with disability and the aged during voting.

Other safety measures put in place include the deployment of 50 Stand-by OSD in potential hotspot areas identified in the Western Area to feel police presence and visibility; beefing up police patrols nationwide; activating the Local Police Partnership Board, which has been defunct for some time now; arrange a meeting between the Police and residents of communities to map out crime incidence; strengthen the Cabinet of the Police at every headquarters to meet their election tasks; and extend MAC-P to conduct joint night patrols early November 2022 for public order management due to challenges envisage in the upcoming elections;

On the issues of their preparedness to ensure women participated in the 2023 public elections, it was revealed by the RSLAF Operation Chairperson that political street rallies would be a band to avoid clashes between opponents. Rallies will be confined to party offices, town halls or house-to-house.

The PPRA, 2022, now has the Political Parties Code of Conduct, which has been incorporated into the Bill as a Schedule, with binding effects, unlike the previous situation, when it was a stand-alone Code and not binding. It criminalizes election-related violence, such as reigning invectives on opponents and tearing/defacing candidates and party symbols. Similarly, the PEA 2022 explicitly has provisions for election-related crimes/violence with strict penalties. These penalties do not specifically refer to women alone but to every potential violator.

All women's organizations/groups interviewed reported advocating, educating, sensitizing and admonishing against electoral-related violence against women and the potential harm done to women's aspirations to participate in free, fair and credible elections recommending strategies to curb or minimize it. These organizations, in their commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism (25th November-10 December), will also speak against election-related Gender-based violence as we approach the 2023 elections and ask policymakers and political party leaders to ensure that they nip any election-related gender-based violence in the bud and put modalities to bring violators to book. There are also plans to do street rallies to sensitize citizens on the need for a violent-free election, as has always been done before elections.
FINDINGS

INSTITUTING/STRENGTHENING MEASURES FOR COLLECTING, PROCESSING AND ANALYZING GENDER DISAGGREGATED DATA.

Statistics is essential as a source of critical primary information in stimulating public debate, advocacy, public expenditure and research, and improving conceptual and methodological precision. Collecting, processing and analyzing gender statistics or gender-disaggregated data is essential to identify, producing and disseminating data reflecting the realities of women's and men's lives and can drive and inform policy issues related to gender equality. Until recently, there has been a paucity of gender statistics/disaggregated data for use by policymakers for planning, including for electoral purposes.

Generating gender-disaggregated data is an important object in all the gender policies the ECSL, RSLAF, SLP, ONS, SLPP, and APPWA perused. The Constitutions of the Women’s Forum and 50/50 Group also make provision for collecting and analyzing Gender disaggregated as a strategy for planning, advocacy and lobbying.

According to the Chairman of NEW, all their structures fully account for gender equality. Inclusion is at the centre of data capture in NEW, she underscored. Going further, she even revealed that NEW had exceeded the 50% quota for women, given that the current Chairperson of NEW is a female. The Strategic Management Committee, Regional and District Committees and the District Teams have 50/50, 40-60, 43-57 and 50-50%
A checklist was developed to capture Gender disaggregated even at tally centres by NEW election observers for voter registration and voting. During the pre-election phase, NEW carefully examines how many candidates contest by Party and Gender. While acknowledging efforts by ECSL to include women, she lamented that Presiding Officers at the polling centres are primarily men. NEW has projected the need for female inclusion in deployment and has brought more women into election administration, monitoring and evaluation than any other EMB. These women undergo rigorous training, to the extent that presently, NEW has built a cadre of women in the election, even at the village level, to take various responsibilities for election. As a result, male attitudes towards female officers at polling centres are positively cultivated. The Chairperson confidently attributed the reduced violence against women by male violators to the presence of more female officers in polling centres. She also believed that the presence of female election observers is gradually sanitizing and respecting the electoral process, as women election observers are hardly the target of male violence.
Despite the good intentions and plans (some ongoing, others at the inception stage) of EMBs, political parties and women's organizations to ensure women participate fully in the 2023 public elections, all lamented specific challenges slowing down progress.

Although acknowledging that resources are never enough, all EMBs, political parties and women's groups interviewed identified limited/inadequate finance as a significant challenge. For government institutions, in addition to inadequate finance, bureaucracy and tedious paperwork account for the late and piecemeal disbursement of funds. Some reported receiving only the first or second-quarter disbursement during the interview. They were unsure that they would receive the third and fourth quarters by the end of the financial calendar year. As a coping mechanism, there is a drawdown of the area and personnel deployment and coverage during the election, in most instances, which affects their effectiveness and efficiency.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE EMBS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS.

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The failure of the Government to support political parties puts a heavy burden on political parties to fund their planned activities.

The significant and consistent funding sources for political parties are membership dues and pledges/donations, which are small in quantum against the needs of political parties.
For women's organizations, it was revealed that membership dues and donations/plaques are the most conventional means of financing their activities. Donors' funding has dwindled and become unpredictable and highly competitive. The Gender Officer for ECSL lamented that "limited funding affects the Department's work, especially, moving out of the Capital City into the districts, to sensitize citizens, especially women, on their roles and responsibilities for election and what the Department has done and plan to do to ensure women and PWDs participate in the election in 2023''.

Inadequate/limited and late disbursement of finances also affects the availability of logistics/work tools in adequate supply and quality. For example, the SLP and RSLAF's need for vehicles, ITC equipment, fuel and lubricants are huge, especially given the increase in polling stations, remotes, poor road network and condition of certain polling centres. The SLP reported walking on foot for several miles, using motorbikes on rugged roads or using canoes for security electorates, pooling staff, election observers and sensitive electoral materials.

Shortage/limited human and institutional capacity is also a significant challenge facing all institutions and organizations interviewed. For women's organizations, this affects cascading planned programmes outside the capital cities into the regions and districts. For instance, according to the APPWA President, weak institutional, technical and human capacity, lack of financial support from political parties, weak economic empowerment of party women and executives, poor attendance at meetings, weak/no structures at the regional and district levels for programme implementation and low educational level of party women were vital.

For the security forces and ECSL, the shortage of qualified women personnel to man the increased number of polling stations is a cause for concern. It goes against the Gender Policies they have adopted. Women's welfare issues, such as menstruation, need to be given attention as the resultant depression can affect the deployment of women during elections. This issue was of particular concern to the RSLAF. The SLP identified the shortage of educated females in the Police to be deployed at a strategic senior staff level. The IG lamented that women lack the confidence to apply for positions advertised, be shortlisted, take the qualifying examination and go for medical examinations with no discrimination based on Gender.

The main challenges NEW reported facing were enumerated as follows: women members of NEW are targets in the political space, who are constantly attached by male politicians, especially those who could not distinguish the personal from the institution; Due to patriarch and misogyny, women are not expected to sit in leadership positions, although NEW has built the capacities of women over time. By attacking women in these institutions, it is hoped that they will be silenced; due to engendering NEC, both males and females traverse challenging terrains using motorbikes and travelling at night to follow election materials and collect data. This can pose some difficulty to women. Some husbands are against their wives taking such risks; women are sometimes targets for election-related violence, which limits their involvement in election observation, and defamation of the characters of female staff.
ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS

Having assessed EMBs and political parties' preparedness for the participation of women in the 2023 Public elections, this section assesses women's socioeconomic and political status for gender-inclusive elections.

Women constitute slightly over half of the population of Sierra Leone and have slightly dominated as registered voters in previous elections. Women have also played an active role in the politics of the country. The history of women's representation in parliament dates back to 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. Five districts have no female representation in parliament. These are: Falaba, Kambia, Koinadugu, Port Loko and Pujehun.

Similarly, the first local council elections were held in 2004 after 32 years of abolishing local bodies in 1972. The 2004 local council 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. In the present councils, only 3 of the 21 Councils have Women as Mayor/Chairperson and Deputy Mayor/Chairpersons. These are found in the Freetown, Bombali and Tonkolili Councils. There are two women Deputy Chairpersons of Councils.

Of the 17 registered political parties that participated in the 2018 elections, just two of these parties had women as their flagbearers. However, the increase has been marginal and extremely slow in the parliament and the local Council.

Women's leadership in the party structure is mainly limited to the Women's Wing/Council/Congress. At the level of political parties, an insignificant number hold executive positions and are members of the electoral colleges participating in the award of party symbols. Below is a Table that highlights the number of women in the national executives of their respective political parties.
Table 1: Percentage of women executives in political parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Number of executive positions</th>
<th>Number of positions occupied by Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLPP(^{1})</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3 (9.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4C</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADP</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMDC</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6 (26.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 (3.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDM</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by Hon. Dr Bernadette Lahai, 2018.

1 Only SLPP has conducted its lower-level executive, national and flagbearer elections in 2020-2021
2=National Chairperson is a female

The above figures may have changed since 2018 for better or for worse.

Women party agents and women election observers are also very insignificant in numbers, although they outnumber men as registered voters and party members/supporters in past elections. The Mano River Women’s Peace Net 2020 got accreditation for an all-female election observer mission for Constituency 110 Bye-election in 2020. The experience garnered, and lessons learnt are worth sharing.

At the Executive level, female representation in the Executive level has also been low. From 2018 to date, 5-7 women have been appointed to ministerial ranks out of 32 Ministries; Deputy Women Ministers are 7 out of 26 Deputy Ministers. There are four (4)female Ambassadors, with about 2 Deputy Ambassadors. A few women currently head the Parastatal and Commissions Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and Guma Valley Water Company.

However, women in the Judiciary have done much better than their counterparts in the Legislature, Local Councils and the Executive. There is almost an achievement of the minimum 30% of women Judges in the Judiciary, with the first female Chief Justice appointed in 2009.
FACTORS CONSTRAINING WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN GOVERNANCE

Many factors responsible for women's low participation in governance and political Party politics have been reported. These include: cultural and traditional norms, religious beliefs and practice; high illiteracy among women and girls; limited financial resources; gender insensitive political party structure, legal frameworks and male dominance; lack of Affirmative Action in national and political parties Constitutions, electoral laws and the PPRC Acts; electoral system of the First-Pass-The-Post (now there is a revert to PR), violence against women generally and during the electioneering process; lack of unity and coordination among women; women aspirants and candidates less prepared, focus and determined; poor, inadequate, negative and gender-bias media coverage and reporting; political party leaders not giving the equal opportunities to women to operate freely; legal instrument and policies not in favor of women; high candidature fee that needs to be reviewed as these limits women from participating from elections, domination of men in the electoral college within political party limits the space for female aspirant from getting their part symbol; most women do not have the requisite finance to support their political ambition hence deter them from participating in politics; personal attacks on women from their male counter parts deter their political participation; women encountered significant levels of intimidation and harassment from members of their communities when they enrolled into another political party; lack of transparency in the award of symbol and evidence abound where women were awarded symbols and later retrieved by the political party; most candidates especially new candidates are not prepared well, little knowledge about their party; little knowledge about the office they are vying for; women’s very low self-esteem; unaware of the mechanisms available for managing conflict related issues either within their political parties or in their communities; socio-cultural challenges; financial demands from within political parties and from ‘supporters’; and women not believing in the leadership of women.
PAST EFFORTS AT IMPROVING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN GOVERNANCE

Efforts abound to improve women's low participation in politics and decision-making in governance at the governmental, non-governmental, and civil society organizations, especially women groups level. A few examples will suffice creation of a Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs Ministry and later a Gender and Children's Affairs Ministry; Development of a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy; most recently, the enactment of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act, 2022; enactment of the three Gender Laws on domestic violence, devolution of an estate, customary marriage and divorce acts of 2007, sexual offences act and its amendment, child rights act; establishment of a fast track court for gender-based violence; trafficking in persons Act, girls child support project, development of free health policies for pregnant and lactating women and under-five children; free quality education; waiver/reduction in political party candidature fees; and development of women’s manifesto.

Despite these efforts, implementation has been an enormous challenge due to limited financial, human, technical and logistical support, coupled with sluggish and weak political will.

Against this backdrop, political party Women leaders in Sierra Leone raised concerns about the reduced number of women in politics. They stated various reasons, including male chauvinism within political parties, cultural and traditional barriers in local communities for women to contest for positions, poor economic status, high illiteracy, and the dominance of men in political party leadership.
All EMBs interviewed recognised women's critical roles and contributions to political and national governance and, therefore, the need for more women's participation in all electoral processes.

The above notwithstanding, there was a broad acknowledgement of women's low representation in all governance structures at all levels, although women dominate in population and electorates.

Given the above, all EMBs interviewed reported undertaking some form of action in preparation for increased female participation in the electoral processes, especially for the 2023 elections. These actions ranged from legal and policy reforms to ensure the safety of women voters and candidates to creating new and strengthening existing structures that address gender imbalances, to human and institutional capacity building/strengthening, resource mobilisation, to the creation of new and strengthening of existing partnerships/collaboration/networks.

The actions taken by EMBs in preparation for increased women’s participation in the 2023 public elections vary and are determined by the nature and mandate of these organisations. Although some actions pertained to the generality of the population, from which women also benefited, however, some women-specific actions were undertaken, such as the development of gender policies, establishment of gender units/divisions, recruitment of gender focal points personnel, capacity building/strengthening and forging new and strengthening existing collaboration/networks/partnerships.
RECOMMENDATION/ROAD MAP TO ENHANCE WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT FOR THE 2023 ELECTORAL PROCESSES.

GOSL
The Government is calling to increase the election-related budget of all Ministries, Departments and Agencies and to disburse these allocations promptly to facilitate effective planning and execution of all election-related activities.

Government to enact a new Constitution in line with TRC recommendations.

Now that the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 has been passed in November 2022, there is a need for its popularisation nationwide. Nevertheless, for women to benefit from its provisions, political parties, women's organizations, CSO, and the competent line ministry must put modalities in place to encourage more women to contest for executive positions in the parties, parliament, and local councils.

The Government, Statistic Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs continue to entrench the collection and analysis of Gender disaggregated data on gender-based violence for more targeted policy-making and strategies to curb GBV.

ECSL
ECSL is called upon to recruit more females as election officers as well as effectively implement the Gender and Disability Policies;

ECSL to encourage more women to serve as election observers, whose presence has been reported to reduce violence perpetuated by males, thereby giving more confidence to women voters and candidates to exercise their rights to vote and be voted;

ECSL to popularise the PEA, 2022 so that all citizens are aware of the new provision in the Act, especially those that have the potential to affect women's participation in the 2023 elections positively.
PPRC
Political Parties Regulation Commission Act 2022 was enacted in November 2022. The content of the Act must be speedily popularised nationwide. Resources must be made available to the PPRC to operationalize the provisions of the Act.

PPRC should ensure that political parties align their constitutions, rules and regulations governing elections to the PEA, 2022, PPRC, 2022 and GEWE Act, 2022. PPRC should help provide more sustainable support to APPWA.

POLITICAL PARTIES
Political parties are urged to speedily align the provisions of their legal frameworks, rules and regulations governing and symbol awards in line with the revised/new PEA, PPRC and GEWE laws.

Given the low level of representation of females in both elective and appointive positions, which is not commensurate with their demography and electorate status, the women’s movement is strongly urged to reflect on their role, both past and present, in this regard and to, accordingly, reposition themselves more robustly and strategically, to reverse this unwanted situation;

Political parties should provide more financial and other support to APPWA to make it more functional and practical;

Despite the revision of the Constitutions of some political parties, with new commitments to gender equality, this needs to be backed by more practical and strategic actions that will bring political party women and their issues into the mainstream of the Party's decision-making structures.

Women’s CSOs
Women's organizations need nationwide sensitization on the benefits of female participation in governance and encourage more women to vie for all elective positions at the parliamentary, Council and political Party executive levels.

Better networking and coordination between women CSOs is recommended;

Women CSOs should be more loyal and committed to the course of women;

Women CSOs should devise innovative ways to mobilize resources by looking inwardly.

Together with the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and the international community, start the "violent-free election campaigns" early using all available media nationwide.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
While appreciating International donors and the community for their support for free, fair and credible elections, there is a need to call out political parties who violate the rights of women to vote and be voted for.

The international community are called upon to provide more resources to help in the popularisation, implementation and monitoring of the GEWE Act, 2022.

Security Sector
The security sector is called out to increase the protection of women electorates and candidates and speedily redress violence against women without fear or favour.

More training and capacity building for security personnel handling gender-based violence cases was proffer.
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