

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

SIERRA LEONE

In June 2023, Sierra Leoneans returned to the polls for the country’s fifth presidential and parliamentary elections since the end of the civil war in 2002. To support transparent, inclusive, and credible elections and governance in Sierra Leone before, during, and after the 2023 elections, NDI has implemented programs that aim to enhance the meaningful participation of women in politics, strengthen citizen observation of election processes, and facilitate constructive communication among political parties, government representatives, and citizens. By addressing political party tensions, conducting election oversight, and increasing the inclusion of women throughout Sierra Leone’s politics, NDI and our local partners support Sierra Leone to strengthen its democratic processes, institutions, and delivery of good governance.

ENHANCING THE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SIERRA LEONE’S POLITICAL PROCESSES

NDI has been committed to leveraging the unique window of opportunity created by the passage of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act 2022, as well as other inclusion measures, to encourage a more inclusive and representative democracy in Sierra Leone. Following a curriculum specifically designed for the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone, NDI trained over 450 women aspirants and candidates to understand the electoral system, secure a spot on their party’s nomination lists, and get elected. Critically, the training also supported women in politics to assess their individual security while engaging in political activities and to make a plan for increasing their safety. In the June elections, many of the women who participated in NDI trainings were able to win seats in Parliament and local councils, part of the wave of newly elected women across the country in this electoral cycle. NDI also



The President of the All Political Party Women Association gives a speech during a town hall in Kenema on the National Inclusion Action plan.

created a participant network group on WhatsApp to bring together women training beneficiaries, CSO representatives, and former women MPs from across the country on a single platform to share experiences, give advice to one another, share information on potential safety risks, and offer support to one another as they pursue their political ambitions. In the post-election period, NDI is conducting a series of training sessions for women newly elected to local councils across the country to prepare them to thrive and successfully take on the responsibilities of their positions.

Through a collaboration with the Men’s Association for Gender Equality Sierra Leone (MAGE), NDI is also supporting Men, Power, and Politics (MPP) workshops which target male leaders from political parties in Sierra Leone and aim to increase their awareness and understanding of the impacts of patriarchal gender norms on their lives, families, communities, and society at large and build a quorum of male political allies. During these workshops, participants personalize, politicize, and strategize on the role of gender in Sierra Leone to better understand how they can promote gender equality in their personal and professional lives. Dialogue sessions held between male and female party members provide a safe platform for women to share their perspectives and recommendations with their male counterparts on how to address the many challenges they face when it comes to their full inclusion in politics within their parties. MAGE activities played an important role in encouraging male MPP allies to raise public awareness of the benefits of increased participation of women in public office. Their continued efforts in the post-election period will be key to maintaining momentum and progress towards a more inclusive political environment in Sierra Leone.

NDI also works with Sierra Leone’s political parties and the All Political Parties Women’s Association (APPWA) to develop and implement action plans that aim to identify policies and actions parties can take to increase women’s inclusion. This includes enforcing laws related to sexual harassment and violence, helping political parties to come into compliance with the Political Parties Act, 2022, and developing training manuals to provide women aspirants and party members with critical skills so that they can effectively perform their roles and take on leadership positions.

PROMOTING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

NDI is a pioneer in supporting domestic civic organizations in Sierra Leone, and around the world, to build capacities to monitor electoral and political processes. Citizen election observation promotes public confidence in electoral processes, as the mass mobilization of citizens to safeguard electoral integrity sends a strong signal that democratic processes are supported and overseen by the citizens. Advanced election observation methodologies empower citizens to provide independent verification of the credibility of an election process, as well as play a conflict mitigation role during contested elections. During the 2023 general election, NDI supported the National Election Watch (NEW) and the Elections Observer Network (EON) to enhance the credibility and transparency of electoral processes within Sierra Leone. With attention on the passage of inclusion-focused legislation ahead of the 2023 elections, NDI is supporting EON to utilize public data about the elections to analyze political party and election management body compliance with gender quota requirements. Through hands-on technical assistance approaches, NDI supported NEW to understand and execute a process and results verification for transparency (PRVT) exercise for the 2023 elections, an advanced domestic observation approach that allows independent nonpartisan citizen observers to systematically assess the quality of opening, voting, closing, counting, and tabulation processes at a national scale and independently verify the official results.



Young party members from 6 of Sierra Leone's political parties engage in a youth debate.

INCREASING EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES ON ISSUES IMPORTANT TO SIERRA LEONEANS

Since the 2018 general elections, NDI has worked to facilitate effective dialogue between political parties and citizens and ensure the needs and preferences of Sierra Leone citizens are prioritized by political parties and elected officials. To do this, NDI has partnered with the National Political Debates Committee (NPDC) to hold a series of issue-based debates - ranging from debates with presidential candidates to others with traditionally marginalized representatives of political parties – broadcast on live television, the radio, and on social media. The most recent debates and radio programs, held throughout January 2023, highlighted the voices of women, young people, and disabled individuals.

In addition to the debates, NDI has worked with local partners like the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), to increase dialogue between political parties and civilians through issue forums, town halls, training sessions, and workshops that include representatives of diverse political parties. Between February and July 2022, NDI and PPRC organized all-party issue forums across Sierra Leone to convene representatives from political parties, civil society, the media, and the public in consensus building and constructive engagement on issues that are priorities for citizens. To improve the outcomes of the all-party forums, NDI and the PPRC also organized training sessions on message development and communications, so that political parties could participate in the forums in a more meaningful fashion.

INCREASING RESPONSIVENESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

To improve the capacities of elected officials to effectively execute their roles and responsibilities and deliver good governance to the citizens of Sierra Leone, NDI conducted capacity building trainings with local councilors and core council administrative staff across Sierra Leone in 2021. The training curriculum aimed to address some of the most critical challenges local officials face while performing their duties, which were identified through a survey distributed to local councils throughout Sierra Leone as well as phone interviews with various local media representatives, civil society organizations, and local councilors. During the training sessions, local councilors and staff talked through the challenges they faced, such as limited revenue generation and lack of citizen input, and created action plans for tackling these obstacles. This resulted in efforts by local councilors to bring council meetings and town halls to the citizens to better account for their priorities and needs. NDI is currently working to prepare trainings that meet the needs of women newly elected to local councils, seeking to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the duties of their office.

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