



CONSTITUENCY OUTREACH IN SIERRA LEONE: A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world



Preface

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is grateful to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) for providing funds for NDI's constituency outreach activities in 2003 and 2004, as well as the development and distribution of this corresponding manual. The objective of the manual is to help Members of Parliament (MPs) conduct constituency outreach activities more effectively in the future by building on the lessons learned during the previous program and remembering the important issues in their districts. NDI would like to thank its Sierra Leone team: Niall Johnston, Mary Margaret Dineen, Daniel Gbondo and Vandetta Sawyerr and DC-based staff: Brittany Danisch, Alexandra McCown and Courtney Creek for their contributions to the program and this publication.

For further information on NDI's programs in Central and West Africa, please go to NDI's website: www.ndi.org or contact:

Chris Fomunyoh
Senior Associate for Africa
2030 M St. NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
USA
Tel: + (1) 202.728.5542
Fax: + (1) 202.728.5562
chrisf@ndi.org

or

Barrie Hofmann
Deputy Regional Director for Central and West Africa
2030 M St. NW, Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
USA
Tel: +(1) 202.728.5547
Fax: +(1) 202.728.5562
bhofmann@ndi.org

Copyright © National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) 2004. All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for noncommercial purposes provided NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is sent copies of any translation.

Members
➤ Learn who votes, which will allow MPs to urge those who don't to participate while encouraging those who do to continue.
➤ Be perceived as leaders who make things happen.
➤ Enjoy a higher profile and greater visibility so that Members' accomplishments can be shared and constituent needs identified.

I. Introduction

Defining Constituency Outreach

Constituency outreach and service delivery are limited only by the imagination of MPs. In order to be effective, outreach strategies and services should be tailored to fit the norms, values, traditions, needs and concerns of the district. Constituency outreach consists of activities and mechanisms designed to do the following:

- | |
|--|
| ➤ Develop ideas that can be turned into legislation or other legislative-related activities such as hearings, fact-finding missions and resolutions. |
| ➤ Build coalitions with local groups, leaders and opinion makers. |

- ◆ Bring constituents closer to elected Members.
- ◆ Help Members address constituents’ deeply felt or urgent needs.
- ◆ Engage Members with their constituents in mutually beneficial problem identification and problem solving.
- ◆ Inform development, introduction and enactment of, or advocacy for, legislation.
- ◆ Ensure accountable, equitable, accessible and appropriate services for all who need them.

Elected legislators, citizens, and political parties all benefit from public outreach efforts. A member who not only has the support of local voters, but who also has demonstrated his/her value to the party, is much more likely to be re-elected than a member who has remained silent. Some other benefits of constituency outreach to both MPs and their constituents are outlined at right:

Section II of this manual provides guidelines for what sort of preparation is necessary for MPs interested in engaging in effective constituency outreach. Section III outlines a variety of strategies that MPs can use to connect with constituents in a variety of ways. Finally, Section IV provides an overview of the issues discussed in each of the districts during NDI's 2003 constituency outreach program.

- | Constituents |
|--|
| ➤ Acquire useful advocacy, representational or leadership skills. |
| ➤ Gain access to important information. |
| ➤ Learn where and how to mobilize resources and services. |
| ➤ Strengthen community infrastructure and development. |
| ➤ Reinforce accountability and transparency among elected and appointed officials. |

II. Preparing for Constituency Outreach

Gathering information about one's constituency is essential for identifying and pursuing the issues most relevant to the district and also helps to identify which local outreach activities are most likely to generate desired results.

Information gathering efforts should be centered on relevant issues, such as the level of impoverishment in the district, adequacy of food supply, water potability, opportunities for local employment or the existence of community driven development projects. The following questions can help guide MPs' information gathering efforts:

1. Issues of interest:

- ◆ What are the key issues of importance in the area where constituency outreach is being conducted?
- ◆ What excites or angers people most?
- ◆ What are the most common issues or problems with respect to health, education, economic development or infrastructure?
- ◆ Are there any community hazards (waste dumps, factory emissions, sewage, etc.)?
- ◆ What type of legislative or program initiatives have community residents, leaders, and activists called for in the past?

2. Demographic Factors:

- ◆ What are the key demographic indicators, such as: is the district heavily populated by the young or the elderly? By women or by men engaged in migratory labor? By an influx of internally displaced persons? By university students or industrial or plantation workers?
- ◆ What is the geographic profile of the constituency or district? Is it urban, rural or mixed?
- ◆ What groups predominate in the population?
- ◆ What groups have economic power? Political power?

3. Institutional Factors:

- ◆ What are the key institutions in all sectors?
- ◆ What role do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) play in providing services to the community?
- ◆ Are there places where groups congregate on a regular basis?
- ◆ Where are the headquarters for community based organizations and NGOs in the district?

4. Quality and Frequency of MP-Constituent Relations:

- ◆ Do constituents readily come to MPs' offices and seek advice?
- ◆ Is MP contact with constituents systematic or sporadic and episodic?
- ◆ With whom do MPs have the most or the least contact?
- ◆ Where are these contacts most likely to occur?

With this data, MPs have intimate knowledge of their constituencies. They should be able to identify priorities and provide information critical to solving problems related to key issues, such as national development initiatives and community resources available to constituents.

III. Constituency Outreach Strategies

A constituency outreach program provides MPs with a mechanism for monitoring community events, mobilizing financial resources and facilitating commitment for development initiatives in their districts.

Communication strategies associated with outreach should be designed to facilitate dialogue between MPs and the people they serve. Carving out a permanent space where such exchanges become the norm will help keep the national government attuned to local needs and inform constituents of policy initiatives in their area and the resources accessible to them.

The following sections provide a variety of strategies MPs can employ to connect with their citizens:

Town Hall Meetings

Annex A provides a checklist for organizers of a town hall meeting.



Town hall meetings are a useful strategy to begin a dialogue with constituents and can inform more targeted follow-on constituency outreach efforts. Town hall meetings allow MPs to meet in person with a large group of constituents, providing MPs the opportunity to inform constituents of their efforts to meet constituent needs in parliament and providing constituents the opportunity to raise issues of concern. Town hall meetings typically begin with a brief presentation by the MP, followed by a question and answer session with constituents. A moderator can help to facilitate the discussion and maintain order. MPs may schedule town hall meetings on general issues or on a very specific topic.

The following tips will assist MPs in conducting productive town hall meetings:

Preparation

The meeting will be more useful to the MP and the constituents if the MP prepares in advance:

- ◆ Provide advance information to constituents about the upcoming town hall meeting and key topics to be discussed.
- ◆ Be prepared to give a brief presentation on activities in parliament and the MP's efforts to address constituent needs.
- ◆ Be prepared to answer constituents' questions on a variety of topics.

Choose a Neutral Moderator

The role of the moderator is to guide the discussion in the following ways:

- ◆ Present the objectives of the meeting.
- ◆ Explain the political context of the country, as well as outlining the functions and responsibilities of the three arms of government with particular emphasis on the executive and legislative arm.
- ◆ Assist people in understanding their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. Citizens who feel involved in the political and decision-making processes will be more likely to raise issues in meetings.
- ◆ Emphasize the meeting is not a political party meeting and advise citizens not to ask questions or raise concerns that should be addressed at a political party meeting.
- ◆ Highlight recent political reforms that have taken place. Discussions at town hall meetings should focus on the rationale for shifting from old governance practices to new ones, specifically highlighting the benefits it will bring to citizens.
- ◆ Alert the audience five minutes before the end of the meeting to avoid the possibility of cutting someone off from speaking or not recognizing other questioners when the meeting ends.

Tips for Q&A

- ◆ Moderate the question and answer session in a neutral manner. Ensure that questions are asked and answered in an orderly fashion and that one individual or group does not dominate the discussion.
- ◆ MPs should clarify confusing questions by rephrasing them in such a way that the whole audience understands.
- ◆ MPs should avoid campaigning by making clear that they are acting in their capacity as public servants for all district residents, not just citizens who voted for them.
- ◆ MPs should avoid responding to clear provocations and insist that the meeting continue in a calm and respectful fashion.
- ◆ MPs should be willing to accept criticism and use critical comments as opportunities to engage in constructive problem solving with constituents.



Other Forms of Outreach

An MP is not limited to public meetings or to town halls in order to reach his/her constituents. There is a broad range of outreach activities from which to choose, including the following options:

- ◆ Public service announcements (both radio and television).
- ◆ Participation in a radio or television call-in show.
- ◆ Use of print media by issuing press releases, publishing statements or announcing events.
- ◆ Distribution of a newsletter or other relevant publications.
- ◆ Attendance at local events.
- ◆ Presentation of information on reform progress or processes.
- ◆ Organization of special events, such as Earth Day or Human Rights Day.

Some outreach activities, such as drafting and distributing a newsletter, can be more resource intensive than others. MPs have a range of options with which to address this dilemma.

To find low-cost ways of conducting outreach, MPs should look for opportunities that coincide with existing community resources or activities. For some events, it may be more appropriate and economical for an individual Member to personally organize them, rather than mobilizing the party or parliament as a whole. For example, rather than drafting and distributing a monthly newsletter, an MP could ask a local newspaper if he/she could contribute a column to the weekly newspaper. This allows the MP to communicate with constituents on an ongoing weekly basis without expending valuable monies. Holding special events can also be resource (and time) intensive. Therefore, an MP might choose to attend a community festival or visit a busy local market where he/she could speak with constituents.

Casework is another tool/mechanism of constituency outreach that Members can undertake. Casework can involve an MP helping an individual constituent resolve a particular problem or address a specific issue. This typically involves regular contact with a constituent over an extended period of time. Casework also allows the MP to target different locations in his/her home district.

Depending on available resources, an MP may open a constituent office. Beyond providing a physical location where the MP can carry out his or her duties, an office is rich in democratic symbolism. A constituent office in the district demonstrates the MP's tangible presence among the people who elected him/her and for whom he/she works. To reduce the operational and start-up costs of opening an office, MPs can use existing local office space in either their party's or municipal government's headquarters or offices. If an MP's open office

hours are predictable, constituents will know when to go to the party or local government office to take advantage of direct access to the MP.

A community training project is another example of an activity that an individual MP might take on. Or, an MP might participate in a local training opportunity conducted by an NGO. Through their participation, MPs lend a sense of credibility to the project and gain valuable skills, which they can then impart to their constituents.

One of the most common barriers that MPs must overcome is the perception by citizens that the MP should distribute personal financial assistance to individual constituents. MPs often spend a great deal of their personal assets to satisfy the demands of their constituents. While MPs are not responsible for providing handouts to constituencies, they are charged with ensuring that their districts benefit from state resources. These resources encompass national monies, as well as healthcare, job training and water. An MP can also highlight outside resource distributors who may not be self-evident to the public, such as NGOs or Chambers of Commerce.

Other examples of non-traditional constituency outreach that can be accomplished with limited resources include:

- ◆ Provide application forms and information for local lending institutions;
- ◆ Organize a workshop of community organizations where citizens can learn about the resources available to them;
- ◆ Compile a directory of community organizations and make it available to the community at large;
- ◆ Bring community members, Chambers of Commerce and local government together to share information and facilitate dialogue;
- ◆ Help citizens initiate small development projects or obtain small loans to open businesses;
- ◆ Help constituents access entrepreneurial training held by the government or NGOs;
- ◆ Meet with local microfinance program managers and recommend appropriate constituents to participate in projects; and
- ◆ Serve as a clearing house for information about different programs and projects that have and have not worked in the region.

IV. Constituency Outreach Program Overview

In 2003, NDI supported efforts of Sierra Leonean MPs to hold meetings with constituents in nine districts around the country. The specific aim of the program was to promote participatory democracy in Sierra Leone and enhance effective parliamentary representation. The objectives of the program were:

- ◆ Introduce MPs in Sierra Leone to effective constituency outreach activities;
- ◆ Provide a forum for dialogue between MPs and constituents on matters of local and national concern;
- ◆ Provide opportunities for MPs to be held accountable by the electorate;
- ◆ Assist constituents in playing a role in the political processes outside of elections; and
- ◆ Increase the legislature's transparency.

Countrywide Themes

Constituent participants across the country raised the following issues consistently:

1. Presence of MPs in the Districts One universal theme to the constituency outreach program was the frustration expressed by participants that MPs had not been back to the districts since the 2002 elections. MPs acknowledged this problem but cited a lack of funds as the primary reason they have not returned.

The MPs all acknowledged that they have a collective responsibility to represent the entire district, irrespective of political party affiliation, because the proportional representation electoral system in Sierra Leone's multi-member districts often results in co-habitation.

2. Local Government Many districts wanted to see more power given to local chiefdom police forces. People blame the decline in the importance of the Chiefdom Police for the weakened authority of Paramount Chiefs as well as the general increase in crime throughout the country.

In response to these concerns, the MPs explained how the decentralization process and the government's goal of encouraging citizens' direct participation in governance and development would help address the balance of power between the national and local leaders. The MPs stated that the reintroduction of local government structures would help residents enhance their communities and take ownership of development activities. Elected District and Chiefdom councils would take on primary responsibility to design community development plans, and raise funds to execute those plans.

The MPs also discussed the National Recovery Strategy of the government, which aims to restore all defunct government institutions. MPs added that the government is aware of the significant role played by the Chiefdom Police forces in maintaining law and order. Plans are underway to reinstate the force.

3. Food Self Sufficiency Participants from various districts wanted to know what steps the government was taking to deliver on President Kabbah's promise that the country would have a secure food supply by 2007. Many constituents want the government to help their communities by providing resources for fishing and farming, including fertilizer, seeds, instruments for mechanical farming and fishnets. The MPs agreed that the introduction of mechanical cultivation would increase food production as well as the economic well-being of farmers because they could grow a greater variety of crops. The MPs also explained that the government was working on plans to give support to local fishermen and improve the fishing industry.

4. Infrastructure/Health/Education MPs promised to discuss with the appropriate government ministries/agencies the need for roads, increased health and sanitation facilities, and a revamping of the education system. MPs informed constituents of the government's plans to improve the roads through an EU grant. To improve the health sector, the government intends to build a health centre with essential drugs in every chiefdom, providing accessible and affordable health care to all citizens. The government has received funds to build secondary schools in every chiefdom of the country, helping to address some of the educational problems facing the nation.

5. Unemployment Constituents are increasingly concerned by unemployment, which affects many young people around the country. They see the rising drug problem among youth as a direct effect of the high unemployment rate. MPs are mindful of the problem but often replied that the government cannot create jobs for everyone.

District-Specific Themes

The conclusions and highlights of each District's meeting follow:

1. Port Loko District

February 21-23, 2003 700 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Alfred Kumbu-Smart, APC Hon. Alhaji Buya Kamara, APC Hon. Ibrahim Kemoh Sesay, APC Hon. Ibrahim Bundu, APC

Political Citizens at Port Loko meetings raised concerns that only MPs from the All People's Congress Party (APC) were present at the meetings. The MPs responded that the absence of the other MPs at the event should not be perceived as an indication of disunity among them. They went on to say that the district block parliamentary system provides for all eight MPs to represent the entire district, therefore they are working together for the

general good of the district, irrespective of differences in political party affiliations.

Economic Participants discussed the fact that resumption of iron ore mining would be beneficial to the district. The MPs assured the participants that they would talk with the Minister of Mineral Resources about what steps need to be taken to resume mining in the district.

2. Bonthe

March 13-15, 2003 860 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Brimah Conteh, SLPP Hon. Solomon Bangali, SLPP Hon. Mrs. Agnes Bassie, SLPP Hon. Solomon Tua, SLPP Hon. Dr. Samuel Maligi II, SLPP Hon. Arthur Harvey, SLPP Hon. Jonathan Sama, SLPP Hon. Thomas P. Kaine, SLPP

Political The participants stated their expectation that the MPs should be able to work together because they were all from the same party, the Sierra Leone's People's Party (SLPP). The MPs responded that they were committed to promoting the interests of the district and the welfare of the people.

Economic The MPs and the participants discussed the resumption of mining rutile in the area. Local residents were concerned with the environmental hazards associated with the mining activities. If the Sierra Rutile Company decides to restart operations, the MPs promised

that the government would take steps to protect the interests of the community in negotiating new contracts with the company.

The MPs informed their constituents that discussions were underway with an Egyptian fishing company to establish a fish-farming project in the district.

The MPs supported the constituents' request for the involvement of community leaders in the implementation of building contracts as a viable way of ensuring that projects are implemented as stipulated in the agreement and that corrupt practices are checked.

Infrastructure and Social Services In response to concerns raised by citizens, MPs unequivocally stated that Bonthe town would remain the district headquarters for Bonthe district. MPs went on to add that the Ministries of Works and Transport have plans to reconstruct the jetty in the town as well as improve means of transport to and from Bonthe, with particular emphasis on an effective mode of transport between Bonthe and the capital, Freetown. Regarding the underdeveloped state of the island, the MPs promised to lobby development NGOs to extend their facilities to the island.

3. Kambia

April 10 -12, 2003 1,410 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Ibrahim Sorie, APC Hon. Dauda S. Kamara, APC Hon. Ibrahim Sesay, SLPP Hon. Brima Conteh, SLPP Hon. Dr. Alusine Fofanah, SLPP Hon. Col (Rtd.) Marray S. Conteh, SLPP Hon. P C Kefa Sankoh III

Political Some participants expressed concern about the disputed elections for the paramount chief in Tonko Limba chiefdom. Three sections of the chiefdom refused to accept the election results because they accuse senior and influential government officials of manipulating the elections to the disadvantage of the favored candidate. The MPs responded that it is not the policy of the government to interfere with paramount chieftaincy elections. They promised to look into the matter but warned the parties to exercise restraint and cooperate

with the chiefdom leadership.

4. Kenema

May 8-10, 2003 1,165 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Mohamed M. Makaya, SLPP Hon. Andrew Lungay, SLPP Hon. Dominic K. Vandy, SLPP Hon. Dr. Phrancis B. Momoh, SLPP Hon. Moussa Conteh, SLPP Hon. Bintu Myers, SLPP Hon. P C Madam Mamie G. Gamanga, Paramount Chief

Economic Citizens called on MPs to lobby the government to develop the rubber plantation in Simbaru Chiefdom to create jobs and bring much-needed foreign exchange to the country. MPs responded positively to this suggestion and agreed to discuss the matter with the Ministers of Agriculture, Trade and Industry.

Citizens informed MPs of their efforts to put diamond revenues to good use through the Diamond Community Development Fund. The fund has already contributed to the establishment of a community center in Panguma Chiefdom. Residents called for effective monitoring of mining activities in the chiefdom to curtail excessive

smuggling of the precious minerals and bring revenue to the diamond mining areas as well as the entire country. MPs reinforced this sentiment by asking local residents to help officials by reporting suspected cases of diamond smuggling to the authorities.

Sierra Leone Special Court Many participants decried the detention of Chief Sam Hinga Norman by the Special Court, and accused the government of assisting in his arrest. Chief Hinga Norman is seen as a hero, and many people do not understand his arrest. The MPs responded by saying that the Court is an independent body outside the government's purview. The MPs went on to say that these concerns raised by participants indicate that the Ministry of Information and the Public Relations Office of the Court have not adequately sensitized the public about the separate roles of the Court and the national government.

5. Bombali

June 5-7, 2003 1,620 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Ernest Bai Koroma, APC, Party Leader Hon. Wusu B. Munu, APC Hon. Dr. Moses O. M. Sesay, APC Hon. Rev. Marie Yansaneh, APC Hon. Col. (Rtd.) A. O. Kamara, SLPP Hon. Hardy A. Sheriff, SLPP Hon. P C Kandeh Luseni II, Paramount Chief

hiring local residents with the appropriate training.

Infrastructure Participants praised the efforts made by the government to repair most of the infrastructure of the district including the roads and educational and health facilities. However, citizens raised concerns that contractors rebuilding the Kamakwie – Makeni road were doing an inadequate job. The MPs assured residents that they would talk to the contractors responsible for the work and urge them to improve their performance so that the road will be passable during the rainy season. The MPs also agreed to investigate contractors who import labor into the district rather than

6. Moyamba

July 17-19, 2003 1,235 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Mohamed S. Fofanah, SLPP Hon. Alex M. Koroma, SLPP Hon. Musa T. Tarawalie, SLPP Hon. C. J. Wongbo-Bettie, SLPP Hon. Shekou Tejan-Sankoh, SLPP Hon. Jonathan J. Dambo, SLPP Hon. Samuel B. M. Margai, SLPP Hon. Joseph N. Kaindoh, SLPP Hon. P C Charles Caulker, Paramount Chief

community. MPs disagreed, explaining that the presence of the mining business in the district resulted in tax revenues used for road construction, local employment, medical care and better local education, all of which benefit district residents.

Economic Participants from this district requested that a bank be opened in Moyamba. They currently have to travel to Freetown or Bo to conduct their banking transactions, which is a considerable inconvenience. While MPs voiced their support for establishing a bank in the district, they explained that residents would have to save enough money to ensure a profitable venture. The MPs promised to discuss the idea with senior management at the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank.

Residents in Moyamba were concerned that mining policies seem to benefit mining companies rather than the

Education Residents asked MPs to bring Njala University College back to the district from Freetown now that the war is over. Residents claimed that the distance of the university from the district increases the financial burden on local families. The MPs responded that the insecurity caused by the war was over, but repairs to damaged buildings have yet to be undertaken, the original facilities of the college included. They assured residents that reconstruction is underway and that the college would relocate to its original campus as soon as possible.

7. Tonkolili

August 7-10, 2003 1,570 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Usman S. A. Kagbo, APC Hon. Edward Sembu Koroma, APC Hon. Abdulai E. Fornah, APC Hon. Alie Salieu Sankoh, APC Hon. Musu Kandeh, APC Hon. Mabel N. Turay, APC Hon. Dr. Fatmata Hassan, SLPP Hon. Emmanuel O. K. Tholley, SLPP Hon. P C Bai Sunthuba Osara III, Paramount Chief

mothers, indicating their commitment to help improve their welfare. However, it was explained that the

Political Involvement Residents of the district saw the presence of three women MPs at the meeting as an indication that the involvement of women in politics is improving. The MPs implored citizens to abandon traditional practices that impede women from being involved in politics at the local and national levels. One MP stated that the men of Tonkolili district believe that women have a role to play in the politics of the district (*Tonkolili district has the highest number of elected women MPs*).

Economic Empowerment for Women The MPs expressed concern over the plight of widows and single

resumption of the micro-credit program by the government was contingent on the repayment of loans borrowed by its initial beneficiaries. The Tonkolili District has the highest number of debtors in the program, and constituents need to work on repaying the loans.

Unemployment The MPs informed their audience that work will resume at the Magbass sugar cane factory and the Bumbuna hydro-dam. This would provide employment opportunities to youths of the district and the rest of the country.

Infrastructure The MPs assured the people of Tonkolili district that they would work with the Minister of Energy and Power to restore electricity to the district after the completion of the hydro-dam. They went on to condemn the destructive and criminal attitude of people who stole the electric cables linking the Makeni and Magburaka power stations.

8. Bo

September 11-13, 2003 900 Participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Mathew G. B. Alpha, SLPP Hon. John Ngewo Moiba, SLPP Hon. Patrick Mustapha Kamara, SLPP Hon. R. E. S. Lagao, SLPP Hon. Amidu Nallo, SLPP Hon. Janet Mamie Sam-King, SLPP

Political Meeting participants called for major reforms of the local district administration. Participants and MPs agreed that the district administration could be more effective in running the chiefdoms; particularly before the district councils are elected.

9. Kono

October 16-18, 2003 1,235 participants
Participating MPs: Hon. Sahr Maturie, SLPP Hon. Emmanuel W. Tommy, SLPP Hon. Komba E. Koedoyoma, SLPP Hon. Komba C. Gbamanja, SLPP Hon. Tamba E. Kaingbanja, SLPP Hon. Rev. Kai D. Thomas, SLPP Hon. P C Abu Mbawa Kongoba, Paramount Chief

Civic Forum The NDI Civic Forum Program was very popular in the district.¹ Participants at the constituency outreach meetings were disappointed that the program was not renewed. NDI's Deputy Regional Director for Central and West Africa expressed regret that the Civic Forum ended but said that NDI was looking for future funding to restart the program.

Economic Residents discussed the continuing decline of the value of the Leone against the US Dollar. MPs explained that the primary cause of the devaluation is the heavy dependence on imports and a low amount of foreign exchange. The MPs said the government is enacting fiscal policies that should result in more foreign exchange for the country and a rise in value of the Leone resulting in a lower cost of living for everyone in the district as well as the entire country.

Infrastructure Kono district was hit the hardest by the war. Every settlement was torched, creating serious shelter problems. Meeting participants asked the MPs to lobby the government and NGOs to increase their assistance to the area. MPs promised to undertake this action but reminded participants that district and chiefdom governments would take the initiative on reconstruction once elected.

¹ NDI's Civic Forum Program focused on citizen education and participation in the Kono and Kailahun districts of Sierra Leone. Community-level discussions were held on topics such as the constitution, basic democratic rights and responsibilities, how parliament and local government work, and the role of political parties in a democracy.

Follow-on Activities

In 2004, applying lessons learned from its 2003 program, NDI developed a pilot program to work with MPs in Kono district to develop a coordinated constituency outreach strategy that would enable them to communicate regularly and effectively with their constituents. By approaching constituency outreach responsibilities as a group rather than as individuals, MPs were better positioned to take advantage of their collective representation of all the citizens of Kono. The members developed a combined strategy of town hall meetings, call-in radio shows and small group issue discussions.

Annex A: Checklist for organizing a town hall meeting

Prior to the meeting

Venue

- Locate a room suitable for the public meeting
- Reserve a room for the public meeting
- Visit the venue in order to make all necessary arrangements
- Make a seating arrangement (moderator, MP(s), guest speakers, citizens, media)

Announcements

- Prepare an announcement stating the place, time and topic, if there is any
- Post the announcement in visible places (tea shops, coffee bars, convenient stores, etc.)
- Spread the word using existing district or town institutions such as traditional rulers, local government officials, the police etc. Also use the media.

Research (to become familiar with the potential participants and existent problems in the area)

- Call city officials to enquire about current local issues
- Check laws and rules on how different issues are defined
- Prepare a brief report on findings for other MP(s)
- Consult with MPs serving on oversight committees, government ministries and commissions dealing with issues of interest to constituents

Media

- Prepare a media advisory inviting them to the public meeting
- Send the media advisory to all media (local, national)
- Call the media to remind them of the event

Moderator

- Identify a possible moderator who will run the meeting
- Explain to the moderator what is expected of him/her
 - open the floor for questions, comments
 - facilitate the discussion
 - interrupt citizens if they are too long in their speeches, questions or if their discussion is out of place

During the meeting

Media

- Develop a sign-in sheet for present reporters
- Prepare a news release, summarizing the public meeting
- Distribute the news release to all media representatives

Minutes

- Take notes, or have someone volunteer to take notes, during the meeting for future reference

Photos

- Bring a camera to the meeting
- Take photos during the meeting (especially photograph situations that express interaction of the MP with the citizens)

After the meeting

Media

- Encourage media representatives to interview MPs and constituents to gauge opinions about meeting i.e. issues raised by constituents, responses by MPs, what went well, what did not go well, etc.
- Call the media representatives who attended the meeting to ask if they need additional information
- Provide them with photos of the meeting

Follow-up

- Follow-up directly with citizens who have requested additional information.