



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE SIERRA LEONE



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

BACKGROUND

In 2023, Sierra Leoneans will return to the polls for the country's fifth presidential and parliamentary elections since the end of the civil war in 2002. Despite the strong democratic gains the country has made since the turn of the century, the upcoming elections will take place during a time of economic crisis, confusion over new electoral codes, episodes of political violence, and ongoing political party tensions in Sierra Leone. To help address these challenges and support free, fair, and credible elections and governance in Sierra Leone before, during, and after the 2023 elections, NDI implements 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, prioritizing the needs and policy priorities of citizens, 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

FNDI is 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 has trained over 450 women aspirants and candidates to understand the electoral system, secure a spot on their party list, and get elected. Critically, the training also supports women in politics to assess their individual security while engaging in political activities and to make a plan for increasing their safety.

Through a collaboration with the Men's Association for Gender Equality Sierra Leone (MAGE), NDI is also supporting Men, Power, and Politics (MPP) workshops, targeting male leaders from political parties in Sierra Leone, which aim to increase their awareness and understanding of the impacts of patriarchal gender norms on their lives, families, communities, and society at large. 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.

NDI also works with Sierra Leone's political parties and the All Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA) to develop and implement party-specific and national inclusion 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, reforming party constitutions to include quotas for women for leadership positions, 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. For the 2023 general election, NDI is supporting the National Election Watch (NEW) and the Elections Observer Network (EON) to enhance the credibility and transparency of electoral processes within Sierra Leone. Through hands-on technical assistance approaches, NDI is supporting NEW to understand and execute advanced domestic observation approaches; formulate systematic monitoring strategies; prepare training materials and observation checklists; recruit, train, deploy and evaluate observers; establish systems for internal communications; develop data management systems; draft election statements; design external communication strategies; and advocate for electoral reforms. With the passage of inclusion-focused legislation ahead of the 2023 elections, NDI will also support EON to utilize open election data to analyze inclusion within political parties and candidate lists for the elections.

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.

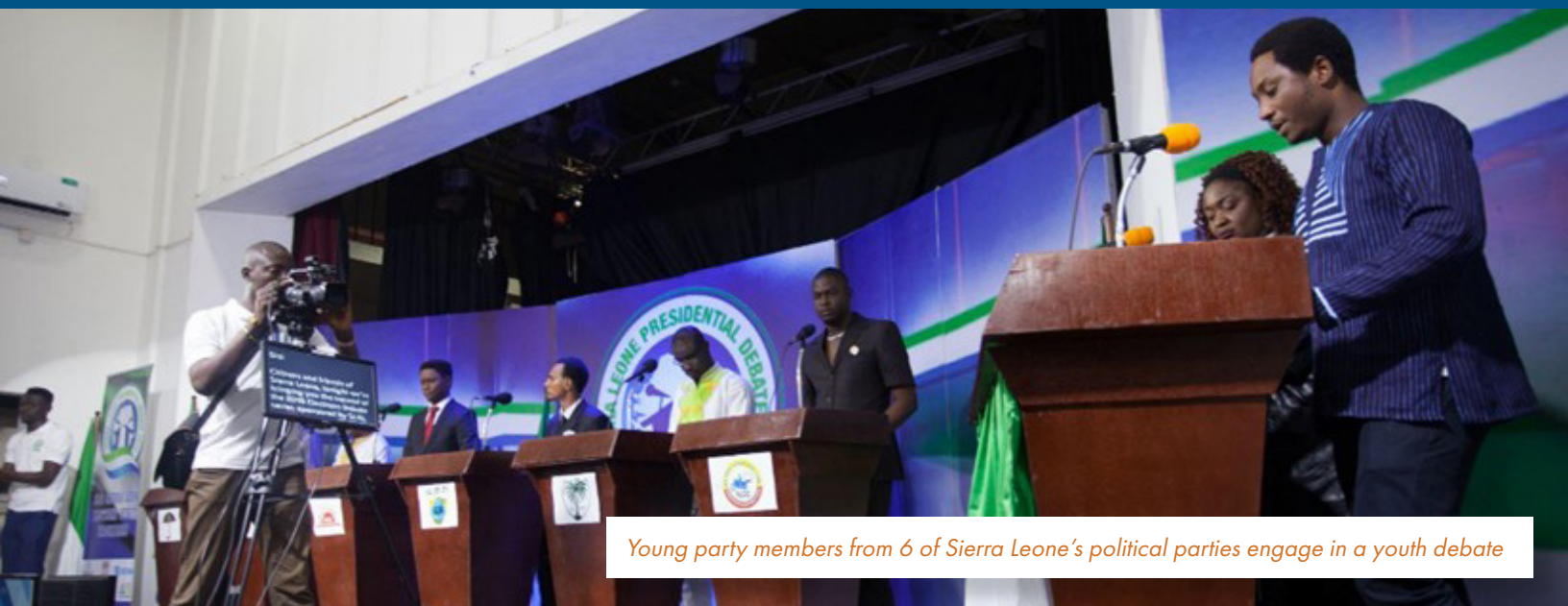
In addition to the debates, NDI is working with local partners like the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), to increase dialogue between political parties and civilians through all-party issue forums, town halls, training sessions, and workshops. Between February and July 2022, NDI and 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 way.

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 recently conducted capacity building trainings with local councilors and core council administrative staff across Sierra Leone. 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.

Funding

NDI's current work in Sierra Leone is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, the United States Agency for International Development, the United States Department of State, and Global Affairs Canada. Previously programming has been funded by the United Nations Development Programme, and the UK Department for International Development (now the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office).



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

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