

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

WORKING FOR DEMOCRACY AND
MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

SIERRA LEONE

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The Way Forward

From the ruins of a decade long civil war that saw over 50,000 deaths, thousands maimed, and enormous destruction of property and infrastructure, Sierra Leoneans are seeking to rebuild their country, using the democratic process to spur and sustain political and economic recovery.



Five years after the cessation of hostilities, the people of Sierra Leone organized national elections in August and September 2007 that were viewed as largely peaceful and credible. These polls were the first in Sierra Leone's history to be conducted after a democratically elected government had served its full constitutional mandate without military intervention in the political process.

The political context was very different in Sierra Leone in 2001, when NDI began working in-country to assist Sierra Leonean political

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Partner Spotlight— 50/50 Group

Among the civic activists most determined to rebuild Sierra Leone's shattered society are a group of women who created the 50/50 Group. As described by founder and past President Nemata Eshun-Baiden, "The 50/50 Group...is a non-partisan campaign for more women in politics and public life. We have a right to have 50 percent representation in parliament even though women constitute 52 percent of the population. It is our right and we will get it!"

Launched in 2000, and recognizing, in the words of past President Abator Thomas, that "you need other women who will help you to either get educated or articulate your own concerns," the Group organized a cadre of experienced trainers and established branches in all of Sierra Leone's 14 districts. Advocacy efforts, and intensive leadership and campaign training activities, helped raise awareness and ultimately expanded opportunities for women in politics, leading all political parties to nominate women candidates on their electoral lists for the 2002 elections. The result: 16 women were elected to

over

**"No longer men in front,
and women at the back."**

—50/50 Group



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parties, legislators and civil society in their reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. NDI and its Sierra Leonean partners:

- Brought together legislators, local officials and constituents across the country, with particular emphasis in the areas hardest hit by the war, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and work collaboratively to solve problems that could arise in their communities;
- Brought together military officers and civilian leaders at community forums to encourage dialogue on civil-military relations and help mitigate the negative impact of post-conflict trauma;
- Trained and helped deploy tens of thousands of domestic election monitors and political pollwatchers; and
- Helped women candidates acquire new political skills.

In working toward an inclusive and transparent electoral process in 2007, NDI built partnerships with Sierra Leonean organizations to create innovative voter education campaigns and engage marginalized segments of the population, particularly the disabled, in the political process. Assisted by NDI, Sierra Leone's National Election Watch (NEW)—a coalition of more than 200 civic organization—fielded more than 5,400 domestic election monitors who used new cell phone text messaging technology to report on polling day irregularities, an innovation that sparked greater public confidence and interest in the elections, particularly among young people.

The Institute integrated peace-building and conflict mitigation activities in its work with political parties and civil society organizations.

Despite the successes of the last five years, Sierra Leone still faces challenges such as widespread poverty, high unemployment, limited access to education and corruption. Many citizens expect the newly-elected government to address these issues; and increased advocacy by a vibrant media and civil society will strengthen the ability of Sierra Leoneans to engage their elected leaders and hold them accountable.

NDI's programs in Sierra Leone are supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the British Department for International Development (DFID).

parliament, three times the number elected in 1996. During the 2004 elections, scores of women trained by the 50/50 Group were elected as members of local councils.

Now a household name in Sierra Leone, the 50/50 Group ramped up its activities for the 2007 general elections, tapping its expanding network of talented women to identify and train female candidates in all parts of Sierra Leone. Combining media messages with on-the-ground training across the country, the Group led voter outreach and education activities to promote peaceful



elections, and made a targeted effort to facilitate the participation of illiterate women in the voting process. Hundreds of its members fanned out as election monitors on voting day. With a view to increasing the number of women in government positions in the post-election period, the Group built a database of women qualified for political appointments. The new government has thus far named three women to the cabinet with more high-level appointments expected. NDI has been privileged to provide assistance to the 50/50 group since its launch in 2001.