



PROTECTING ELECTIONS IN LIBERIA – 25 April 2023

1. Introduction

Protecting election involves an integrated approach because while electoral risks are universal, they are diverse in different contexts. It is important for a risk assessment to determine key risks factors in the context in which an Election Management Body (EMB) operates. In Liberia, for example, risk factors include:

- a. Limited and delayed election financing;
- b. Limited infrastructure, such as voter registration centers or polling precincts, for the conduct of electoral activities. This was experienced in phase one of the ongoing Biometric Voter Registration Exercise when some property owners refused to allow the NEC use their facilities for the registration. In such cases, the NEC had to build tents in the vicinity or just move to a porch or makeshift structure to conduct the registration;
- c. Tendencies of some aspirants and their supporters to strive to manipulate the electoral process through voter trucking and other illegal means;
- d. Verbal and physical threats against electoral workers and materials;
- e. Attempts by some to criminally attack the results management system with the aim to manipulate the results;
- f. Occurrences of unforeseen epidemic or pandemic such as EBOLA or Corona Virus;
- g. Attempted interference of members of the Legislature with the independence of the NEC;
- h. Violent political rivalries leading to disruption of voter registration or polling;
- i. Misinformation and disinformation campaigns perpetrated against the Election Management Body;
- j. Voter apathy and lack of faith in the electoral process based on the aforementioned negative campaigns.

Over the years, NEC-Liberia has managed to mitigate these risks by organizing elections based on clear plans of action and implementation strategy firmly rooted in the Commission's strategic plan. Some of these strategies are discussed below.

2. Risk Assessment in NEC, how is it done?

Risk assessment and management in the NEC is done on several fronts. One of the principal means by which the NEC assesses and manages risks is learning from experience. Consequently, the Commission holds lessons learnt conference after every major electoral activity to evaluate risk factors for future planning. Because of these lessons learned over time, the NEC has become aware of many of the risk factors and the required mitigating actions. As second means of risk assessment in NEC-Liberia is stakeholders consultation. The Commission has a policy of consulting stakeholders in the electoral on a regular basis. An example of this is the Inter Party Consultative Committee that meets monthly to assess the electoral process and recommend possible solutions



for potential risks. Additionally, the Commission has within its structure a monitoring and evaluation section and a compliance desk that assist identify potential electoral risks as electoral activities unfold and offer mitigating recommendations. The Commission has also in the past worked with other institutions, like the Ministry of Health, in the case of EBOA and COVID-19, to develop and implement protocols on the prevention of those diseases during electoral processes.

The NEC believes that while these risk assessment mechanisms have been helpful in the past, they are inadequate because they have not been fully institutionalized in terms of developing and implementing the necessary policy framework. Going forward, and based on discussions at the recent Sweden IDEA meeting, the NEC is taking actions to institutionalize the assessment and management of risks in the Commission, by making it a core function of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Section with support of the Compliance Desk in the Office of the Executive Director. This requires training of key staff in assessment and management of risks.

3. Other Ways NEC Liberia Protect Elections

NEC-Liberia endeavors to protect elections, not only internally but also using a partnership approach. The following are few of the steps, including partnerships with other institutions, that the Commission has established to protect elections:

- a. Recently, the Commission facilitated the signing of the Farmington River Declaration on Peaceful Elections by leaders of 26 political parties committing themselves to peaceful electoral process. ECOWAS and the United Nations witnessed that document.
- b. The NEC usually also facilitate the commitment of media institutions and civil society organizations to peaceful reportage during the electoral process by providing electoral training for them, after which they sign codes of conduct governing them during the electoral process.
- c. The NEC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Liberia Peacebuilding Office to cooperate and coordinate their efforts aimed at maintaining the peace during the electoral process. The two parties will share information through their decentralized structures and an early warning situation room as well as hold regular dialogues to avert potential conflict issues.
- d. The NEC has been working with the relevant agencies of the government including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, LISGIS, Land Commission, and the Governance Commissions to address challenges associated with administrative boundaries that have the propensity of having domino effects on electoral boundaries.
- e. The NEC, working with other stakeholders including UN Women, facilitated the development of the Protocol on Violence Against Women in Election and Politics (VAWiE/P) which was signed by leaders of political parties.
- f. The NEC continues to work with the national security apparatus, which has the legal responsibility for providing a secured environment for the electoral process.
- g. The NEC has also taken steps to improve the electoral disputes adjudication mechanism. The regulations and guidelines have been revised to hopefully shorten the time for the conclusion of cases.



- h. During Phase One of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise, that was conducted from 20 March to 9 April, the Commission grappled with a number of risks including, challenges with powering the BVR equipment; glitches with printing of voter registration cards and connection of the equipment at few of the centers; crowd control; attempts by some to engage in multiple registration and voter trucking; and other logistical issues. Technicians of the Commission and the LAXTON Group, which is contracted to provide the BVR equipment, timeously intervened to correct the technical issues while the Liberia National Police was helpful in quelling potential violent situation.

4. Regional Collaboration in Protecting Elections

On the regional front, NEC-Liberia currently serves as the first vice president of the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), which is an umbrella organization of Electoral Management Bodies in West Africa and it pursues the following objectives:

- a. The promotion of free and credible elections in West Africa;
- b. The promotion of independent and impartial election organizations and administrations;
- c. Strengthening public confidence in the electoral process through free and credible electoral procedures;
- d. The development of professional election officials with integrity, with a strong sense of public service and a commitment to democracy;
- e. To bring predictability to the framework for elections;
- f. Commitment to the promotion and consolidation of democratic cultures to create conducive environment for the peaceful organization of elections;
- g. The sharing of experiences, information, technology and election documents;
- h. Cooperation for the improvement of electoral laws and practices;
- i. Gradual harmonization of electoral laws and practices, as appropriate, capitalizing on the good practices in electoral matters;
- j. Rationalization and pooling of resources to reduce the cost of conducting elections; and
- k. Improving the working condition of its members in the fulfillment of their mandate.

Similarly, Liberia is a member of the Association of African Election Authorities (AAEA), which aims to exchange information and to provide technical assistance, as well as participate in pre-electoral assessment and election observation. AAEA supports electoral management bodies in administering free and fair elections in their respective counties. Liberia EMB participated in the solidarity mission to the 2022 General Elections in Kenya following the revitalization of the Group (AAEA), which was inactive due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In the case of both ECONEC and the AAEA, Liberia gains from peer learning and support in the prevention of risks pre, during and after elections throughout the electoral cycle. Against the backdrop that Liberia is nursing its democracy following years of civil conflict, these two organizations, by their constant assessment and monitoring of electoral processes bring pressure to bear on the EMB (NEC-Liberia) to continue to conduct inclusive activities in line with its mandate of conducting free, fair, transparent and credible elections which is inextricably linked to



peace and security. Judging from the past war, instability in Liberia is instability of the Mano River countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast and throughout West Africa and the continent as a whole. Majority of these countries served to keep the peace in various military missions including Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Pursuant to the above objectives, NEC Liberia has been collaborating with member countries in sharing knowledge and materials that have helped mitigate risks. In furtherance of regional cooperation, a memorandum of understanding was signed between NEC-Liberia and the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) in July 2021 to share electoral knowledge and resources, something which both countries were doing prior. For example, in previous elections, NEC-Liberia provided voting screens and ballot boxes to ECSL which eased the burden on the cost and time to procure those materials in the face of dwindling resources from international donors to EMBs in the region. Similarly, NEC-Liberia recently requested technical and administrative support from ECSL where two staff with expertise in information technology and administration were received by NEC-Liberia to review the planning of the biometric voter registration having themselves conducted BVR in their own country, shared their experiences with the Commission in its first time conduct of BVR.

5. Conclusion

NEC-Liberia is doing a lot to assess electoral risks and protect the electoral process; however, following the Sweden IDEA meeting, which reinforced the need for EMBs to integrate risk management in their electoral processes, the NEC has taken steps to redesign and strengthen the institutionalization for effective management of risk in our EMB. By this action, senior level management including at Deputy Executive Director level, Monitoring and Evaluation and Compliance Desk will develop a strategy document as to how we can strengthen both the process and capabilities of staff to manage risks in the Commission. Consequently, a primary focus is to develop the skills of staff to identify and management risks. To this end, the NEC is endeavoring to source training opportunities

Finally, while often times risks management focuses on the threats, it is worth recommending that any dialogue on risk management also focuses on the opportunities, so that EMBs do not lose sight of what is working well in their institutions - systems and mechanisms - that enhance better management to avoid crisis. For example, the below matrix lists some of the systems and mechanisms NEC-Liberia has in place to manage risks that are opportunities worth discussing.

NO.	SYSTEMS	MECHANISMS
1	Migration from Optical Mark Recognition to the introduction of Biometric Technology for the Voter Registration	The development of electoral cycle-based six year strategic plans
2	Migration from a manual recruitment process to the use of online recruitment portal for the recruitment of temporary	The development and use of detailed operational plans for BVR exercise and every major electoral activity.



	staff for the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR)	
3	The establishment of high standard results management portal	The development of a well-articulated recruitment plan for temporary staff for the BVR
4	Establishment of financial management systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) - HR, Procurement, Asset Management and Warehousing.	Assessment and, where necessary, adjustment of voter registration centers prior to the beginning of BVR exercise
5	Improvement in the integrity of the electoral system. Example, counting of ballots on the spot and publishing of the results on the spot at polling centers.	Dispute resolution mechanism that grants due process to parties in electoral disputes.