

# NATIONAL CONSULTATION REPORT ON RECOMMENDATION 78

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AG</b>	Attorney General
<b>APC</b>	All People's Congress
<b>ECSL</b>	Electoral Commission Sierra Leone
<b>EMB</b>	Electoral Management Bodies
<b>FPTP</b>	First Past The Post
<b>ICPNC</b>	Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion
<b>IDEA</b>	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
<b>NACEED</b>	National Council for Civic Education and Democracy
<b>PPRC</b>	Political Party Regulation Commission
<b>PR</b>	Proportional Representation
<b>PWD</b>	Persons With Disability
<b>SLPP</b>	Sierra Leone People's Party

# Consolidated Report

## Executive Summary

The nationwide stakeholder consultations on Sierra Leone's Preferred Electoral System were a significant step toward fostering an inclusive, participatory, and people-centred electoral reform process. Through its European Union-funded Sierra Leone Democracy Strengthening Programme, International IDEA supported the Office of the Attorney General and the Tripartite Committee Secretariat to hold five regional, four technical expert conversations and a national dialogue on the preferred electoral system for Sierra Leone. The consultations were conducted in compliance with Recommendation 78 of the Tripartite Committee Report. This committee was established after the signing of the National Unity Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the main opposition APC party, following the contested outcome of the June 2023 elections.

While the technical discussions were held in Freetown, the engagements were held at the five regional headquarters of Port Loko, Makeni, Bo, Kenema and Waterloo (for the Western Area), bringing stakeholders from across the districts within each region. The aim was to engender an inclusive, open, and meaningful dialogue to elicit perspectives and recommendations of key stakeholders on their preferred and most suitable electoral system for the 2028 elections and thereafter. The deliberations presented an engaging and robust discussion on issues concerning the various versions of the First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation electoral systems used in Sierra Leone since 1996. The National Council for Civic Education and Development (NaCCED) was also supported by International IDEA to engage with citizens and stakeholders, infusing civic engagement values into the national dialogue. The Attorney General, co-chair of the tripartite committee, head of International IDEA in Sierra Leone, various resident ministers, mayors/ chairpersons, EMBs, security personnel, experts, academicians, political parties, civil society organisations, local authorities, representatives of the inter-religious council, and the diplomatic communities delivered remarks and participated in the deliberations.

During consultations across the country, presentations were made on the comparative analysis of various electoral systems, examining their use and applicability in different political contexts and democracies. The discourse incorporated regional contexts of some African countries practicing the First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) electoral systems.

The engagements also presented participants with the opportunity to deepen their insights into the advantages and disadvantages inherent in both the PR and FPTP electoral systems. Examples of countries practicing the mixed electoral system were also shared, alongside accompanying challenges that are associated with each adopted system. Furthermore, the participants were allowed to contextualize the electoral systems with Sierra Leone's legal and sociopolitical realities. The presentations emphasized that the selection of an electoral system should be informed by the desire to have a democratic system that seeks to strengthen representation, legitimacy, inclusivity, national cohesion, and accountability. Stakeholders demonstrated deep interest in understanding the practical implications of different electoral models. Opinions were diverse and often reflective of national socio-political dynamics and institutional priorities. In some instances, the conversations appear like a referendum between the PR and FPTP electoral system, with deepen divergencies depending on the region of the country, and or the constituents you are consulting.

Despite the sharp divergencies on the preferred electoral system, which mostly follows Sierra Leone's ethno-regional and political divide<sup>[1]</sup> between the north-west and south-eastern region,



participants also explored the Mixed-member Proportional Representation electoral system, which many participants recognized as a viable approach to balancing the strengths and mitigating the weaknesses of both the FPTP and the PR. The dialogue sessions revealed a shared appreciation that no one-size-fits-all model exists, and that the goal should be to adopt a system that aligns with Sierra Leone's socio-political, democratic development and institutional capacity and the commitments of effective and inclusive representation, especially the quota system provided for in the GEWE Act of 2022 and the provisions of the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report of 2004 on youth and PWD representation.

## Background and Context

The 2023 Presidential and general elections in Sierra Leone were an epoch-making reiteration of the country's commitment to enhancing its democratic credentials. While questions were raised about the integrity of elections, they presented the country with another opportunity to adopt a context-driven and citizen-centric electoral system that responds to the myriads of challenges that post-conflict Sierra Leone has experienced. The need for a thorough democratic and social engineering system through a national conversation that reflects the will of the citizens will be pivotal for the country's democratic values.

Sierra Leone has alternately used the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems in conducting general elections since 1996. Over time, voters have experienced both systems and their implications for representation, accountability, and legitimacy. Reviews about the merits and demerits of both electoral systems are mixed.

The use of the District Block Proportional Representation (PR) and the announcement of the June 2023 elections triggered a dispute between the Government of Sierra Leone and the main opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) party. The disagreements that followed the post-June 2023 elections were characterized by contested results, legal disputes, and a widening public discourse on the need for extensive electoral reforms. The APC and some civil society organisations challenged the constitutionality of the switch from the FPTP system—prescribed under Section 38 of the 1991 Constitution—to the PR system under Section 38(a) which seem to grant the latitude to the President to choose an electoral system depending on the circumstances.

In response to the calls for participatory, inclusive and electoral reforms, and in line with Recommendation 78 of the Tripartite Committee's report, International IDEA collaborated with the Office of the Attorney General and the Tripartite Committee Secretariat to convene a series of nationwide stakeholder consultations across the country. The dialogue was designed to create space for frank reflections, dialogue, education, and consensus-building on the future of Sierra Leone's electoral system.

The consultations aimed to deepen citizens' understanding of electoral systems, especially the FPTP and the PR, stimulate robust discussions on possible options, and gather informed input on the most suitable system for the country's polarized socio-political and democratic context. The stakeholder consultations also benefited from extensive comparative analysis from Western and African democracies that would be instrumental in co-creating recommendations that reflect Sierra Leone's unique historical, political, and economic realities.

[1] With a high preference of FPTP in the North and Western Regions, while the South and Eastern Regions mostly preferred PR

Ultimately, the consultations demonstrated Sierra Leone's commitment to democratic values and accountable and participatory governance. They also underscored the fact that no electoral system is perfect, but that context-sensitive reforms, grounded in local knowledge and social realities and comparative knowledge, offer the best path toward a credible and inclusive electoral future with a preferred electoral system for Sierra Leone. A system that could be trusted, carrying the legitimacy as a process pivotal to peace and stability.

"The ongoing national consultations and dialogues across the country for citizens to provide their input into the deliberations on the choice of electoral system for Sierra Leone are monumental. Our government is delighted that citizens from all walks of life, with diverse views, are participating in a debate that will shape the future of our country. As a government, we are committed to implementing the recommendations of the tripartite committee and completing the ongoing constitution review process." Dr David Moinina Sengeh (Chief Minister)

## Objectives of the Consultation

- To facilitate an inclusive and constructive national dialogue with the inclusion of all major stakeholders and interest groups.
- To increase citizens' knowledge about the two main electoral systems - design, operational features, and implications of the FPTP and PR systems, including their variants (e.g., open vs. closed list PR, majoritarian vs. mixed systems), using comparative and context-sensitive analyses.
- Generate conversations towards a citizen-informed and context-specific preferred electoral system.
- Identify reform areas in party structures, electoral laws, and inclusion mechanisms.
- Catalyze discussions that could inform legal and constitutional reforms for democratic strengthening.

## Methodology and Structure

At each session, senior government representatives, the Special Executive Adviser to the President on Public Sector Reform, the Coordinator Tripartite Secretariat, the Office of the Attorney General, and International IDEA narrated the rationale for the exercise, their roles and expectations. Prior to the expert conversations and nationwide regional consultations, International IDEA commissioned a paper on "A Comparative Analysis of the First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation electoral systems used in post-conflict Sierra Leone" which eventually became the background paper for all public engagements on the implementation of Recommendation 78 of the Tripartite Committee Recommendations. The 10 days consultations involved presentations, facilitated discussions, an expert panel discussion with discussants to dissect the various electoral systems and their impact on Sierra Leone's democratic ecosystem, as well as their expectations from the exercise. The key facilitators included electoral experts and researchers Joe Pemagbi, Valnora Edwin, and Chibueze Onah. Their comparative presentations examined global practices and regional examples (e.g., Germany, New Zealand, Kenya), highlighting the merits, limitations, and adaptability of FPTP, PR, and hybrid systems. The feedback and discussion sessions that followed the formal presentations in all stakeholder dialogues gave the participants the opportunity to dissect the electoral systems and gauge their relevance to Sierra Leone's socio-political and democratic landscape.

## Stakeholders Consulted:

- Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)
- Security Sector
- Religious and traditional leaders
- Political parties
- Youth, women, and PWDs' representatives
- Security sector officials
- Expert Engagements with the civil society, media and academic institutions

## Key Findings and Thematic Insights

- FPTP advocates emphasized simplicity, direct accountability, and constituency linkage. They stated the simplicity of the system and its potential to promote candidate responsibility and local representation as some of the core value of FPTP. However, participants raised concerns about the patronage, nepotism, and clientelism that have plagued the political ecosystem of Sierra Leone.

**“The ongoing national consultations and dialogues across the country for citizens to provide their input into the deliberations on the choice of electoral system for Sierra Leone is monumental. Our government is delighted that citizens from all walks of life, with diverse views, are participating in a debate that will shape the future of our country. As a government, we are committed to implementing the recommendations of the tripartite committee and completing the ongoing constitution review process.” Dr David Moinina Sengeh (Chief Minister)**



- Threshold debate: Participants unanimously opposed the 11.9% threshold used in the 2023 elections because it excluded smaller parties and undermined the representational logic of PR. There was a consensus for a 5%–7% threshold, which is considered the internationally accepted range that encourages representation, affirmative action, and promotes political diversity. There was a consensus for a lower threshold ranging from 3% to 7% to be considered .
- There were calls to consider a regional level PR as a pathway to reducing the threshold with each region having a threshold based on the number of MP seats in that region.
- PR supporters highlighted the inclusive and multiparty nature of PR, especially its ability to reduce wasted votes and enhance gender representation. Many favoured an open-list, constituency-based PR model to address accountability and voter empowerment based on concerns that PR compromises the representation and accountability of elected leaders.
- Hybrid Model proponents recommended combining the advantages of both systems, e.g., FPTP at local levels and PR at national levels. This model was seen as responsive to Sierra Leone's complex democratic needs



# Representation and Inclusion

Participants made strong calls for affirmative action:

- Minimum 30% representation for women (some proposing 40%).
- Reserved seats for persons with disabilities (5%) as recommended in the TRC report.
- Reserved seats for youth as recommended by the TRC report
- Legal mechanisms for inclusion of youth and minorities.
- Kenya's gender quota system (47 women-only parliamentary seats) was frequently cited as a replicable model.

## Political Party and Institutional Reform

- Participants stressed the need for institutionalization of political parties, particularly strengthening internal party democracy, transparent primaries, and constituency-based candidate selection.
- There were strong calls for institutional reform of state institutions, particularly EMBs (ECSL and the PPRC), to enhance neutrality, transparency, financial independence, and oversight.
- Proposals emerged for consultative appointment of electoral commissioners as provided for in the Tripartite recommendations, improved civic education, and public financing of elections.

## Conclusion

The stakeholder consultations involving political parties, election management bodies, civil society, and other key stakeholders, were conducted across the country to review the current system and chart a path forward.

While the consultations were inclusive, engaging and enriching, various perspectives were shared within the groups engaged. Despite these stark divisions, there were some common grounds around a mixed electoral system – combining the good traits of FPTP and those of PR, with a reduced threshold largely tied to regions rather than districts

There was also a common ground for making elections more credible and EMBs more transparent and inclusive. The question of a clean voter register, and a transparent result management system were considered critical to clean elections and inclusive political processes.



## Recommendations

- Urgent need for a constitutional amendment to accommodate proposed recommendations from the national consultations.
- Adopt an electoral system that ensures effective representation, accountability, and fosters national cohesion –a hybrid system as the National electoral system of Sierra Leone with safeguard provisions relating to guidelines and regulations to address (threshold, representative accountability, political party candidate selection, list management, gender and diversity, maintaining boundaries, etc.
- A regional level open list PR that combines the benefits of FPTP and proportional representation with significantly reduced thresholds (unique to each region based on the number of seat or region) could be considered
- Demand for the acceleration of the constitutional review process emphasizing general electoral reform issues such as a definitive election date. A transition legislation and the appointment of the Electoral Management Body (EMB) leadership.
- Accelerate the implementation of other Tripartite Committee Recommendations around elections, especially those dealing with Voter registration and result management, will be critical to the roll out of the preferred electoral system.
- Legislate a transition law (date of elections, determination of results, handing and taking over), to ensure all post-election matters are concluded before the swearing-in process.
- Electoral reforms to include electoral financing (regarding quantum/ volume, predictability/ availability/ timeliness to EMBs) as well as monitoring and regulation of funding of political parties.
- Strengthen the capacity of the EMBs, particularly the PPRC, to support the institutionalization of political parties by establishing rules that foster regional balance and inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disability at all levels.
- Electoral reforms must adopt an affirmation action approach that reserves/fixed seats to engender the representation of women, youth, and PWDs in parliament.



# Annexes

## Notes from Consultations

# ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES & THE SECURITY SECTOR

**TOPIC: The National Consultation on the preferred Electoral System in Sierra Leone (Tripartite Committee Recommendation 78).**

**VENUE: Brookfields Hotel Freetown**

**DATE: 18TH JUNE 2025**

## BACKGROUND

The engagement with the EMBs and security sector was held at the New Brookfields Hotel in Freetown, on the 18th of June 2025. It had in attendance top management staff of the EMBs, representatives of the security forces, International IDEA Sierra Leone, the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Tripartite Committee Secretariat, Special Adviser to the President on Public Sector Reform, Chief Electoral Commissioner for Sierra Leone, other commissioners and staff of the ECSL, and the directors of the PPRC.

The event started with opening remarks by Dr. Idrissa Mamoud Tarawalli (Country Director, International IDEA Sierra Leone). He appreciated all participants and commended the demonstrated commitment on the side of government in support of the implementation of the tripartite committee's recommendations especially "Recommendation 78" that requires a nationwide consultation with all the key stakeholders across the electoral process value chain and the nation at large in the review of the current electoral system in use in the country with a view to adopting a preferred electoral system.

He provided a brief background to the process that informed the initiative, which he stated was part of the eighty (80) recommendations by the Tripartite Committee's resolution which, recommended a National Consultative Dialogue to determine a preferred electoral system that is most suited for Sierra Leone.

He also highlighted the importance of adopting a system that will advance the participation of women, persons with disabilities and youth in the electoral process of the country. He concluded by appreciating the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mr. Alpha Sesay who has shown great commitment to deliver on the recommendations. Other speakers included the Mr. Ngolo Katta (Coordinator, Tripartite committee secretariat), Dr. Emmanuel Gaima (co-chair of the Tripartite committee), and Mr. Mohamed Konneh (Chief Electoral Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, ECSL).

They all applauded the initiative and took turns to provide insights into the advantages and disadvantages of both the PR and FPTP systems. Some of the speakers also advocated for a hybrid or mixed system as obtained in other climes, where you adopt a system that incorporates the positives of both systems into one for the country.



The key speakers were unanimous in the fact that the threshold of 11.9% used in the last election was considered very high and way above the global average of about 5% which they believe when adopted as the acceptable benchmark here in Sierra Leone would enable the electorates enjoy the full potentials of the PR system which include reduction of wasted votes and promotion of multi-party politics.

## OBJECTIVES:

The key objective of the consultative engagement with the electoral management body (EMA) and the security organisations was to consult, in adherence to the final report of the Tripartite committee's recommendation 80, which clearly suggested a National Dialogue to determine a preferred electoral system for Sierra Leone.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHT

Day one featured a presentation by one of the national consultants, Mr. Joe Pemagbi title "A comprehensive analysis of electoral systems in. Sierra Leone" The presentation provided historical perspectives that preconditioned the use of either the First Past the Post (FPTP) or the Proportional Representation (PR) systems in previous elections in Sierra Leone. The report highlighted the varying versions of electoral systems while providing key advantages and disadvantages of each. The presentation deepened their understanding of the possibility of adopting a hybrid system that will accommodate both the positives of the FPTP and PR system into a single system.





He concluded his presentation by urging participants not to be influenced by primordial sentiments in choosing a preferred electoral system but rather encouraged them to prioritise a system that will be less complex to manage and that encourages people-oriented representation in elective positions in Sierra Leone.

## PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS

### FPTP PREFERENCE

- It is believed that if political parties are well structured and regulated, the FPTP, if adopted, would produce a people-oriented accountable representation.
- The simplicity of the FPTP was greatly admired by those who advocated for its adoption as a preferred alternative. They argued it provides a strong link between the electorate and the constituents and strengthens accountability of elected public representatives.
- It was argued that the FPTP system had previously produced a multi-party representation in parliament as opposed to a two-party system currently in the present parliament.

### PR PREFERENCE

- The open list constituency PR system was preferred as an alternative option to the currently practiced closed-list PR system
- A threshold of around 5% or below is a more acceptable figure as it is believed to accommodate upcoming political parties.
- A national threshold should not be used as a factor for determining the threshold if PR is adopted. It weakens representation for districts with smaller population sizes. Hence, a district threshold system could be appropriate for the Sierra Leone context.

### HYBRID PREFERENCE

- A hybrid, taking on board the best features of both the FPTP and PR, adapted to the Sierra Leone context, was proposed as a workable solution that would address the concerns.

**Former Cllr Sellu from Pujehun in her contribution, stated that ‘ the ongoing reforms should consider more than a 30% representation for women’**

## **BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

- Need to adopt an electoral system that will encourage and protect the participation of women, youth, and persons with disability.
- Adopt a system that will set aside a securitized provision in law that prescribes a certain number of seats that are contested by only women, so as to ensure effective participation of women in governance.
- Political parties should reform their internal structures to foster internal party democracy and accommodate a transparent representation of minority groups – women, youth, persons with disability, and minority ethnic groups

## **INTER- RELIGIOUS COUNCIL**

**TOPIC: The National Consultation on the preferred Electoral System in Sierra Leone (Tripartite committee recommendation 78).**

**VENUE: Brookfields Hotel Freetown**

**DATE: 19TH JUNE ,2025.**

### **BACKGROUND**

Discussions around the preferred electoral system continued with a cross-section of the Inter-Religious Council in Sierra Leone. They are a critical stakeholder, noting their important role as mediators and peace brokers, noting their critical role in ending the civil war and during political disagreements and various issues of national concern. Representatives were drawn from the various Christian denominations, Muslims, and those who practiced the Jewish faith.

The day's proceedings started with goodwill messages and background to the engagement from Dr. Mamoud Idriss Tarawally of International IDEA, Dr. Emmanuel Gaima, the Special Executive Adviser to the President on Public Sector Reform and Mr. Ngolo Katta the Coordinator of the Tripartite Secretariat and convener in collaboration with the office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The key objective of the consultative engagement with the religious bodies as a sector was to consult on the preferred electoral system for the country as prescribed by recommendation 78 of the Tripartite committee's recommendation, which clearly suggested a National Dialogue to determine a preferred electoral system for Sierra Leone.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

For a more informed conversation, three facilitators were engaged to accompany the process. These were Mr. Joe Pemagbi, Ms. Valnora Edwin, and an international expert, Mr. Chibueze Francis Onah. The conversation started with a presentation from Joe Pemagbi based on his research titled, 'A Comparative Analysis of the FPTP and the PR Electoral Systems.' The presentation captured Sierra Leone's socio-political history and the current context, the issues around violence, limited representation of interest groups, particularly women as aspirants, and candidates and how these experiences were captured using both the First Past The FPTP and the PR electoral systems. He discussed the advantages and disadvantages of both systems, emphasising that the systems could be used based on country context and should not be considered as two opposing systems. The presentation also highlighted the unique aspects of the hybrid electoral system that featured aspects of PR and aspects of FPTP. He elaborated on the various types of PR, including open and closed lists, hybrid systems such as mixed-member Proportional (MMP) and parallel voting. The FPTP included the single majority and the two-round system.

Chibueze Onah's presentation covered examples of countries that use the various systems and singled out the hybrid electoral systems (mixed-member proportional or Parallel voting) used by Germany, Israel, and New Zealand. Kenya was presented as a country with gender-responsive legislation that set aside 47 seats to be contested by women only, guaranteeing a huge female representation in their legislature.



## **PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS**

### **FPTP PREFERENCE**

- Most electorates were familiar and comfortable with the FPTP system, especially as it was a process with simple procedures. Concerned that a new system is being considered that appears complex.
- A people-centred system should be designed.
- Cost should not be seen as an impediment to what works for the electorate.
- Proponents contend that the argument that the FPTP breeds violence does not hold, as all elections held since 2007 have been violent and portray Sierra Leone's electoral processes in a poor light. The FPTP should therefore be retained.
- The FPTP should be modified to address the challenges of violence, women's representation, and accountability.

### **PR PREFERENCE**

- PR electoral process limits opportunities for violence; therefore, the preferred system.
- PR is worth exploring as it is cost-effective because bye-elections are not conducted, and the EMB does not conduct boundary delimitation which is time-consuming and capital-intensive and promotes the representation of interest groups.
- The PR electoral system translates all votes cast into seats. In essence, it prevents wastage of votes.

### **BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

- A system that promotes gender representation is more important than cost.
- A system that accommodates independent candidates should be considered.
- The PPRC should play a more robust role in regulating political parties to ensure they seek the interests of the populace.
- There is a need for stronger collaboration with CSOs to ensure parliamentarians adequately play their oversight roles and are more accountable.



**“Persons with disabilities will continue to demand a seat on the table to ensure that the chosen electoral system responds to our needs for representation and active participation in decision-making processes.” Brima Sheriff, Commission for Persons with Disabilities**

## **POLITICAL PARTIES**

TOPIC: The National Consultation on the preferred Electoral System in Sierra Leone (Tripartite committee recommendation 78).

VENUE: Country Lodge Hotel, Freetown

DATE: 20TH JUNE 2025.

### **BACKGROUND**

Dr. Mamoud Tarawallie informed participants about the strategic partnership that the International IDEA has forged with the Government of Sierra Leone through the Office of the Chief Minister, who co-chaired the Tripartite Steering Committee. Dr. Tarawallie recounted the genesis of his organization's presence in Sierra Leone and expressed gratitude to the ECSL for extending a formal invitation for his organization to support the ECSL's Risk Assessment ahead of the 2023 elections as part of the European Union's support to the 2023 elections.

He informed the audience that the International IDEA agreed to support the Agreement for National Unity and, eventually, the Tripartite Committee at the request of the Chief Minister, which includes supporting the establishment and operations of the Tripartite Secretariat. He added that International IDEA is currently supporting some consultants at the AG's office who are working on the legislative reforms proposed by the Tripartite Committee.

Ngolo Katta explained the role of the Tripartite Committee and the Secretariat's focus on recommendation 78 of the Tripartite Committee report and encouraged participants to ensure that the electoral system agreed on should be inclusive of women, youths and persons with disabilities (PWDs). While Dr. Emmanuel Gaima, the Special Adviser to the President on Public Sector Reforms, reminded the representatives of the political parties that reform efforts must conform with the dictates of the 1991 Constitution and other legal provisions that would eventually be included in the constitutional and legislative review processes. He, however, cautioned that clear parameters that focus on representation, inclusivity, a reduction of economic burden, peace, unity, and national cohesion must be considered when deciding our preferred electoral system.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHT

The preliminary statements were followed by presentations made by Joe Pemagbi, Chibueze Onah, and Valnora Edwin, who facilitated the discussions.

Joe Pemagbi delivered on his research titled, 'Report of the comprehensive analysis of the electoral systems'. The report captured the context of Sierra Leone's political history, the issues around violence, limited representation of women as aspirants and candidates, and how these experiences were captured using both the First Past The Post (FPTP) and the Proportional Representation electoral systems. The

report further discussed the advantages and disadvantages of both systems, emphasising that the systems could be used based on the country context and should not be considered as two opposing systems. There were hybrid systems that featured aspects of PR and aspects of FPTP. The report elaborated on the various types of PR, including open and closed lists, hybrid systems such as mixed-member proportional and parallel voting. The FPTP included the single majority and the two-round system.

Chibueze Onah's presentation covered countries with hybrid electoral systems (mixed-member proportional or parallel voting) - Germany, Israel and New Zealand. Kenya was presented as a country with gender responsive legislation on the representation of women through providing 47 women-only contesting seats for parliamentary representation.

- There was overwhelming consensus on the need to adopt an electoral system that promotes inclusivity and participation of all interest groups - women, youths and persons with disability. Additionally, the room leaned towards an electoral system that considers affirmative action to foster participation and representation, like Kenya, where 47 seats are reserved for women with provision made for young persons and PWDs.
- Extensively discussed the threshold set for the PR system used in the 2023 elections and urged the reduction from 11.9 to the international accepted standard of 5% – 6%.

## PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS

### FPTP PREFERENCE

- The simplicity of the First-Past-the-Post system, especially for counting and tabulation, was considered valuable.

### PR PREFERENCE

- The open list constituency PR system was preferred as an alternative option to the currently practiced closed-list PR system.
- A significantly lower threshold between 5- 7% could be adaptable to ensure representation and inclusion of financially challenged political parties if a PR system evolves as the preferred system.

### Broader Recommendations to Strengthen the Democratic process

- Political party strengthening and institutionalization would be of immense value to a new electoral system for Sierra Leone.
- Political party strengthening through technical capacity enhancement initiatives and financial support to facilitate the institutionalization of parties for transparency and accountability.

# EXPERT PANEL DISCUSSION

**TOPIC: Expert session on the national consultation on the preferred electoral system in Sierra Leone (Tripartite committee recommendation 78).**

**VENUE: COUNTRY LODGE HOTEL, FREETOWN**

**DATE: 21ST JUNE 2025**

## BACKGROUND

The National consultation on the preferred electoral system in Sierra Leone (Tripartite Committee's recommendation 78) engagement brought together experts from academia and civil society to present their perspectives on the topic. The public enlightenment engagement provided an intellectually stimulating platform which created an opportunity where experts from academia, election management, stakeholders, members of civil society organizations, television and radio stations across the country and other distinguished personalities converged and discussed key considerations on the preferred electoral system in Sierra Leone.

Also in attendance were the Head of International IDEA in Sierra Leone (Dr. Idrissa Mamoud Tarawallie), Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Mr. Alpha Sesay ESQ), Coordinator of the Tripartite Secretariat (Ngolo Katta), Special Adviser to the President on Public Policy (Dr. Emmanuel Gaima), and other important members of the public.

The event started with opening remarks by Dr. Idrissa Mamoud Tarawalli (Country Director International IDEA Sierra Leone), who set the tone for the day's conversation by welcoming all participants to the event. He further expressed optimism in the consultation process, affirming it will create the much-desired opportunity to interact with election management experts, which in his view will deepen their understanding towards making an informed choice in the ongoing process of adopting a preferred electoral system. Dr. Mamoud concluded by expressing heartfelt appreciation to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice Mr. Alpha Sesay, whom he described as a great supporter of the electoral reform process. Other speakers included Mr. Ngolo Katta, the Coordinator of the Tripartite Secretariat thanked International IDEA for supporting the entire process. He further expressed optimism on the importance of the expert panel discussion to the entire consultation process and highlighted the significance of the round-table discussion with some selected members of academia and civil society in this process maintaining it will offer academic perspectives to the entire process.

Dr. Gaima addressed both participants and members of the various media organisations at the event, and he went further to provide a detailed background of the entire formation process of the tripartite committee. He also used the opportunity to reassure participants of the President's unwavering commitment towards ensuring Sierra Leone adopts an electoral system that will be a true reflection of popular opinion.



## EXPERT SESSION

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHT

The expert session had Mr. Gavin Thompson Weise and Mr. Charles Hughes as panelists, and it was moderated by Mr. Joe Pemagbi. The event was televised live on both television and radio stations across the country.

The expert session started with a brief background of the paper 'a comparative study of the two electoral Systems in Sierra Leone' that discussed the two electoral systems previously used in the conduct of elections in the country. He further explained the rationale behind the current regional consultation on the preferred electoral system in Sierra Leone.

After providing the necessary background for the day's discussion, Mr. Joe Pemagbi invited the panelists to share their perspectives of both the PR and the FPTP electoral systems.

In his presentation, Gavin maintained that both the FPTP and PR electoral systems have produced credible election results globally. He further explained the inherent advantages and disadvantages of each of them. While concluding his introductory remarks, Mr. Gavin advised that if the country eventually decides to adopt a PR system, it should consider a 5% threshold limit, as it is a globally acceptable threshold across other countries that practice the PR system.

On the flipside, Mr. Garvin highlighted key advantages inherent in the use of FPTP system and maintained that it offers, through its accountability framework (the link between the elected representatives and the constituents), the opportunity of a direct engagement between the representatives and their constituents. He further explained the different types of PR systems and



provided a list of some countries that practice what is best described as a hybrid system, which combines parts of the FPTP and PR systems. He acknowledged the possibility of the adoption of the hybrid system for the Sierra Leonean context, even though the hybrid system has its challenges. Gavin, however, ended by emphasising the need to properly scrutinise the inherent disadvantages of both systems to make an informed decision while choosing a preferred electoral system for the country.

Mr. Charlie Hughes advocated for an open list PR system that would be constituency-based so that it would encourage accountability of elected representatives. He further provided detailed advantages that the PR system has over the FPTP system.

He ended his contribution by maintaining that every democracy should be primarily about the people and that any electoral system that does not prioritise the people should never be considered.

## PANEL DISCUSSION:

The event also had a panel discussion, which featured the following three personalities as key discussants, Ms. Lena Thompson, a Political Science Lecturer at Fourah Bay College University of Sierra Leone, Andrew Laval, a civil society democracy and governance expert and Prof. Fredline M'Cormack, President of the 50/50 Group that advocates for equal representation of men and women.



## KEY OUTCOMES OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

- Urgent need for the institutionalization of parties – political party reforms.
- Adopting a political structure that will encourage the participation of women and youth in government.
- Need to adopt the Kenyan example of dedicating a certain number of parliamentary seats to be contested only by women.
- Adopting an open list PR system that will be constituency-based to encourage accountability of elected representatives.
- A threshold of between 5%-7% was recommended.
- A hybrid or mixed electoral system that will accommodate both the positives of the FPTP and PR systems was recommended.
- The cost of conducting elections should be considered when determining the electoral system.
- Civic education and a continuous public enlightenment campaign on the electoral process were recommended.

## BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

1. The Kenyan model should be considered as an example of a mixed electoral system for the representation of women. In this model, a seat in each of the 47 counties of the country is dedicated to being contested only by women. An innovative initiative that many believed would provide a permanent solution to the issue of women's marginalization in governance.
2. An open list PR system that will be constituency-based was accepted as a way of resolving the current lack of accountability by elected representatives.
3. Strong arguments were presented on the need to reduce the age requirement for the office of the President to accommodate more innovative minds in the activities of serving the country at the highest level.
4. There was a consensus on the urgent need to reform the structures of political parties to reflect national character and the representation and participation of women in party politics.
5. A threshold of not more than 5% was recommended in the case of a PR system.
6. The FPTP system should continue to serve as the country's electoral system.

# REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

## NORTH-WEST REGIONAL CONSULTATION-PORT LOKO DISTRICT

DISTRICT- PORT LOKO

VENUE: NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY

DATE: 23RD JUNE 2025

### INTRODUCTION

The consultations for the North-West Region started at the Port Loko District in Port Loko city. Participants at the consultative dialogue were drawn from Karene, Kambia and Port Loko, representing women and youth groups, civil society organisations, teachers, senior secondary school students, religious leaders, and members of the security sector.

Welcoming statements were delivered by the Mayor of Port Loko City followed by the Resident Minister of the North-West region Ambassador Wurie. Dr. Mamoud Tarawallie from International IDEA presented an overview of their engagement with the tripartite committee and the desire of their agency to ensure democracy is strengthened in Sierra Leone. The final remark was delivered by Mr. Ngolo Katta, the coordinator of the Tripartite Secretariat, who enlightened participants on the activities of the Tripartite Secretariat and the status of the implementation of the recommendations.

### OBJECTIVE OF CONSULTATION

The objective of the consultation was to source the views of citizens on the preferred electoral system as prescribed by recommendation 78 of the tripartite report.

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

Following the preliminary statements and background of the conversation, the three facilitators - Joe Pemagbi, Valnora Edwin, and the international consultant Chibueze Francis Onah delivered their presentations and facilitated the discussions.

Joe Pemagbi's presentation focused on the findings of the research he had conducted on 'The Comparative Analysis of the Electoral System in Sierra Leone'. This research captured the use of the FPTP and the variants of the PR used in Sierra Leone since 1996, highlighting the key advantages and disadvantages of both systems and examples of hybrid systems. Key point emphasised was that both systems were not opposing processes but could complement each other resulting in hybrid systems. It was emphasised that it was not a party discussion but a system that would enrich the democratic process in Sierra Leone. Lessons covered the historical use of both First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation, learnt from the 2023 electoral process.

The next presentation delivered by Chibueze Onah highlighted the various types of proportional representation which were not familiar systems and examples of countries that included Germany, Israel, and New Zealand that employed hybrid/mixed systems such as the mixed-member proportional and the parallel voting. Kenya was presented as a country with provisions that provided mandatory representation for women.

The final session facilitated by Valnora Edwin provided an opportunity for the participants to share their perspectives on the electoral system building around the parameters of accountability, representation, inclusion, and transparency.



# PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS

## FPTP PREFERENCE

- In FPTP, power is given by the people and not political parties
- It promotes accountability as the electorates have an opportunity to evaluate their candidates or representatives
- FPTP is easy to understand and implement
- It ensures equitable representation

## PR PREFERENCE

- The PR system should be designed with an open list.
- There should be a PR system, but with a threshold that accommodates independent candidates.
- PR provides representation, demystifying the stronghold ideology.
- Though in support of the PR. There must be a design that limits the opportunity for abuse by political parties.
- The PR system should be applicable to all offices including that of the presidency, to address the winner-takes-all approach.
- If a PR system is selected, it should be designed to ensure members of parliament are drawn from all sections of the community in a constituency-based form.
- A lower threshold of about 6% should be considered in the PR system designed to accommodate more than two political parties.



## **HYBRID AS THE PREFERRED SYSTEM**

- This system provides the opportunity for voters to vote in their preferred candidate and political party

## **BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

- There must be deliberate efforts to strengthen the internal structures of political parties to become people-centred
- Widespread and intense public education is required if a new electoral system is designed.
- There should be an enabling act with a mandatory provision for parties to nominate persons with disability and other interest groups.
- The appointment of the electoral commissioner should be consultative. Political parties must be involved in the recruitment process.
- Electoral Management bodies, especially ECSL, should be reformed to enhance transparency and accountability.
- This current engagement seems limited, noting that the wider populace needs to be informed and engaged in the discussion.
- Politicians should be sincere and engage in activities that benefit all citizens.

## **NORTH-EAST REGIONAL CONSULTATION- MAKENI CITY**

DISTRICT: **BOMBALI**

VENUE: **MAKENI CITY COUNCIL**

DATE: **25th JUNE 2025**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The north-eastern phase of the national consultations brought together a wide range of participants from Falaba, Tonkolili, Koinadugu and Bombali districts to discuss the electoral systems that have been used thus far and hopefully carve a new electoral tool that works for Sierra Leone. With all the interest groups represented, the session commenced with solidarity statements from the major stakeholders.

The Mayor of Makeni, Abubakarr Kamara, extended a warm welcome to all participants and urged everyone to put Sierra Leone's interest above personal and political party interests.

On his part, the Resident Minister, Ibrahim Jalloh, encouraged participants to make a conscious decision in deliberating on the preferred electoral process for the country and noted that despite the controversies that plagued the Tripartite Committee Process, all Sierra Leoneans must look beyond their political party interests and put the country first. He reminded the participants that the consultations could shape future elections for decades, and therefore, they must be tolerant, objective, and respect each other's views as they deliberate.

Dr. Mamoud Tarawalie gave a brief background of his organization and the institution's mission in Sierra Leone. He emphatically cautioned the participants that the essence of the convening was to discuss the parameters that could guide stakeholders in determining the best electoral system for Sierra Leone. He stressed that whichever system is selected must guarantee peace, stability and representation, especially for women, youths and persons with disability. The Tripartite Secretariat

Coordinator, Ngolo Katta, gave a synopsis of the mandate of the secretariat and informed the audience that the Tripartite Committee had cross-party representation and international partners to ensure the integrity and credibility of their interventions. He explained the rationale for the establishment of the Tripartite Committee, the role of the secretariat and presented the national consultations process.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION**

The objective of the consultation was to ensure a citizen-driven national consultative process on the preferred electoral system as prescribed by recommendation 78 of the tripartite report.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

Joe Pemagbi presented his core research findings from his paper on 'The Comparative Analysis of the Electoral System in Sierra Leone'. His presentation focused on the two electoral systems that have been used in post-conflict Sierra Leone. He underscored the parameters that informed the use of the PR system including the threshold that has been used in all three instances. He presented the advantages and disadvantages and emphasized the contextual analysis that has informed their use and delved into the implications of implementing each system including a hybrid approach that could produce 'the best of both worlds.' He ended his presentation with some parameters that could be considered for the selection of an electoral system – representation particularly of all interest groups – women, youth and persons with disabilities, accountability, national stability, peace and cohesion and the cost of elections.

Chubueze Onah gave examples of countries practising both the FPTP and various versions of the PR system. He, however, brought to the fore the complexities of hybrid systems and low thresholds for the PR. His examples included Germany, Israel, and New Zealand that employed hybrid/mixed systems.

Valnora Edwin led the discussions that brought out diverse perspectives on both main systems while considering Sierra Leone's history, socio-political, and economic circumstances that could impact the choice of system.

There was overwhelming consensus on the need to adopt an electoral system that promotes inclusivity and participation of all interest groups - women, youths, and persons with disability. Additionally, the room leaned towards an electoral system that considers affirmative action to foster participation and representation, like Kenya, where 47 seats are reserved for women with provision made for young persons and PWDs.

Participants were deeply concerned about the process involved in deciding on the use of the PR system, as well as the 11.9% threshold.

The pros and cons of the two electoral systems that have been experimented were highlighted and deliberated upon.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS**

### **FPTP PREFERENCE**

- It is simple and familiar to the electorate.
- Legislative amendments for interest groups to be addressed.
- FPTP promotes accountability and a strong relationship between MP's and their constituents.



## **PR PREFERENCE**

- It should be an open list system that provides for voting for the candidate and the preferred political party
- Political parties should consult at the constituency and ward level on the preferred candidate to be included on the list
- There should be a lower threshold that could make room for smaller parties with the potential of broadening the democratic space.
- It provides an opportunity for increased representation of women
- A 5% threshold was recommended
- Advocacy for increased women's quota above 30% provided for in the GEWE legislation.

## **HYBRID PREFERENCE**

- The best of the two systems should be adopted
- A contextually responsive electoral system that addresses the core issues of accountability, representation, political party accountability and reduced cost of elections.

## **BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY**

- The quotas for women, youths, and persons with disability were upheld, and it was recommended that, regardless of system, there should be mandatory regulations that political parties must comply with.
- Political parties should be made accountable to ensure women, youth and persons with disability are included.
- The constitutional review process should consider reducing presidential powers in the appointments of certain offices including the Inspector General of Police, the leadership of the EMBs and the Chief Justice
- A national development plan should be established that all political parties and subsequent governments must inherit.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The room was sharply divided between the PR and the first-past-the-post system, with the majority opting for the latter because of its simplicity and propensity to enhance accountability and foster a closer relationship between the candidate and the electorate.
- Political party strengthening and institutionalization would be of immense value to a new electoral system for Sierra Leone.
- A significantly lower threshold between 5- 7% should be adopted to ensure representation and inclusion of financially challenged political parties.

## **EASTERN REGION CONSULTATION-KENEMA CITY**

DISTRICT: **KENEMA**

VENUE: **YARD HALL, MAXWELL KOBE STREET, KENEMA.**

DATE: **27TH JUNE 2025**

## **BACKGROUND:**

The regional consultation on the preferred electoral system in Sierra Leone (Tripartite committee recommendation 78) engagement was held in Kenema on 27th June, 2025 at the Yard Hall, Maxwell Kobe Street Kenema. The regional consultation in Kenema district brought together representatives from Kailahun and Kono districts. Solidarity statements were delivered by Mr. Joseph Bindi (chairman, NACCED), Mr. Jusu Jaka (Resident Minister East), Madam Frances Yamawai, (chairperson, Kenema District Council), Dr. Mamoud Tarawallie, (Head International idea), Mr. Ngolo Katta of the Tripartite Recommendations Secretariat.

The event started with welcome remarks offered by the Chairperson of Kenema district council and a brief remark by other dignitaries at the event. After the goodwill messages, Dr. Mamoud Tarawallie took the floor and provided the essence of the regional consultation. He reminded participants of the importance of a non-partisan disposition in the consultation process. While concluding the introductory remarks, Dr. Mamoud reiterated the importance of prioritizing an electoral system that will accommodate equitable representation of women, youth and persons with disability and that will ultimately prioritise the interest of the people.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

Mr. Chibueze Onah and Ms Valnora Edwin presented diverse perspectives of “a comparative analysis of electoral systems in Sierra Leone. They also presented examples of the implementation of diverse variants of the First Past the Post and the PR system. The consultants’ presentations deepened the participants understanding of the historical perspectives of both the PR and FPTP electoral systems in Sierra Leone, but also advanced their knowledge of the different variants of both FPTP and PR systems. Details in the two presentations exposed participants to the inherent advantages/ disadvantages of both the FPTP and PR systems while educating them with country examples of a possible mixed-method electoral system, which entails incorporating some positives of both PR and FPTP into a single mixed electoral system. At the end of the presentations which provided participants with a balanced mindset that aided open conversation towards making an informed recommendation of a preferred electoral system.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS**

### **FPTP PREFERENCE**

- Proponents of the FPTP maintained that it promotes accountability and is easier to understand and use in a predominantly low-literate population. They further berated the PR system, insisting it prioritises party loyalists over the electorate and therefore compromises internal party democracy.

### **PR PREFERENCE**

- Concerns were raised about the close PR list system, which allows political parties to submit names of candidates as elected party officials after the general election without due consultation with the people in a particular district to ensure the chosen candidate represents the popular



choice.

- Some supporters of the PR system maintained that it has an inherent advantage of reducing tension and violence, as they suggested was the case in previous elections conducted in Sierra Leone, where PR was used.
- The increased number of women in the present parliament was amplified as a demonstrable gain of the PR system, as it was argued that no previously conducted elections had matched such record.
- A strong case was made for an open list PR system that will be constituency-based, as many agreed it will encourage elected representatives to be accountable to their constituents and will also prioritise the people over political godfathers within political parties while delivering democracy dividends to the people.
- Concerns were raised as to whether women's representation should be kept at 30% representation or at least 30% female representation.

## **BROADER RECOMMENDATION TO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS**

- Concerns were raised about the cost of elections and that Sierra Leone needs to self-fund its own elections.
- Urgent need for public awareness campaign and civic education advocacy was highlighted as a catalyst for making informed decisions during the general elections.
- A strong case was made to allocate 5% percentage to persons with disability in the parliament as recommended by the TRC and the Tripartite report.
- Participants unanimously rejected the 11.9% threshold used in the last election. They argued that it denied the political ecosystem the primary benefit of a PR system which includes encouragement of multiple political parties and zero wasted votes. However, it was argued that the high threshold used in the last election alienated all the smaller political parties from participating in government, thereby rendering all the votes they gained wasted.

## **SOUTHERN REGION CONSULTATION-BO CITY**

DISTRICT: **BO**

VENUE: **Methodist Church Hall, Bo**

DATE: **28TH JUNE 2025**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Consultation for the preferred electoral system continued at the regional level across the country. The southern region session was held in Bo City. The hundred participants drawn from diverse backgrounds (teachers, senior secondary school students, councillors, representatives of persons with disability, civil society organisations- women, youths, election observers, lecturers, imams and pastors) were brought together from Bonthe, Pujehun, Moyamba and Bo.

Goodwill messages were received from the Resident Minister Mr. Abu and the Mayor, Mr. Kobba, Mr. Joseph Bindi, the Chairperson of the National Civic Education (NACEED) urged participants to be patriotic. The gathering was requested to read the first verse of the national anthem and the national pledge. Mr. Ngolo Katta, the coordinator of the Tripartite Secretariat presented an extensive overview on the background, objective and purpose of the consultative dialogue session. The gathering was reminded that the focus of the discussion was on recommendation 78 of the tripartite report that required a national consultation on the preferred electoral system.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

Following the preliminary statements and background of the conversation, the three facilitators-Joe Pemagbi, Valnora Edwin and Francis Chibueze Onah intervened with their presentations and facilitation of the discussion.

Joe Pemagbi's presentation centred around the findings of the research he had conducted on 'The Comparative Analysis of the Electoral System in Sierra Leone'. This research covered the historical use of both First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation since 1996, highlights the key advantages and disadvantages of both systems and provides examples of hybrid systems. The key point emphasised was that both systems were not opposing processes but could complement each other, resulting in hybrid systems. It was emphasised that it was not a party discussion but a system that would enrich the democratic process in Sierra Leone, lessons learnt from the 2023 electoral process.

The next presentation delivered by Chibueze Onah highlighted the various types of proportional representation, which were not familiar systems, and examples of countries that included Germany, Israel and New Zealand that employed hybrid/mixed systems. Kenya was presented as a country with provisions that provided mandatory representation for women.

The final session facilitated by Valnora Edwin provided an opportunity for the participants to share their perspectives on the electoral system building around the parameters of accountability, representation, inclusion, and transparency.

## **FPTP PREFERENCE**

- It is simple and understood by many.
- Regulations or enabling legislation must be in place to support the representation of women, youths, and persons with disability.
- The electoral commission should be independent.
- FPTP is a more accountable system-MPs are known and can be engaged
- FPTP promotes local presentation and ensures accountability

## **PR PREFERENCE**

- It should be an open list system.
- Political parties should consult at the constituency and ward level on the preferred candidate to be included on the list.
- There should be a lower threshold for opportunities to include other political parties besides the two parties, i.e., APC and SLPP.
- There should be a threshold that can support the participation of independent candidates.
- It provides an opportunity for increased representation of women.
- A 5% threshold was recommended.

- Women's quota should be increased to 40%

## HYBRID PREFERENCE

- The best of the two systems should be adopted
- All quotas should be included
- The system should be designed to address all concerns

## BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

- The quotas for women, youths, and persons with disability were upheld, and it was recommended that regardless of the system, there should be mandatory regulations that political parties must comply with.
- Political parties should be made accountable to ensure women, youths and persons with disability are included.
- The constitutional review process should consider reducing presidential powers in the





- appointments of certain offices, such as the Inspector General of Police and the Chief Justice.
- A national development plan should be developed. By doing so, all political parties and subsequently the government should build on.

## **WESTERN RURAL CONSULTATIVE DIALOGUE SESSION-WATERLOO**

**DISTRICT: WESTERN RURAL**

**VENUE: FRANDIA HALL**

**DATE: 30TH JUNE 2025**

Consultation on the preferred electoral system was held in the Western Rural village of Waterloo. It comprised participants from disciplines including-pastors, Imams, youth leaders, persons with disability group, women's organisations and civil society.

The session started with goodwill messages delivered by councillors from the Western Rural District council representing the All People's Congress Party and the Sierra Leone People's Party. Dr. Mamoud Idriss Tarawalie, representing International IDEA, provided an overview of their support to the process with the goal of strengthening the democratic process in Sierra Leone. Mr. Joseph Bindi, chairman of NaCEED, emphasised patriotism and requested all to recite the first verse of the national anthem and the national pledge. Mr. Ngolo Katta, the coordinator of the Tripartite Committee, presented a background on the operations of the secretariat, including the 80 recommendations that emerged as a product of the deliberations.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the consultation was to secure diverse views of the general populace on the preferred electoral system as prescribed by recommendation 78 of the tripartite report.

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS**

Following the preliminary statements and background of the conversation, the three facilitators-Joe Pemagbi, Valnora Edwin and Francis Chibueze Onah intervened with their presentations and facilitation of the discussion.

Joe Pemagbi's presentation focused on 'the' background paper instead of 'The Comparative analysis of the Electoral System in Sierra Leone' which was used as a background document. The research, highlighted the key advantages and disadvantages of both systems and examples of hybrid systems. The key point emphasised that both systems were not opposing processes but could complement each other resulting in hybrid systems. It was emphasised that it was not a party discussion but a system that would enrich the democratic process in Sierra Leone. Lessons covered the historical use of both First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation, learnt from the 2023 electoral process.

The next presentation delivered by Chibueze Onah highlighted the various types of proportional representation which were not familiar systems and examples of countries that included Germany, Israel and New Zealand that employed hybrid/mixed systems such as the mixed-member proportional and the parallel voting. Kenya was presented as a country with provisions for mandatory representation for women.

The final session facilitated by Valnora Edwin provided an opportunity for the participants to share their perspectives on the electoral system building around the parameters of accountability, representation, inclusion, and transparency.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON ELECTORAL MODELS**

### **FPTP PREFERENCE**

- Promotes accountability
- Ensures citizens can interact with their elected officials

### **PR PREFERENCE**

- PR enhances representation and dispels the stronghold ideology. Currently, there are members of the APC party serving as councilors at the Kenema City Council and members of the SLPP serving as councilors at the Freetown City Council.
- Representation is proportional and addresses the winner-takes-all practice
- A threshold should be designed for the PR that will accommodate more than two political parties.
- Quotas for interest groups (women, youths and persons with disability) should be included in the design of the selected PR system.
- PR prevents voter apathy.
- The PR should be an open list system
- The PR reduces the financial burden on political parties who need to conduct campaigns for by-elections.
- Supports a PR system that is flexible and designed to address our national cohesion and peace needs.

### **HYBRID PREFERENCE**

- In favour of a hybrid system that will ensure accountability, political party preference and participation at the ward committee level.
- The government should consider using FPTP for local councils and PR at the parliamentary level.

## BROADER RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE ELECTORAL AND DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

- A transition period to be legislated (three months after the presidential election to allow aggrieved persons to seek legal redress before the president-elect assumes office.
- Political parties should strengthen their internal democratic system.
- 5% representation of persons with disability must be included in any system designed following the recommendations of the TRC.

### Key findings

#### Regional Consultations on Sierra Leone's Electoral System: Summary of Key Issues and Recommendations

The regional stakeholder consultations held across all districts and regions of Sierra Leone on the country's preferred electoral system highlighted serious defects in the current electoral framework. A



central theme across the engagements was the widespread perception the EMB must earn the trust and confidence of the electorate and should be well-positioned to conduct credible elections. With public confidence in the electoral process substantially eroded, many people expressed concerns about the potential for political instability down the road if these issues are not addressed urgently.

Participants cited systemic inconsistencies in the conduct of the 2023 elections. Many argued that these failures developed from the inherently flawed electoral framework, as a result of the closed-list Proportional Representation (PR) system used in the last elections. This variant of the PR system allows only voters to choose parties rather than individual candidates. It was widely perceived as opaque, undemocratic, and unfair.

There was particular concern that the closed-list PR system enabled political parties to submit names of candidates as elected representatives without the informed consent of the electorate. Many saw this practice of privileging the political party over the voters as contrary to the democratic principles of voter choice and accountability.

As a result, a growing preference emerged for a hybrid system that would ensure candidates are selected to represent constituencies based on an open-list PR system. Many stakeholders believe this model would secure the power of free franchise and ensure elected representatives are more accountable to their constituents. The status quo would make elected officials indebted and beholden to party leadership.

The consultations also revisited the question of gender representation. There was significant debate about whether the current approach—treating 30% as the maximum threshold for women's representation—should be reframed to require at least 30% female representation. This shift would reflect a more substantive commitment to gender inclusion in governance.

A very strong recommendation is the need to institutionalize affirmative action, specifically a 5% minimum representation in parliament for persons with disabilities.

Another point of broad consensus was the rejection of the 11.9% threshold used in the 2023 elections. Participants argued that such a high bar undermined the core strengths of a PR system, especially its ability to accommodate multiple political voices and reduce wasted votes. In effect,

the threshold excluded smaller parties from representation, rendering the votes they received meaningless. Independent candidates should also be considered when determining the threshold. There was widespread agreement among PR supporters that a 5% threshold would better uphold the inclusive spirit of proportional representation.

Advocates of the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system, meanwhile, argued that it is more straightforward and better supports accountability by directly linking candidates to specific constituencies. They expressed concern that the PR model tends to prioritise party loyalists over genuine public representatives.

Beyond the technical aspects of electoral systems, there was also a strong call for sustained public awareness campaigns and civic education. Participants highlighted the need for long-term civic





engagement to enable citizens to make informed choices and participate meaningfully in electoral reform and democratic governance.

## **National Stakeholders Consultation and Validation Conference**

**July 17, 2025**

**Bintumani Conference Center, Aberdeen, Freetown**

The climax of the national Stakeholders conference was held on Thursday, July 17th, at the Bintumani International Conference Center, Aberdeen, in Freetown, with over three hundred and fifty (350) participants representing diverse walks of life from all 16 political districts of the country. The formal opening session of the stakeholders' conference was graced by Ministers of Government, Heads of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), members of the diplomatic corps, international and national civil society organizations, representatives of various interest groups, including the Sierra Leone teachers' union, persons with disabilities, women's rights advocates and youth. In his keynote remarks, the Chief Minister Dr David Sengh recollected a series of preliminary discussions held with the leadership of International IDEA to support the National Unity Agreement and, later on, the tripartite committees' recommendations to support Sierra Leone's democratic consolidation efforts. He emphasized the government's commitment to democratic values as expressed in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. Dr Idrissa Tarawallie urged the government and all stakeholders to recognize that the national dialogue on the preferred electoral system is a national conversation among Sierra Leoneans for the democratic future of Sierra Leone, one that must prioritize the national interest over individual and partisan interests.

Joe H Pemagbi presented a summary of the deliberations of the regional stakeholders meetings held in all five political regional headquarters towns. He explained the various variants of the PR in order to help the participants dissect the merits and demerits of the electoral system. He highlighted the following parameters that must be considered by the citizens represented by the participants:

- Citizens' representation must be enshrined in any electoral system selected.



- Interest groups, including persons with disabilities and youth should be enshrined in the electoral reforms in conformance with the TRC and Tripartite Committee recommendations.
- The country should select a system that significantly contributes to peace and national cohesion.
- Duty bearers' accountability must be a critical factor in the choice that will eventually be made.
- There is a need to reduce the cost of elections, considering donor fatigue and competing demands on the state's meagre resources.
- Following the presentation of position papers by the Council of Paramount Chiefs, civil society groups and the inter-religious council, participants remained divided between the First-Past-Post and the Proportional Representation (PR) system.

**“ As a nation, we’ve made significant progress towards ensuring that democracy thrives, but at this juncture, the country needs an electoral system that responds to our socio-political and economic realities. We want an electoral system that promotes national cohesion and reduces the cost of elections, so let’s be bold and innovative in shaping a system that works for us as Sierra Leoneans. “  
Alpha Sesay, Hon Attorney General  
and Minister of Justice**

