



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewer: Ashley McCants

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Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice  
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA  
[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

McCANTS: This is Ashley McCants here in Sierra Leone doing an elections interview. Would you please tell us your name?

PAILA: *I am Alex Tomahyei Paila, the Voter Education Officer and Public Relations Officer for the National Electoral Commission (NEC), Bo District. My profession has been journalism. I worked for the National Broadcast Society, Sierra Leone television and also Sierra Leone newspapers in Sierra Leone.*

McCANTS: Great. Thanks so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. We have about ninety minutes to talk. We have a number of subjects to discuss as we went over earlier. If you feel you want to say more on certain subjects and less on others that's fine. We always like to begin the conversation by learning a little bit more about your personal background. So you've told us that your position during the past elections. Could you explain kind of what your job was and what your goals were in this position?

PAILA: *At the Sierra Leone Broadcast Service, SLBS, the broadcasting service as media, radio and television in Sierra Leone, in the capital, Freetown. I worked as a reporter, a cub reporter. Later on I rose to the [Indecipherable 1:33] Deputy News Editor of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service. Where I was Deputy News Editor I worked on radio and also on television for five years. While at the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service I also used the opportunity to enter Fourah Bay College where I studied mass communication and I obtained a diploma in mass communication from 2000 to 2002 and later on I proceeded to read for the B.A. honor's degree in mass communication which I completed in 2005 after which I left the SLBS and attached to some of the newspapers in Sierra Leone, the Ceylon Times, and Spectator newspaper and also I served as a freelance reporter for some of the newspapers.*

McCANTS: Great. When did your work in the election administration begin?

PAILA: *During my work at the Spectator newspaper and while I was freelancing for several newspapers, I saw an advertisement by, sent in by—sent in the newspapers by the National Electoral Commission and I applied and I was accepted at the National Electoral Commission in 2007. I was also the voter education and public relations officer who was part of the team which conducted the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections which were acclaimed by people all over the world as they were credible. Later on because of my hard work and because of my good service to the commission I was later called for the local government elections which were held on July 5<sup>th</sup> and then later also I decided to come on board again the National Electoral Commission. The local government election, the period I was given for the work was five months because it was a five-month contract. Last year, 2007 I was given nine-month contract so my work now is more about elections and teaching people how to vote correctly and explaining the electoral processes to them.*

McCANTS: Most of this interview may focus on the most recent district elections but we also welcome comparisons to the previous elections that you worked in the 2007 presidential and parliamentary that you have served in. Very briefly it would be helpful for you to describe the mission of the district elections, the goals and objectives for which you were hired and could you just describe these briefly?

PAILA: *The National Electoral Commission thought that the country is so large that if you want people to understand, you are, we have over, we have about 30% literate people and about 70% illiterate people. The thing about voting, you need to bring*

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*on board voter education officers. So the commission thought it wise and we were employed as voter education officers and distributed to the districts. I was lucky to be sent to Bo. Of course Bo is a mainly dominated district, Bo City is the second capital city of Sierra Leone. So the commission thought it was necessary for us to be sent at the districts, every district to have a voter education officer, to explain to the people about the electoral process so that they would vote correctly during the elections.*

McCANTS: What would you say are the biggest challenges that arose in the election environment?

*PAILA: One of the problems is because of the large number of illiterate people in the country the problem is getting the people to understand the process. So our job as voter education officers, we were sent into the field to teach the people. For instance, I speak Mende so I have to use Mende as a means of communication to explain these issues. The people understanding the process is one problem. Also the terrains, at times you have to use boats to go to some of those villages. At times you have to walk on foot to go to some of those villages. Some roads are not accessible so you have to go there by foot and that was very, very difficult. So those are some of the problems.*

*Logistical problems also include the ARFF vehicles. Voter education officers I believe should have, although we are given vehicles which we used, but voter education is very important in the electoral process so the voter education officers we are supposed to have vehicles on their own to make sure that they carry out voter education every day. Voter education is a continuous process, it is not a process that you start and finish and then forget about every day, until after the elections. So these are some of the problems we encountered during the past three elections.*

McCANTS: How long, from your end, how long did the electoral process take from the first kind of initial planning discussions that you were having until the end of the process, about how long was that?

*PAILA: The process, for instance, the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections started before, that is around November or December 2006. There the planning took place wherein the consensus was done to ensure that we disseminated the information about the constraints. So we were brought on board in January 2007 for the elections in August. Also the local government elections. After the presidential and parliamentary elections, the process was planned between November and December and we came on board in March. Between November to March the process was planned. The wards were delimited because in the local council elections you no longer talk about consensus, we talk about what. So once we are delimited and brought on board for the process. So it is about—the first one is about five months and the other one is about four months to plan the actual process for the elections.*

McCANTS: Did weather or planting seasons or other kinds of landmark events change the timing or the sequencing of the election events?

*PAILA: No, since I worked for the National Electoral Commission for almost one year and a half now, the weather does not change the—the electoral timetable is fixed and even it rains for the rest of the day, voting has to go on. So it did not change last year when it was held in August, during the rains, and it was, the timing was not changed because of the weather. This one, which was held on the fifth of July did not also change because it did not rain all over the country on that*

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*particular day. So the weather does not change the electoral process because it is done according to the time lines stated by the constitution of Sierra Leone, the 1991 constitution.*

McCANTS: Moving on to talk a little bit about staffing. Can you tell me how were staff members recruited where you were working and poll workers or staff members recruited?

PAILA: *The National Electoral Commission ensures that it employs efficient and qualified staff. So whenever they want to employ staff they send an advertisement on the newspapers, on the radio stations after which we apply. After we applied for the particular positions we were called for examination. It does go for an interview. Examination after examination. If you pass the basic test, after the test, you will be called for an interview. After the interview there has to be a thorough check on your background to see if you are politically neutral before you are brought on board.*

*The National Electoral Commission as you know is an independent commission and if you are brought on board, they will have to check your background to ensure that you are not politically active in some way and partisan or politically active. So in that case, even if you pass the exams or you pass the interview, you will not be brought on board because the commission is having, always, to get neutral people on board after which, when you go to the district, when we are sent to the district as district staff, we met the core staff who are there who also have to go through a lot of exams, who have to go through a lot of interviews before they are employed.*

*For instance, in Bo, we have, the National Electoral Commission, we have the Chief Electoral Commissioner as the boss. We have the Executive Secretary as deputy. Then we have the commissioners, five commissioners, commissioners for the south, east, west, north and you also have the commissioner for the western area and the commissioner for the east. So they ensure that five commissioners are there. Then according to the district staff, we have the district electoral officer. We have the assistant district electoral officer. We have the training officer. We have the voter education and public relations officer. We have the logistics officer. So we have core five staff in the district, at all district levels.*

*Also at the district level we ensure that when we get to the district, we have the field staff, we recruit the field staff. So out there in the past elections we had what you call the election monitors. We recruited monitors. And in the local governments' election we recruited ward coordinators because in the local governments' elections we are not talking about constituency monitors, we are talking about ward coordinators because we are dealing with wards instead of constituency. So the ward coordinators have to through the same process, they have to take the examination. After the examination they have to go for an interview and when they go for an interview they submit the document, you ensure that they are correct. They make sure they are authentic and we employ them according to their performance and their qualification.*

*After which, for the polling staff, advertisement is always made during the registration process. We recruit staff for the registration process. We recruit people who call the registrar, the assistant registrar, the photographer and laminator. So we recruit those people. Then during polling, elections, we have several, about six staff. So the coordinators recruit with our own assistant, the core staff assistant, they recruit—for instance the presiding officer, the polling center manager, the queue controller, the voter identification officer and also the*

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*ballot box controller and the ballot issuer. So at least six staff. So at the National Electoral Commission these are the staff who at least carry out the functions of the commission.*

*Then you must also realize that we have different sections or different units in the National Electoral Commission. We have the logistic units, we have the Finance Unit, we have the Administrative unit and also we have the engineering unit. We have the IT and several other units so these are the staffs basically on the National Electoral Commission.*

McCANTS: At the district level for the most recent election, was the staff size adequate for the responsibilities that you had to carry out? Did you feel that there were kinds of skills or kinds of coverage that were in short supply?

PAILA: *For instance, the staff was sufficient for the registration because during the registration we did not do fresh registration. We are trying to update our final voter register. So we had to ensure that we carried out registration, we update the final voter register. Those who did not reach the voting age, 18, had to register during the registration period. Those who transferred from one town to another and those who did not actually register for the 2007 elections. So the staff we had was adequate for the job and they did the job perfectly.*

McCANTS: How were the poll workers in your district, how were they trained? Was the international community involved or helpful in conducting the training and did you think that this training was adequate?

PAILA: *Yes. Then the UN, the UNOMSIL (United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone), the office in Sierra Leone, helped the National Electoral Commission and we had to, I, the voter education officer and then the training officer, we are called during each process. Registration we are called at the [Indecipherable]. We have the UN headquarters, we are trained there for three days and after that training we go there and train the ward coordinators. After training the ward coordinators, the ward coordinators ensure that they train, with our supervision, they train the polling staff or the registration staff.*

*For the senior, the district electoral officer and the assistant district electoral officer, the NEC training team from Freetown goes into the district and they train those two core staffs. Then they ensure that they get the information because we are also supported by UN advisors, in the name of UNVs (United Nations Volunteers) who actually back us up in the area of training and voter education and the logistics. They were in the field, another UN vehicles were obtained and sent to us by the UN. So we get a lot of UN assistance during registration and also polling.*

McCANTS: Was there any evaluation or monitoring of the performance of the poll workers and if so how were they evaluated or monitored?

PAILA: *The workers, normally during the training programs the UNVs or the UN advisors ensure that they are part of the training and ensure that the training officer and then the voter education officer pass on the correct information. In the National Electoral Commission we talk about procedures. So when we get the procedures we ensure that we pass on the same procedures with ward coordinators and from the ward coordinators they pass on the same information to the staff. They are monitored. We don't just train staff. The ward coordinators do not just train staff. The UN guides ensure that they monitor the training and evaluate.*

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*During the training if we find out that a particular staff is not capable to carry out his duties or her duties we ensure that that particular person is replaced immediately.*

McCANTS: And are they monitored after the training, at the time of the—?

PAILA: *Yes, they are monitored after the training also, by the monitoring team. The training officer and the UN Advisor on Training and Voter Education ensures that they visit all the centers, all the registration centers, all the polling stations, all the polling centers to make sure that the staff carry out their work professionally. If not, if they are not capable to carry out their work well they will be replaced on the spot.*

McCANTS: What steps were taken to protect poll workers from threats? Did you experience any kind of threats and if so, what kind of protection was offered to the poll workers and did you think that this was effective?

PAILA: *We had a lot of military and police presence during the elections. Even before the elections I ensured that as the voter education officer I disseminate the information that, for instance, the party agents, we just need one party agent at the time in the particular polling station. So we don't want to die at the polling station - and then the police. The police assured us and provided one security per polling station, per polling center. One security, one Sierra Leone police officer per polling center. And also, in these past elections we had military guys, that is the military police officers. They were also in full gear ensuring that they were monitoring the process and patrolling all the centers to ensure that there was no violence.*

*In the Bo district we had no case of violence in the Bo district or intimidation of workers of NEC. It did not happen.*

McCANTS: Often there are difficulties in delimiting the boundaries or the districts for an election. Can you describe how the boundary delimitation process worked in this most recent election in terms of the wards and who was responsible for doing that?

PAILA: *Development in any country is determined according to the population quota. So we have what we call Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL). Statistics Sierra Leone workers also provide information on the total number of registered people in the population in the country. In 2004 we had a population housing census wherein Statistics Sierra Leone supplied the information, the accurate information on the number of people in the country. During the delimitation of the wards in the local council elections, the National Electoral Commission, our Chief Electoral Commissioner, Dr. Christiana Thorpe worked closely, Dr. Thorpe and other senior staff of the National Electoral Commission worked closely with the Statistics Sierra Leone.*

*So Statistics Sierra Leone has the duty to provide information on the population. So NEC worked closely with Statistics Sierra Leone and did the boundaries, the ward boundaries according to the population of the people in particular districts, in the particular area. It was delimited. The national population divided according to the number of districts, the number of districts in the country. So it was really divided according to the population of the particular area. So the quota was used according to the information supplied the NEC by Statistics Sierra Leone. So it was purely done according to the population.*

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*So, for instance, in Bo, in Bo we have 29 wards in Bo. We have three wards which are multi-member wards, then we have the balance which are single member wards. So we have 29 wards in the Bo district. Bo is just one of the districts in Sierra Leone. Then the National Electoral Commission worked closely with Statistics Sierra Leone and they arrived at the figures and then the wards they gave us during the local government elections.*

McCANTS: Are there laws that govern the role of the NEC in terms of boundary, in terms of delimiting the boundaries? Or are there regulations that shape their work or give guidelines for how they are going to do their boundary—?

PAILA: *Yes, absolutely, as I said. In addition, the legal framework is important. We have the Local Government Act of 2004. We have the Electoral Act of 2002. Then we also have the constitution of Sierra Leone, the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone. Delimiting the boundaries, as I said, requires the support and assistance of Statistics Sierra Leone. Statistics Sierra Leone came up with them, according to the guidelines, the legal guidelines.*

McCANTS: How would you describe the registration of voters and how that took place in these elections? Voter registration involves eligibility, identification, enrollment and allocation to the different polls or constituencies. Can you describe how the registration took place according to all of these things?

PAILA: *According to?*

McCANTS: According to eligibility, and enrollment and allocation to polls.

PAILA: *Registration, the last registration, 2007 for the presidential and parliamentary elections, was, we had the highest number of registered people, the highest percentage of registered people last year. This year it is not a fresh registration. It is updating the register. So it was specifically for people who did not register last year, people who had not reached the age of 18 and those who transferred from one city to another. So the registration, if I can get your question right, the registration was purely done according to certain criteria. For instance, somebody has to be a resident, they have to be a resident of that particular ward, you have to be—.*

McCANTS: How do you prove that?

PAILA: *Your address. When you come you give your address, we know where you reside and whether you are a resident in that particular ward. Also you have to be 18 years or above. You have to be also somebody who is not a criminal to be registered.*

McCANTS: How do you prove all of these things?

PAILA: *By providing documents. You provide affidavits or you provide birth certificate and somebody who is not a lunatic, somebody who is lunatic is not supposed to register. So that is the criteria we use for registration which is embedded in our constitution, the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone. So you ensure that you carry all those out. If somebody is not satisfied that this particular person is 18 years, that is why, during the registration period we have a time line for objection. We also inform the people that you have the right to object that this person is not 18, this person is underage, this person is lunatic. But the burden of proof rests on you, the objector, whether you can prove that this person is not 18 or this person*

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*is a lunatic, whether this person does not, is not, or that he is not a resident in a particular area.*

*So you have to satisfy all of those criteria. If you don't, it is not easy for us to register you, it is not possible.*

McCANTS: What controls were developed to prevent multiple registrations or false registration, maybe for people who wanted to try to vote twice? What kinds of things were used to prevent that from happening?

PAILA: *Also we check for your name in the final register. We check for your name and when you vote we tick your name. That's one. Second we have to ink your finger. Ink, you know, the finger, with an indelible ink. That is another one. We also ensure that we carry out massive sensitization on that particular information. Multiple voting might land you in prison. Multiple voting is not good for the electoral process. So we ensure that the electorate gets the information they need. They get adequate information that multiple voting will not be tolerated. So we ensure that those who want to condone or those who are involved in multiple registration are handed over to the police for prosecution.*

McCANTS: Were registration lists published and posted and were there clear procedures for identifying if my name is not on the list how do I remedy that?

PAILA: *Yes, we have what you call exhibition. After registration we ensure that we post all the lists. It is the duty of the voter to go to the exhibition center to look for his or her name and ensure that if there is any mistake on the name it can be corrected. If anything is omitted it can be included and we ensure that the information is given on the exhibition so that people go there to check for their names. We post the names at the various registration centers. We ensure that people get information that their names are on the register before taking the list to headquarters and before the compilation so that it is in the final register of electors.*

McCANTS: What steps were taken to prevent any tampering with those registration lists by the time they left the registration centers to go into the headquarters?

PAILA: *Whatever the National Electoral Commission does from the boundary delimitation to the announcement of results is observed by national or local observers, the international observers including the UN. Then journalists are there to ensure that people do not tamper with the procedure of registration or any particular registration list. The staffs are trained adequately to ensure that they do the right thing. During training they are reminded about that. The purpose of the register, the purpose of the list, and the preservation of the list to ensure that the particular list is safe for the process. If we do not get the list of registers and voters there is a problem. So we have to ensure that the staff is properly trained to ensure that they do the right thing.*

McCANTS: What kind of documentation was used to prove your identity? Did people use existing documents or did you issue special voter cards for the election?

PAILA: *Yes, we issued, during the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections, and also during the July 5 local government elections, we issued voter ID cards. We issued voter ID cards during the 2007 elections and we have to punch the ID cards on different areas. In 2008 local government elections we had to punch the ID card on the "of." That is the Republic of Sierra Leone, the "of" Sierra Leone,*

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*we had to punch that particular area. So we ensure that the people get that particular identification.*

*In the area that we are in somebody lost his voter ID card. We had to appeal to the police that maybe he should go there for police clearance. Police clearance alone is not enough. Police clearance plus a national ID card, a national passport, or driver's license. So these are the three, any one of these three documents, in addition to the police clearance for lost ID cards. You can use any one of these documents. So these are the documents we used during the local government elections.*

McCANTS: Were there any kinds of logistical difficulties during voter registration? Maybe you didn't have the forms didn't arrive or procurement issues, or what kind of—were there difficulties with getting people registered to vote?

PAILA: *The problem here is not—some people, we had very minor problems during registration. We are not expecting everybody to go back to the registration centers and register. Some people who were not living in the wards, they were in the area where they were supposed to vote. Some people traveled and they did not register. Some people traveled from one town to another forgetting that when you travel from Freetown to Bo you have to register in Bo if you think that the July 5 election—eventually you will be in Bo, you are supposed to register in Bo. So the problem is getting more people to register, those who transfer from one city to another.*

*Some people register, but then some people refuse to register. Some people refuse to get their [Indecipherable 33:59], so some of them did not vote. Some of them have several reasons why they did not vote. So we had to encourage them to go to the polling centers to register. In the area of logistics it is possible that certain items would not be enough, but we ensured that through the logistics department at the various districts, the Bo district, ensured that the logistics arrived. The registration kits arrived one day before registration. So we had to solve some of the problems at this level.*

McCANTS: I would like to talk a little bit about activities at the polling stations. Can you describe how many voters that your polling stations were designed to serve?

PAILA: *The polling stations, we had 600 ballot papers.*

McCANTS: Six hundred?

PAILA: *Yes, 600. But the polling stations, there are some polling stations with just 24 registered people, 24, 25, some 500, some 300. So we do not have exact figures. We had a total of 600 ballot papers for each registration.*

McCANTS: How many poll workers were there at each polling station?

PAILA: *Six.*

McCANTS: Were there any concerns about using certain buildings or certain facilities for polling stations because you had—?

PAILA: *Yes. In Bo for instance last year we had a problem with somebody's house, somebody who was a candidate and then later on his compound was about to be used as a center but later on we had to change it, we had to change that. At times you get requests from people to use their facilities. Then you go there and*

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*they change their mind and they do not want elections in their compound. So there are certain areas wherein you do not have permanent structures, you have makeshift structures that are erected during elections. That is why we have tent poles and other materials supplied to ensure that you build a structure. It depends. Certain people do not allow people to use their areas as a polling center or station.*

McCANTS: Were there any security measures put in place at polling stations to prevent vote fraud, maybe by candidates or by election officials? Some things that often happen are people impersonating other voters or multiple voting or chain voting or stuffing ballots. Were there any kinds of measures put in place to prevent those things from happening?

PAILA: *Yes. The security we have, the police presence in all of the polling centers and also, mind you the party agents, they are very vigilant to ensure that the right thing happened, that also we have the local and international observers including the UN and other UN agencies, observers who are very vigilant and ensure that the process is—. The NEC works with a lot of observers and that would give credence to the particular process. So because of the presence and observation—because the journalists now in Sierra Leone, we have communication all over the place. We have radio stations in all of the districts. We have radio stations, community radio stations, government stations, private stations. We have journalists at the center who report exactly the total number of votes cast in a particular polling center or station so it is very difficult.*

McCANTS: After—.

PAILA: *And if it is done it can be detected and the alarm would be raised.*

McCANTS: After the ballots have been voted, how did you preserve the secrecy of the ballot, the integrity of the ballot? Were there things that you did to make sure that the ballots weren't tampered with after the votes were all taken?

PAILA: *We had the ballot boxes. Then we had the voting screens. The voting screens are closed and then people go into the polling screens and they vote alone without anyone seeing the candidate they have chosen. After that the person in general reports the, she votes the ballot paper correctly and places it in the box. And after the voting a seal is placed on the ballot box in the presence of local and international observers including journalists and the party agent. So after placing the seal at the end of voting they record the number of slips in that particular ballot box and after which they open the ballot papers in front of the local and international observers and also journalists. So it is done in the presence of everybody and nobody can tamper with the ballot box.*

McCANTS: So were the ballots counted at the polling station?

PAILA: *At the polling stations.*

McCANTS: They were.

PAILA: *We already voted, we counted the ballot papers at the same spot in the presence of local and international observers and the party agents and the independent candidates' agents.*

McCANTS: Did you experience anything called family voting where one family member tells everyone else in the family who to vote for? Did you experience anything like that?

PAILA: *I don't think that happened in Bo. What happened was in, for instance, we went to tell the blind people to get their assistants to vote for them in the case they could not use the tactile ballot guide, the guide for voting for the blind. So it happened just in some cases wherein the blind man will say I want this and this candidate and somebody else has to observe for them. The person ticks or marks the candidate the blind man wants and doesn't mark different candidates. So no family voting, people vote the way they want, the candidates they want.*

McCANTS: So in the conduct of voting as well as in prior stages of election administration, there is often several kinds of logistical challenges. I would like to hear some of your observations about these. Here mainly I'm interested in communication and transportation challenges. So first, how were, how are communications between the NEC headquarters and the district offices organized?

PAILA: *The area of communication, the NEC headquarters ensures that it sends topic cards. Now communication networks are all over the country and here is wherein we do not have a communication network. We have certain spots where the staff will go and ensure that the district office, topic cards—cards are provided to make phone calls. So there is a communication between the districts and the coordinators in the field. They call the districts on a daily basis to give information about what is happening. So communication is very good in the—in the past elections it was a weakness. Communication is not a problem because mobile telephone communication is all over the country now and it is easy to get communication. So they report incidents to the district office and the district office passes on or solves the problem.*

*For instance, we have logistics also the problem usually is vehicles, vehicle constraint, adequate vehicles at times. For example during the registration adequate vehicle was not provided but later on in the elections, on election day, complaints of the district officer requesting for more vehicles than you were provided. You have no vehicle on election day.*

McCANTS: What about—?

PAILA: *At times, during the registration they have problems coming up from [Indecipherable 43:43] at times, but it is not a problem now.*

McCANTS: You mentioned that prior to the election day, often when you were conducting your voter education activities that you had trouble because you had vehicle constraint.

PAILA: Yes.

McCANTS: So how did you solve that problem?

PAILA: *The UN advisor ensured us to have vehicles. But the vehicles were interchanged. When the work coordinators want to distribute materials there is no vehicle for the voter education man. So voter education has to go on every day, every minute, every hour, every day it has to go on, that's the problem. Getting a permanent vehicle, a permanent vehicle for voter education is out.*

McCANTS: Were there maps or mapping services available to the election organizers?

**PAILA:** *Maps? A lot of maps. We had a lot of maps. We had maps on constituency, ballot invitation, we had maps on ward ballot invitation. We had maps on the wards, the towns, the chiefdoms, the villages. We had maps, a lot of maps at the district level to ensure that we are not [Indecipherable 45:01].*

**McCANTS:** So I would now like to talk to you about your area of expertise which is the role played by various media in distributing information about the election process and civic education and as agents of political parties. So can you characterize the media at the beginning of the electoral period? Maybe this can go back to your experience in the previous elections, but was the media government-controlled or was it independent? Were there multiple radio, television channels or only one? Were the newspapers government-owned or party-controlled or mixed and did this change over time?

**PAILA:** *The layer of media, the media has been covering elections, the media is the key for disseminating information during elections in this country. We have only one, one newspaper which is government-owned and very few people read it. Also we have a radio station and a TV station which are government-owned. We have a lot of private radio stations, community radio stations in the country. Newspapers, we have over fifteen newspapers which are private-owned. There dissemination of information through the media, there is no problem because the media ensures that it reports on every electoral process and in Bo we have about five community radio stations.*

*They generally themselves are very cooperative in the area, they have been cooperative in the area of disseminating election news, election processes so it is very good. The media in Sierra Leone is not state-controlled, it is mostly multi-media, or media plurality, or what we can call them, private ownership. Media is all over the place and it is mostly private ownership and participates in media allowing people to ensure that—. With the development in communication, whenever something happens now, during the program people texting messages, so the media has been very good in the area of disseminating election messages. Radio, television, newspapers, magazines, have been very useful.*

**McCANTS:** Could you tell me more about how the NEC or other organizations that were involved in the election used the media such as the newspapers, the radio and television? So, for example, when did they start using the media and for what purpose?

**PAILA:** *The National Electoral Commission and other organizations working with the NEC in the area of the election process ensure, we ensured that we used the media. We used the media during the boundary delimitation. The boundary delimitation is the first process, or the ward boundary delimitation is the first process in the electoral process. It is the first stage, boundary delimitation, registration, campaigning and we ensured that we used the media.*

**McCANTS:** So how did the NEC use that?

**PAILA:** *First of all they call meetings. Every meeting we call, all over the country, even at NEC headquarters, regular press conferences, regular meetings. We work journalists—. At times we have live, for instance in Bo, all over the country, live coverage of a particular process. The [ARFMM?] announcement of results, live coverage, the [ARFMM] we have live coverage from the media. Then we use*

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*radio, we use television, we use newspapers, we use town criers according to the situation.*

*We also use [Indecipherable 49:27] group, we employed, we contract the [Indecipherable] group to ensure that they disseminate the information about the elections. So we do it according to the stage of the electoral process. At each stage we call a press conference, inform journalists and they go out and then ensure that the public gets the information.*

McCANTS: How effective do you think the media campaign was in helping people understand what they needed to do, how to register to vote and helping them, discouraging behavior that they shouldn't do at a polling site? How effective was the campaign?

PAILA: *The media has been very instrumental in disseminating information about the electoral process. People get to know about the elections through the media even before the boundary delimitation process gets underway. Even before the boundary delimitation process is presented before the parliament and approved, the people get the information at every stage through the media. I believe in Sierra Leone the most widely used medium is radio. People cannot afford the radio sets, people cannot afford this, its 10,000 or 5000, people cannot afford batteries, which are 500 leones so radio is the widest used medium in Sierra Leone. People have confidence in the radio. As soon as they get information from radio, it is, they had it from the radio, I heard it on the radio that this is the information. The National Electoral Commission will be coming up with a particular program, will be coming up with registration. So the media, the radio, even the internet now, we get information on elections. Even the results are posted on the—they are posted on the internet. So the media is very instrumental and very effective in disseminating information.*

McCANTS: Were there any efforts to use new media like the internet or like cell phone communications in Bo or in the national elections?

PAILA: *No, in the provinces the internet is not widely used, but mobile phones are widely used and it can be used to disseminating information, but the internet is strange in most parts of the country. It is at the headquarter towns. The more you get out of them, to the border towns, to the chiefdoms, you don't see internet facilities and you don't use it.*

McCANTS: Did political campaigns, political parties, did they use the media to disseminate propaganda and if they used the media, did they use the media for kind of negative campaigning or hate speech? What was the response from the NEC?

PAILA: *It is not the duty of the National Electoral Commission to tell the political parties what to do. We have what we call the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC).*

McCANTS: Okay.

PAILA: *So it is there to register the political parties and it is there to regulate the political parties. So whenever there is any negative—at times we ensure also that we talk on certain issues. During campaigning the political parties and the independent candidates are expected to campaign on issues, not on personalities. We explain to them that attacking personalities or negative campaigning is not good. Tearing posters, tearing banners, removing posters is not good. So we ensure that we give them the information. But it is the obligation and duty of the Political Parties*

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*Registration Commission to ensure that these political parties conform with the laws or the code of conduct for political parties which they sign. The political parties are not supposed to do this, the political parties are not supposed to attack personalities. The political party member is not supposed to tear posters. It is the Political Party Registration Commission which calls the political parties together when there is a dispute. That is why they monitor the radio stations, they monitor the newspapers to ensure that negative campaigning is not done. When it is done they call the parties to the office and tell them that you are going against the code of conduct for political parties. That is not the way you are supposed to do it.*

*The National Electoral Commission, it is not our duty. Our own constitutional mandate is to conduct all public elections and [Indecipherable].*

McCANTS: Just moving on to election violence and victims or spoilers.

PAILA: Yes.

McCANTS: Was there any kind of assessment of threats or things that might threaten the process before the election?

PAILA: *Threats? The National Electoral Commission is working closely with the security agencies such as the Sierra Leone Police and the Sierra Leone military, and so there is, to ensure that threats are taken very seriously. I believe the military, during the past elections, and the police, they make sure they identify possible problem spots during elections and the same personnel to do the—. A lot of these decisions is done by society organizations and also NEC and also PPRC. Then this election is very—this election was very, very peaceful and we had no serious incidents, no violence during this election. It used to be a trouble spot outside elections, in the 2007 elections, when the former ruling party lost. Now, the former ruling party lost the elections last year. Bo used to be a trouble spot. But in these local government elections there was no violence in Bo.*

McCANTS: So what do you think changed between the time that Bo was a trouble spot and the time that Bo had a very peaceful election?

PAILA: *A lot of the stabilization was done by societal organizations, peaceful. Even during a meeting in Bo the societal organizations ensured that they used one day, which was supposed to be given to—which was a problem to allocate to any of the parties because we had twenty-five days to campaign and one day was supposed to be distributed among the political parties. So the society-based organizations ensured that they spoke with the members of the political parties and pending candidates. They would use it for a peaceful march, a peaceful campaign in Bo. It was done and several organizations carried a lot of peaceful campaign, violence-free campaign then, there was no violence in Bo during the past local government elections.*

McCANTS: In terms of your voter education or public relations work, did you do anything differently between the two elections in order to kind of help prevent the situation that you had—.

PAILA: *We received a lot of training from IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) and other organizations, NDI (National Democratic Institute), to ensure that we talked to people about violence, because violence, you know, will disrupt any election. So making sure that—during our campaigns we also, we were charged with the responsibility of talking on the radio. So we talked on violence-*

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*free elections. We made sure that we got the information and stressing also that punishment will be given to people who were involved in any violence.*

*During the nomination process the National Electoral Commission had what we call the Campaign Code of Ethics, which all the candidates had to sign to ensure that they behave themselves during the election period.*

McCANTS: So returning to the 2007 elections in Bo where you said there were some difficulties, what kinds of disputes were there?

PAILA: *There was political rivalry between the two major political parties, that is the APC (All People's Congress) and SLPP (Sierra Leone's People's Party).*

McCANTS: How were those disputes resolved?

PAILA: *They were resolved by the Political Parties Registration Commission in its mandate to bring the parties together. Also, civil society organizations did their bit in terms of talking to the political parties to stop violence.*

McCANTS: Can you describe how you managed your responsibilities for voter and civic education with other civil society organizations or media organizations, how you worked together in terms of voter education?

PAILA: *No voter education can succeed without the assistance of community-based organizations, CBOs, and also civil society organizations. So upon my assignment as voter education and public relations officer to Bo district I ensured that I identified the community-based organizations and also the civil society organizations in Bo district. After I had the list of them which, assisted voter education, we have MMGD, we have Sierra Leone, we have [Indecipherable] Studio, we have SLBS, we have Radio New Song, we have Civil Society Movement Sierra Leone, we have Teacher's Union and we have several organizations which I identified first of all and held meetings with their heads and coordinators, regional heads and also interacted with them.*

*At each stage of our meeting with political parties we ensured that we invited them to be part of the program. Voter education rallies I included the CBOs and civil society organizations for voter education. I even trained a lot of them to carry out voter education.*

McCANTS: So—

PAILA: *So we had a very cordial relationship with them, the community-based organizations and civil society organizations in Bo district. In my own district— [Interruption].*

McCANTS: So mostly the civil society organizations, the CBOs, they were the implementers of the civic education programming?

PAILA: *Yes, they assisted us, but we also had town criers and also went on the radio, conducted [Indecipherable 1:01:51] and also, we involved them greatly and they were sponsored by some UN agencies, IFES and NDI and UNDP (United Nations Development Program). Also the artists, we have a lot of new artists in Sierra Leone, musicians, there are Artists for Peace, and female artists also ensure that they assist us greatly. Because when you talk about voter education, when you include prominent people in the area of art, you get a lot of support, you get a lot of interest. People donate a lot of interest in voter education. We*

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*worked very closely. That is why we believe we have very few—the number of voided votes this time is different from the one we had. This is less than the one we had in 2007.*

McCANTS: How did you go about crafting the messages that you were trying to convey to the voters?

PAILA: *In the National Electoral Commission we work according to procedures and at NEC we have the outreach team which plans the messages and they send the manuals to us and we ensure that we follow the manuals and then pass on the same information. Because there is no way the commission has said that if you have lost your ID card you should have police clearance or any one of the three documents, national ID card, national passport or their driver's license. Then you go in the voter education and say you just need to come with your school ID card. It is not possible. So we ensure that we pass on the information. The information is then obtained by the outreach unit where we have the brains, where we have the chief of outreach, Miatta French and Mr. [Indecipherable 1:03:48], we have a lot of people at the outreach unit.*

*It is their duty to ensure that they initiate the ideas and they have the manuals and then send them to us at this level. We look at the manuals, study the manuals and then pass on the same information in order to get accurate information across.*

McCANTS: In what form were most of the messages delivered? Was it posters, advertisements, theater performances, television, soap operas, workshops? What were the majority of the messages?

PAILA: *We had posters, we had stickers, we had manuals. Then we had radio programs. We had mostly meetings, community meetings. We had workshops and seminars. So these were the instruments that were used to pass on information. Also town criers because in the village you should also know that the town crier is taken very seriously. As you know the town crier is out there, he rings the bell. He hits the iron, and everybody gathers at the community center and they ensure that they gather and they get information. So they are used to tell the people, tomorrow you are supposed to go and vote for the President and the parliamentarians. Tomorrow you are supposed to vote for the mayor and the councilors. So they passed on the information, the town criers. They are instrumental in the process.*

McCANTS: How effective do you think the voter education was? How would you measure how effective it was? Did you think some of the messages were more effective than others?

PAILA: *The message, the meeting, the community meeting is the best to pass on information. But because of the coverage, or because of the mass of land in Sierra Leone, the radio, the community radio has been very instrumental in the voter education. The effectiveness of voter education can be measured according to the number of what you call void votes, void ballot papers and it was very less during this local government election. We had less than the previous. So voter education strived to help during the local government election because, according to the statistics, we have less void votes.*

McCANTS: Were there any groups of people who proved particularly difficult to reach with the information about this election, maybe because of geography or language barriers?

*PAILA: Yeah, people in the non-motorable areas, the radio does cover some areas but the radio does not cover every village in the country.*

McCANTS: So what steps were taken to reach those people?

*PAILA: We had the ward coordinators. Voter education was not done alone. We had the ward coordinators who are the field officers. So they had to go, they had to go with the ballot boxes, they had to go with the voting materials. They had to go with the ballot papers. So they eventually, it was also wise that the training units thought of a position among the staff which is the ballot issuer. On the day of voting the ballot issuer ensures that he or she explains to the voter, this is the ballot paper for the mayor. On this ballot paper you are supposed to just make your mark on just one candidate. Do it in the empty box, a cross. So that is the way, I believe, the voter education also succeeded because of the work of the ballot issuers who on the day of the process explained to the voters who do not know about the papers, the ballot box for the mayor. The ballot box—this is the ballot for the councilors. Explain to them on how to do it before they cast their votes.*

McCANTS: Were those—?

*PAILA: So the ballot paper issuers did work.*

McCANTS: So those were successful?

*PAILA: Yes, they complemented our efforts. In areas that are not motorable, in areas where communication does not reach.*

McCANTS: If someone were to ask you for advice about how best to convey information and messages about an election for a country or a district that was similar to Bo—.

*PAILA: That was?*

McCANTS: Similar to Bo district. What would you say? What two or three things would you say?

*PAILA: Radio and community meetings.*

McCANTS: Were special efforts taken to kind of make sure that marginalized groups participated, maybe women or youth or certain people who may be living away from their home district. Were there efforts taken to make sure those people were voting?

*PAILA: Before elections, on the fifth of July, this 2008, we had to inform IFES, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, we had training in order to target the people we have problems targeting, that is women, disabled people and also youth. So during the training in Makeni, we were taken to Makeni for training, wherein we were trained to target those particular groups. And when we went to the district we held workshops in all the districts. We held workshops and targeted those groups of people, we invited those groups of people and gave them the information on the electoral process for the local government elections. We distributed posters to them. We trained them, a lot of them, even women, we have a lot of women who contested for local council and for position of councilor. In Bo, we have a woman who also contested for the position of mayor. The only woman who contested for the position of mayor in Bo city. So we ensured that*

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*we involved a lot of women. We spoke to a lot—. I trained, I trained them, as the voter education officer in Bo, I trained a lot of women candidates in the area of the election process, local government election process, and also mail candidates, also disabled people ensured—. In Bo we had one disabled who also contested for the area of mayor, a disabled by the name of Vandy Konneh, and then a female candidate by the name of [Indecipherable 1:11:24], and Toma Elias, also contested.*

*So we ensured that we included those people who think they are left out, that they do not belong to the process and who can be difficult, very difficult to reach, to ensure that we trained them and they participated greatly. The young people participated. There were several posters with young people, young people are voting, slogans like young people are voting, it's time to act. So we have, we see a lot of participation from those three groups, women, disabled, and young people, youth.*

McCANTS: Did you experience any obstacles in trying to reach out to those three groups?

PAILA: *No. In my area of Bo I have no problem because I have been working with them. I was retained after the 2007 election. I was also brought on board for the local government elections. So earlier on last year I identified them. I identified them and when I arrived in the district in March I ensured that I reached them and reminded them that I'm here again for elections and very soon we would be holding several workshops and you guys would be there to ensure that you participate in the process.*

McCANTS: Could you talk a little bit about your interaction with some of the donor groups that you worked with, the UN or maybe IFES? Our program is aiming to help both citizens and policy makers build their own election systems and be able to run them whether or not the United Nations or other donor organizations are involved. Sometimes the relationships between these organizations and the local personnel can affect your ability to do your job well. So I was wondering, are there two or three mistakes that you have ever observed donor organizations, donor countries or international organizations like the United Nations make with respect to local personnel?

PAILA: *Yes. In the Bo district we have the head of the logistics which is a Kenyan by nationality, Mr. Wafula, [Dustin Wafula], and then also a German lady by the name of Christina Wagner. They assisted us greatly in the area of advice and staffing Bo for the electoral process. Christina Wagner was responsible to advise me, the voter education officer, and also the training officer, Mr. Omer Fumba and Mr. Wafula was in charge of logistics, in charge of refueling the vehicles, in charge of ensuring that we get the materials to the polling stations, in charge of them also, training the coordinator as to how and when to distribute materials. We have a very good relationship. We worked closely. Every week we are supposed to send a report, institution report, CTF, to send this institution report on the particular activities undertaken for a week. So we have to work with them to send the reports.*

*There is training. We are together in, at doing the training and in Bo, training for ward coordinators. We were also together when we want a vehicle, we just call Mr. Wafula and we get a vehicle. He asks if the mileage is going to cover the areas you are going to go. We had a very good working relationship with them. The UNVs and advisors, were sent for logistics, voter education and training, Mr. Dustin Wafula from Kenya, and Madam Christina Wagner from Germany.*

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- McCANTS: So you mentioned—.
- PAILA: *So their role is very important in the electoral process.*
- McCANTS: What do you think will be the biggest challenges that you will face and that Sierra Leone will face once you're doing your elections on your own without the assistance of the UN and other organizations?
- PAILA: *I don't think we will face a lot of challenges because the logistics officers have been, the logistics officer in Bo, that is to say Mr. [Alpha, Dominic Alpha 1:16:31] in Bo has been working very closely with these UN guys, the logistics guys. And he worked with them last year. Another Congolese, Mr. Picaso Kasungu from Congo and also Mr. Wafula, and we have been working with this lady from Germany, Christina Wagner and also another lady who was [Gail de Gaisse] from France, who was here last year.*
- We have been working with these people. We have gained a lot of skills and even without them now, as we approach 2012, we have another seventeen elections, we can still work without them because we received a lot of training and a lot of experience from them.*
- McCANTS: Can you tell me anything about something we call a home-grown success, meaning that something that a local personnel did that was very successful that maybe you were particularly proud of with regard to the election?
- PAILA: *Local personnel?*
- McCANTS: Yes, not international staff.
- PAILA: *Yes, a local personnel. Dr. Christiana Thorpe, the Chief Electoral Commissioner has transformed the National Electoral Commission. In the past the commission was linked with ballot stuffing, fraud, improper election conduction and now, since her appointment as the Chief Electoral Commissioner a lot of things have changed in the commission. Dr. Christiana Thorpe has succeeded in ensuring that the commission has qualified and professional staff. Even the qualified and professional staff can be fired at any time if they do not do the right thing during the process. The commissioner has changed a lot and that is why we have credible elections now in Sierra Leone. Dr. Christiana Thorpe, I believe has played a role as a very successful Sierra Leonean, has transformed the National Electoral Commission to a very reputable standard now.*
- McCANTS: As you have kind of worked on these last two elections, were there, did you ever look at the experiences of other countries also kind of similar to Sierra Leone in conducting elections?
- PAILA: *Similar to Sierra Leone in terms of elections?*
- McCANTS: Yes, did you ever use the experiences of other countries in terms of their elections to help you in your work with the NEC here?
- PAILA: *No I have the experience—just listening to the news about elections, elections in Nigeria, elections in Zambia, elections in Zimbabwe, elections in Libya and Liberia. I believe the Sierra Leone experience is different from those elections. I believe we have conducted the best elections in Africa for the time being, I even believe that.*

McCANTS: Was there any aspect of election work that was hardest for you to learn about or to do?

PAILA: *Election work?*

McCANTS: In your work with the NEC. Is there any aspect that was especially difficult for you in your work with the NEC?

PAILA: *It was not difficult, it was challenging. For instance, if there is a problem in a particular polling station they are often in counting, in counting of votes, very difficult, it is very difficult. If there is any problem, there is a complaint about the counting of votes in a particular polling station because maybe the parties complain that the figures are not the same. So a lot—there is a problem, we are asked by the Chief Electoral Commissioner to recount. So we have, in certain stations in Bo, so we have to spend the rest of the night just counting ballot papers in front of local and international observers. We start around 3 o'clock in the afternoon and finished around 7 o'clock in the morning, just counting ballot papers. Recounting is very difficult in the process.*

McCANTS: Why were you asked to recount?

PAILA: *I've told you that I'm in the area of—we are in, there are complaints wherein they think that the figures don't collate so there is supposed to be a recount wherein we have only 8% voting. We have to recount to ensure that those particular figures are correct. So the area of recounting, something which we did and we are asked to recount everything since say about twenty polling stations we recount the ballot papers in the President and parliamentary elections, that was very difficult. It is a very difficult task.*

McCANTS: What do you think the role of both these last two sets of elections that you've worked on, what do you think the role of those elections has been in the overall development of democracy in Sierra Leone?

PAILA: *Yes. They are in the development of democracy. In the past elections we had a lot of political parties. We had a lot of candidates vying for the presidency. So multi-party democracy is now operating in Sierra Leone. So we had about over seven candidates contesting for the presidency and a lot of people contesting for parliamentary positions, and they were in these past elections. So we had, in addition to the three political parties, APC, PMDC (People's Movement for Democratic Change, SLPP, we had independent candidates. We had the NDI. So a lot of people are now conscious about democracy. With or without the political parties they are ready to stand as independent candidates and participate in the process. So there is a very different experience compared to twenty years ago when Sierra Leone used to be another state.*

McCANTS: Well I have wrapped up all of my formal questions here. I was wondering if there is anything that I didn't ask you that you felt was important to talk about?

PAILA: *In the area of?*

McCANTS: In the area of your work with the NEC and with the elections?

PAILA: *One thing I did not talk about in the area of elections is the funding.*

McCANTS: Yes, funding, we did not. So did you want to say anything specifically about that?

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- PAILA:* Yes, funding.
- McCANTS: Did you have a budget for your work?
- PAILA:* Yes. We had funding by IFES and at times by the commission itself, and UNDP. We are very grateful to those organizations for funding the electoral process. Any electoral process needs funding. Funding is very crucial when it comes to elections.
- McCANTS: In addition to the commission itself, were there other government agencies that contributed some financial support?
- PAILA:* Yes, the government of Sierra Leone.
- McCANTS: Was the cash flow available to you as you needed it on a timely basis?
- PAILA:* Yes, it was available. It was sent to the National Electoral Commission, the finance department, and through the district electoral officer and all the districts. We are just asking for more funding in the area of the elections. It is very important, very important.
- McCANTS: Were there any kind of structures in place to make sure that people were financially accountable for what they spent? In other words, were there problems where people used funding for things that weren't related to the elections?
- PAILA:* Of course. You have to provide returns when a particular process is financed. For instance the town criers, we have a lot of people to ensure that they are going to the wages, that expenditure is a viable process. We have to provide returns, we have to sign contracts. We have to sign contracts and ensure that we sign contracts to the finance department. We need more funding than they often have in the elections. Elections are about money, movements of money because [Indecipherable 1:26:26] and everything. So elections are based on cash, you know, in order to get the process to be perfect.
- McCANTS: Right.
- PAILA:* So if you're talking about areas wherein for instance if vehicles are not enough, at times we get a lot of support from UNDP. We have a lot of UN vehicles during the elections. So funding is very crucial.
- McCANTS: You just mentioned how expensive elections are.
- PAILA:* They are very expensive.
- McCANTS: Cost can vary greatly in different places depending on the place. Do you have any ideas on how to make the elections process less expensive?
- PAILA:* Ideas to make the elections process—no I don't.
- McCANTS: You have no ideas.
- PAILA:* I have no ideas. I know it is very difficult because most of the materials have to be printed outside of Sierra Leone.
- McCANTS: So developing your own printing capacity would probably make it cheaper?

*PAILA:*            *Yes, make it cheaper.*

McCANTS:        Again, I've finished my formal questions, if you have anything else you'd like to add at this time?

*PAILA:*            *No, thank you.*

McCANTS:        Thank you so much for taking the time to interview with us today.

*PAILA:*            *You're welcome.*