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Interviewee: Isabel Otero

Interviewer: Ashley McCants

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McCANTS: This is Elections Interview Number 6 with Isabel Otero at the UNDP Elections Assistance Team, August 4th in Sierra Leone. Interviewer is Ashley McCants.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the interview. We'd like to begin the conversation by learning a little more about your personal background. Can you please describe the position that you held during the election and what your goals were in this position?

OTERO: *My position was, or is still, Procedures and Training Advisor for the National Electoral Commission in Sierra Leone. I've been here since November 2006. We first advised the commission to prepare for the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007. Then, this year, 2008, we helped them with the local government elections.*

My background for this post—well, I've been involved in electoral issues or matters since 2001. I was in East Timor twice, one for the National Constituency Assembly Election, and then for the Presidential Election. Then I was in Afghanistan for a year and a half. There I was a training officer. Then I've been in Liberia for eight months as training and capacity building advisor, now I'm here.

The goals, or the main goal, was to advise the Procedures and Training Unit at the NEC (National Electoral Commission) in all the activities and tasks related to the work of the unit. At the beginning it was like structuring the unit. Most of the staff were new, completely new, without previous experience in elections. I have to say that at least in that unit, the members of the unit, they have been with me since 2006 and we were together through all the processes. We worked very closely together and I think that they now are capable of conducting, or at least doing the job that is related to the unit by themselves. So, I think the goal was accomplished.

McCANTS: Can you tell me more about what you did before you got involved with elections?

OTERO: *I'm a psychologist. I have a master's degree in philosophy. I also have, or did a specialization in human rights and ethics. I've worked with gender issues for many years in different topics, like health, then--.*

McCANTS: Was this with the UN (United Nations) as well?

OTERO: *No, it was in Colombia with different NGOs (non-governmental organizations), local NGO's and some international NGO's. Always in gender and in different topics, yes—economics, participation of women in the civil society, participation of women in politics, productive projects for different communities, minorities especially, like Afro-Colombians or farmers or indigenous communities, yes.*

McCANTS: Most of this interview will revolve around your work in Sierra Leone on the most previous election cycle; from 2007 to 2008. But you are also welcome to make comparisons to other missions that you've served in.

What would you say were the biggest challenges for you in your work in the election?

OTERO: *Here in Sierra Leone?*

McCANTS: Yes.

OTERO: *Well, as I mentioned before, we had two different processes, the one in 2007 and this one in 2008. Always the memory remembers the fresh situations, and definitely this time, this year, for the local government elections, the timeline was too tight. It was—we had to do almost everything in a rush and that was very challenging.*

Last year, as I also mentioned, most of the staff were new in elections and the challenge was to somehow give them the—or share the knowledge and have them feel capable and competent to do it, and not expecting us to do their job. Probably, I consider that as I challenge because in my experience in Liberia, as we also were advisors there, our mandate was advising the commission, but at the end, we ended up doing all the job. Because they never got involved, or they just—I don't know, at the end they just let us do—or they didn't do anything and then we had to. But here, at least for me, the challenge was to have the people involved and to have them doing the things and to do the things together. I think we did it.

McCANTS: Can you describe a little bit about how you did that? What kind of processes or procedures did you use to help you transfer the information that you needed to the local staff here?

OTERO: *Well, different things. One was asking them to do their job and we just review, share, discuss, improve, based on their own input. The other, when definitely they didn't have anything from where to start, what I did was like—different workshops or giving them the guidelines, but always let them do it. Well, in a few cases I did it, but then we discussed it, I asked them "Okay, what do you think about that? What do you want to change?" For example, the manuals—I think what the main thing was like let them feel that they were the ones doing it. When they realized that they were the ones doing it, they got more involved and encouraged to continue producing the work, the documents, the—whatever was needed.*

McCANTS: What were the various types of documents or workshop or other types of activities that you were working with them on?

OTERO: *As the unit is a procedures and training unit, first of all we need to write the procedures. We need to review the law. From the law, we write the procedures, to operationalize. The procedures come from the law. It's a way to make the law operative or practical. We start reviewing the law, then we write the procedures, then we produce manuals, which is converting those procedures into like friendly documents with steps and more detail. Yes, steps to—for the officials to conduct the elections or whatever exercise they are doing. Then we produced manuals or then we produced different exercises to conduct the trainings.*

We prepared the trainings, we prepared the agenda, we planned the training, we planned the cascaded strategy. We planned the training materials, we did also plan for distribution of the training materials to the different regions and districts. We—or they, no, when I say we, it's we the unit, conducted trainings, monitored the trainings, the other steps of the cascade. That's it. That we did it for the registration, the exhibition, the inquiry processes, then for polling and counting, then a little bit about tallying. But the tally is mainly done by the data center, but somehow if there was a need to do any recount, it came from the Procedures and Training Unit; the procedures for recount.

Then this year, we did it—we had a by-election in four constituencies. So, we somehow review the procedures. We again prepared a training plan, training

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materials, conduct the training, and all the same steps for the by-elections. Then, we prepared materials, manuals, procedures, and so on, for the update of the register, which included not only the registration itself, but also the inquiry—the exhibition of the inquiry processes, and the polling and counting procedures for the local government elections.

McCANTS: You just spoke that you worked to translate the law into—make it operational. Were there any distinctive challenges or problems that you encountered in kind of translating the law into an operational way—framework? Was there any difficulty in translating the law into the procedures?

OTERO: *Okay, first of all it's important to say that we're not starting from scratch, because the Commission had had elections before, with the same law. In 2002, they had the presidential one and in 2004, they had the local government elections. In both cases, they were following the same electoral laws act. But anyway, we reviewed it again, because as I told you, they were new and I wanted them to start and to do it from scratch. Normally, we were going to use somehow some of the materials that were used in the previous elections, but at least for them to do the exercise.*

         The law, in some parts, is too detailed and too operational that obliged to follow it and to put so many details. But on the other hand, it's too broad and too open that it doesn't give you—not details, but at least guidelines. For example, I remember there is something in the law that it refers to the right of some people who, for example, public workers, or military police, or yes, government officials, who work or who live because of their job in one—let's say, one constituency, but they live in another constituency and then the law provides for them to have the right to—or, I'm not sure if it talks about transfer of vote, but at least to allow them—oh no, it says that they send a letter to the Commission in five days before the elections giving the list of the names, the Commission should allow them to vote wherever they are. That, operationally, is really difficult. In five days the Commission doesn't have the time to prepare or to do all those things.

         But on the other hand—so, that's just an example of how it says something too very detailed that it tied the Commission to do some things in order to comply with the law. Yes, did I answer?

McCANTS: Yes. So how did you deal with those kinds of difficulties when the law was very difficult to make operational?

OTERO: *What we did—well, if it was definitely something that was legal, we'd refer the case to the legal advisor. Then, I imagine, that she in her interview, she already explained what she did, but what she did was to write the kind of regulation for the NEC to do whatever it was needed in order to continue with the electoral process without something or damaging the whole process.*

         Where there were no details in the law, what we did was that we created the procedures, we prepared a document with the procedures, we gave the procedures to the Board of Commissioners, they read the procedures and they approved them or not, approved them or changed them. But the unit doesn't work or doesn't go to the next step, which is writing the manuals to train the staff, unless the procedures have been approved by the Board of Commissioners.

McCANTS: Where there any features of the laws that governed these elections that you think made it work particularly well?

OTERO:　　　*I would say that the law is not a bad law. It gives the NEC the way to conduct the election, it's not—I don't know, it's broad enough to allow the NEC to produce regulations that under the law, are covered by the law. But gives the room to the Commission—for the Commission to prepare the whole operation. So, I would say there.*

McCANTS:　　Transparency and the appearance of fairness are very important in elections. I'm especially interested in the ways in which some of the procedures might have been designed to ensure transparency. I was wondering if you could talk about processes or procedures that were put in place for that.

OTERO:　　　*You want to know the procedures that we put in place for that?*

McCANTS:　　To ensure transparency.

OTERO:　　　*Okay, yes. Some of the procedures to ensure the transparency are in the law. Others are not, but what we put in place to guarantee the transparency was— well, first of all, the register of electors. I think the way the data was captured and was forwarded to the data center, the way we track that information guaranteed that there was no fraud. For example, we knew how many forms were sent to a specific registration center. Then, we knew how many people were registered. After that, we knew how many forms were left, how many forms were spoiled. So we, by tracking the number of forms and the number of people registered, we more or less tracked, for example, that part.*

With the exhibition of the register, we also—well, then it gives the opportunity to the people to review the register, to object to a person who was not able to register, or to correct if there was any error, of if someone was omitted, or if there was a mistake, whatever, it's done during the exhibition period. Well, people have the right to have a hearing in case his name or her name was objected to, and he or she could prove that he or she was Sierra Leonean, or was able to register, or eligible to register. They had also the inquiry period to state that and to be able to register if that was the case.

Then we had the procedures for polling and counting. And, for example, something that is not in the law, but also we tracked all the ballot papers that were sent to the different polling centers and stations, the serial numbers of the ballot papers that were sent. The box containing the results were also serial numbered and that number was tracked in order to ensure that the same box that was sent to that polling station was the same one received with the results, so that there was no change.

Of course, the procedures to identify whomever—well, if the voter was the voter, using the register of electors. The ID card, as you know, has a picture, has a unique serial number. The card was punched in order to avoid the card from being used twice. The voter was inked to avoid the voter from voting twice.

What else? There were the materials—well, we also produced forms to transfer the materials in order to know that the materials—I don't know, follow the chain of distribution. Even the ballot boxes were labeled somehow with a security tape to ensure that the boxes were not changed. Well, these are all—some of these are procedures that no one knew. But, at least that helped the Commission to know if something went wrong with the materials, the results, or—especially the sensitive materials were well taken care of them.

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McCANTS: Do you think that these procedures are now institutionalized enough where they will remain in place the next election?

OTERO: *Some of them, yes, because they are in the law, but the operational ones like tracking the TEE's (tamper evident envelopes) number, tracking the serial number of the ballot papers, at least it's—. For example, this time for the local government elections, that no matter we were there and we—in some cases we, because of the short timeline, we did a lot of things for them. We also let them do the things by themselves because they had learned from last year's process, for example, logistics. I would say that was one of those areas where they did a lot by themselves. They didn't track the TEE's serial numbers this time. Why? I don't know, probably the timing. But some of the NEC staff realized that and they were the ones saying, "Why would they didn't do it? We did it last year, we have to continue doing it because it worked last year. We should keep those procedures." So, I'm pretty sure they will do it. Hopefully they won't be engaged in another very tight timeframe, but--.*

McCANTS: Can you talk a little bit about what kind of training—training that was developed for the field staff?

OTERO: *Okay. I'm talking to you about the operational training, not—there are other trainings for voter education officers, that's something that I don't know. But talking about the training of the electoral officials, the training more really is a cascaded strategy, which starts with the training of the HQ (headquarters) staff. They prepare themselves, we somehow train them. After that, they train the district-training officers. Each office—if each NEC district office has one training officer.*

             As you know, there were two UNV's (United Nations Volunteers) in each district, and one of them had the responsibility to also advise or assist in the trainings and also voter education. For the trainings, we had one international and one local trained by the national headquarters staff. For the local government elections, apart from them, sorry, we also invited the voter education officers, which was a good idea because they also had, I don't know, more detailed procedures and they could help the others while in the districts for the other trainings.

             The other step of the cascade is that the training officers trained the—or constituency monitors for 2007 elections or the ward coordinators for 2008 elections. Then they trained—for the registration process, it was the registrar. For the polling and counting, was the polling center manager, the presiding officer, and the identification officer.

             Then, the other step is that during registration, the registrar trained the rest of the staff; the photographer, laminator, and assistant registrar. For the election day, the polling center manager trained the other staff, like ballot paper issuer, ballot box controller, queue controllers.

             For the district trainers and the ward coordinators, we give them the training manual, also for the polling center managers. Whoever is going to train receives the training manual. That manual has the whole information with more detail. Also, they receive exercises, they receive the agenda, they receive the way to conduct the training. While the registration staff or the polling staff, they just receive a staff manual containing just the steps of the specific procedures and the specific duties of each official.

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McCANTS:	How effective do you think this method of training was? Or how did you evaluate if it was effective?
OTERO:	*Yes, it is effective. There is no other way to train 36,000 people in two weeks, other than in a cascaded strategy. So, it works and is more or less the only way to have all of them train—well, no, there are other ways, but more costly and well, difficult. This worked well, of course, but it's not a Sierra Leonean problem, it's always in a cascaded strategy; the more steps it has, the more (INTERRUPTION)*
McCANTS:	We are continuing with Isabel Otero at the UNDP Election Assistance Team and we were just discussing the effectiveness of the cascaded training program and maybe how it was evaluated.
OTERO:	*Okay, as you know, an electoral operation involves a lot of people, a lot of staff to be trained. For example, just here in Sierra Leone, which is a very small country, we are talking about, for example, just for the polling, 36 and something, thousand staff working that day. Definitely a cascaded strategy is one of the best ways to train that large amount of people, number of people. I think it works, it works well. There is always a risk that whatever information is given at the first level of the cascade could be different at the bottom or at least small changes. That is difficult to control, but the way the NEC and we try to avoid losing that information was first of all creating the manual and training the people in such a way that they—the idea was that they had to reply the training exactly the same.*
	We didn't use any fancy stuff. We could have used here, in headquarters, in the capital, power-point presentations or overhead projectors, very good tools, but we knew people in the field, they didn't have those tools. So, why—there was no point. If we used those, they are not going to be able to use them in the field, so we—whoever attended the training here, I imagine could have said "Oh, this training is so boring" or "should have had more facilities or nice ways to do it", but the idea was not to use anything that they didn't have in the field.
	So, first of all they had to repeat exactly the same. We, as I told you, we prepared an agenda for them that they had to follow. We gave them the exercise, exactly the ones we did here for the first step of the strategy of the training for them to do the same exercise in their own trainings down in the districts and in the other work levels. Third, we monitored the trainings to ensure—or course, we couldn't be in every single venue, but at least there was a monitoring in all the steps to ensure that the message was passed correctly and I don't know—to correct whatever was wrong.
McCANTS:	Were there any procedures put in place to monitor the performance of workers in the field for compliance with rules or other procedures?
OTERO:	*I didn't get it. If the--.*
McCANTS:	Were there any—did you help to develop any procedures to monitor—like the poll workers in the field to make sure that they were following the rules?
OTERO:	*Last year we had like a checklist for them to monitor the trainings and also, for example, during the registration process. As the registration process lasted 21 days, there was time to go and even to visit almost every center to see whether they were doing it correctly. This time for the local government elections that was not possible. The registration period lasted three to four days and definitely there was no time. But, the idea is to have a checklist and each district has to prepare*

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a plan for—not only for the trainings, but for monitoring the other trainings or the process itself. There are no procedures for monitoring as such, but there are what we call, like guidelines or checklists.

McCANTS: Were there any procedures in place to protect poll workers if there were threats?

OTERO: *Yes, yes. There were—well, there were more than procedures, again were like guidelines. Even in the manual we said if there is any attempt to disrupt the process or your life is threatened, or anything that makes the work impossible or—then what to do. Okay, do this, and this, and this, and this, and that. So yes, there were some kind of guidelines; like to inform the supervisor, like to pack whatever sensitive materials, to run if it was needed, to call the police. Well, depends on the--. Yes, the guidelines were in the manuals, but also during the trainings there were discussions about different scenarios, what to do in any case. I'm sorry, but this is more for—not to protect the life of the poll workers but to allow people, like party agents, observers, or normal voters to complain about whatever is wrong in the polling centers or polling stations.*

McCANTS: Can you describe how registration took place?

OTERO: *As I told you, it lasted 21 days. It was—there were like 6,000 and something, I don't remember, or 7,200—2,702, I don't remember, now I got confused with the number of polling stations, polling centers, and registration centers. But registration centers, if I'm not wrong, there were 2,700 and something teams working with four people, one registrar, one assistant registrar, one photographer, and one laminator. They used a registration form, which was an optical recognition mark form that was later—all those forms were sent to the data center. At the data center those forms were scanned. The information was systematized or well, captured with the shaded parts of the form gave the information to the computer system. Then the data was created.*

             Yes, 21 days in a row. I think there were no holidays, no stops. It worked from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except two days in the week that had one hour more, until 6:00 p.m. I'd say that it went very well. We were expecting around three million people to register and we got two million eight hundred and something, which was a good number. It went pretty well actually.

             Later—well, the data center produced the provisional register of electors. That register was exhibited during one week. There were procedures for that exhibition period. After that, there was an inquiry period which was, I don't know, one day-two days. The final register of electors was produced and that was the one we used for the elections in 2007.

McCANTS: What controls were in place to prevent multiple registrations or false registrations?

OTERO: *The people were inked. I think that was like the main way to avoid double registration, because here, as the collection of the data was manually at the centers, it was just after that the data center entered the information in order to be able to see whether there was the same information. It was difficult to say "No, you have registered before, I'm not going to register you." Also, because here a lot of people have exactly the same particulars; same name, same last name, same age, same everything. Here people don't have documents; identification documents. So, the registration teams were not asking necessarily for any proof—documentary proof, unless they doubted the eligibility of the applicant.*

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I think the data center did a cleansing of the data afterwards. But as I mentioned, it was difficult because of the same—same names, same particulars, and same everything. Then, we could have deleted someone who in fact was a voter, and that was a risk of disenfranchising people, and I think the NEC couldn't do that. So, the inking of applicants was the main procedure or the main way to avoid the double registration.

McCANTS: Was there any portion of the registration process that you feel could be improved on for the next time?

OTERO: *Yes, definitely. For example, this time the registration form kept the name, the age, and no date of birth, only the age. Then, with the age for example, if you are Fatimata Kordoman, there is another Fatimata Kordoman, with 19 years old both, you cannot tell who is who. But with the date of birth, then normally you are 19 and she's 19, most probably you are not born on the same day. So, I think that next time the date of birth should be one of the datas to be included in the register.*

             The NEC guys, they want to have also the address, the address of the applicants in the register. I don't think that's a good idea. It's a lot of information to be entered, it creates a lot of risk. But also, it doesn't necessarily avoid the double registration, it's what they think. They think with—I don't know, if the applicants give their address it will more or less automatically avoid the double registration, but you can go to a place and give an address and go to another registration center and give another address. Or come back to the same one and give another address and who knows. I would say that with the data of birth could be easier and less information to be captured and so for, less mistakes.

             But also, I think that hopefully this country soon will produce national identity cards, and with that then the registration of voters will be more reliable in terms of who is eligible and who is not.

McCANTS: Were there any security measures put in place at polling stations to prevent vote fraud by the election officials or maybe political contestants?

OTERO: *Well, to avoid the voters from voting twice I think I already told you, we punched the card, we tick the name of the person in the register, and we inked one of the fingers of the voter.*

             For the officials, as I mentioned, we—but that, well can be all the officials or any other, but the security tape that put in the ballot boxes, the serial number in the ballot papers that was recorded at the NEC warehouse to know which ballot papers were sent to which polling center. Definitely, the seals to seal the ballot boxes, and the seals were serial numbered as well. The numbers were recorded in a specific form.

             Each presiding officer in each polling station had a worksheet form that was used for them to record the number of ballot papers received, the number of ballot papers spoiled, the number of ballot papers issued to voters, and therefore, to calculate the number of ballot papers. Well then—sorry, the unused ones, the spoiled ones, and therefore—plus the received ones – and then you know how many ballot papers were issued to voters. Then after that, you count the ballot papers that are inside the ballot box, and it should give you the same number of ballot papers issued to voters. Then, you know if there is any discrepancy or not. There were procedures for them to find out if there was a discrepancy, to find out

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where—what happened or--. So, with those procedures, they should behave, but you know that there is always—I don't know, it's impossible to definitely, definitely guarantee that they are not going to cheat the process if they want to do it.

It's difficult and at the end, I think the NEC, and I think the NEC proved it, all the procedures allowed the NEC to find out if there was something wrong. Probably not to avoid the fraud, but to discover the fraud, and therefore, to invalidate those results or to take another decision.

McCANTS: I want to return a little bit to something you brought up at the beginning of the conversation. You were speaking about the relationship between the team here in the UN and the NEC personnel. I want you to kind of evaluate your relationship a little, and tell me what were things that you did particularly well that you think with your interactions with them, and maybe what do you think you have could have done better?

OTERO: *This is a point definitely that I feel proud of, because—by the way are you going to also interview the NEC people?*

McCANTS: Yes.

OTERO: *Okay, okay. I think that we definitely in the Procedures and Training Unit, we did it great; in terms of the relationship that we built, in terms of the way we worked together. As I mentioned before, I think the most important was to—giving them the confidence that they could it themselves, and that it was their process, it was their job, it was their responsibility, it was their election, and therefore, they were the ones who had to do it. We were there not to do the things for them, but to work with them and to work together, and they are great.*

McCANTS: Can you give me an example of way that you were able to give them this kind of confidence?

OTERO: *Working together—it's difficult to put it in words, because it's just the way you behave. It's something that is how you relate with others. But, I've seen in other units, I've seen some other colleagues that they just do the job. I understand why they do it. It's because if they don't do it, no one is going to do it. I have to admit that the Procedures and Training Unit at the NEC is exceptional in terms of the members of the unit. They definitely are very hard workers and very committed compared to the members of other units. But also it's the chief of the unit, who involves them and did a great teambuilding job. You don't see that in other units.*

In other units, my colleagues had to do the job for them. But, probably didn't have enough patience to start doing it with them, or to definitely ask them "Okay, you have to do it", while I started since the very beginning doing that. For example, the first step of the training, even the NEC guys, they were expecting us to train them, and in all the documents it says that the UN advisors train the HQ staff. But I said "No, you are going to be the ones training the district staff, so this first training is for you to do it, for you to—like a pilot, or like a--. Here, we just do a feedback and tell you or show you your weakness or—but, we are not going to train you. You are trainers." And it was just that "You are trainers, you are electoral officials, you have to do it." It's just that, like empower them, empower them? Yes, make them confident on their job and the way they were doing it and—I think that was the way.

McCANTS: What do you think will be the biggest challenges that the NEC will face when they have to do this on their own? Is there anything that can be done now in order to prepare them for that?

OTERO: *I think that the main challenge is the coordination between the unit, especially within the Operations Department, that is one. The whole Operations Department, each unit there is a piece of a machine. I think they haven't understood that, that if they don't coordinate the work, they can get mixed up, and mess up everything.*

                  I would say that the guys, the training guys are more or less ready to do it themselves, but I find other units not necessarily well equipped or good enough, especially, for example, Field Coordinations, which is the unit that has to coordinate with the other units. That's—I don't know, it's my opinion, I may be wrong, but I think that that's the unit which has—which is more weak somehow and at the end, is one of the most important because it relates to with the field, it coordinates the whole operation, and it has to deal with logistics, with training, with voter education, to conduct the whole operation, and—I don't know. I don't know if they are ready to do it themselves.

                  On the other hand, probably the field staff. The NEC district offices have three people, permanent ones, or two, in each district office. Anytime there is an electoral process, they call a voter education, a training officer, a logistical person. Each time they are different, and therefore they don't know anything about the elections, or don't have previous experience, or if they had previous experience at—they—well, they—some are good and have learned a lot in these two processes in those two years. But as they are not permanent staff, then they cannot do a proper capacity building with them to create good NEC offices in the districts.

                  I think that they definitely have learned in these two processes. In some regards, they are ready to do it themselves, but in others, definitely not. I think that, for example, in their—in terms of IT, data center, they might not be ready to produce the software necessary to manage all the data. There are no experienced staff or—but now the UN colleagues that work at the data center, they are training two staffs to become permanent and to at least be able to conduct future by-elections if there happen to be.

McCANTS: Could you tell me an example of something that the local personnel did particularly well? Something that they—a problem that they solved on their own or a particular success that they had? Do you have any examples of that?

OTERO: *Yes, yes. It's difficult to mention that because they in some cases and in some situations they didn't either consult us and also the question is what they did themselves, and we don't know, because we were not involved. But, I think for example, that the decision—we were somehow involved and we helped them to take the decision, but it was their decision at the end, they could have done differently, but the decision to invalidate all the results from the stations that were over 100% or clear fraud, was a good decision. They—even if it was of our advice, they decided to do it and they took that risk. I think that was important, because that gave the NEC a lot of credibility from the people. That created the idea that the NEC won't allow the fraud no matter from whom it comes, because they invalidated the results that favored one party or another. So, it was not only affecting one political party. I think that was good and that was one tough decision that they decided to take.*

McCANTS: Who made that decision?

OTERO: *The whole commission. Well, the Board of Commissioners, yes.*

McCANTS: You've mentioned that you've been in several other countries working on elections. Are there any other countries whose experiences that you have found particularly useful?

OTERO: *Yes. For example, in Liberia, the Commission had a decision-making system that I think is good and could have been implemented here. I don't know, but at least in Liberia, the Board of the Commissioners—any time they decide on something, they put it in writing, and all of the commissioners that are present sign the document. Then the decisions are in writing, are on paper, and they become like policies, or regulations, or directives, or whatever. I think that's good. That's a good way to do it, because they not only decided on political or I don't know— issues, but also on operations issues, and the Commission here are not in a— they are not involved with the operations and sometimes they don't even know what's going on in the operation.*

So, they are more—I don't know, dealing with the institution as the body— politically and so on. But, the operations—I know that–and I'm not saying that the commissioners should be involved in there because it's clear that there is this body, the commissioners, plus the Secretariat, and Secretariat is the technical team who runs the elections and who does the whole operation. But the commissioners should know what's going on here and should be the ones also directing the Secretariat. I don't see that relation working well here. I think that there is division. For example, just to give you an example; we prepared procedures and we expect the commissioners to decide on those procedures, but at the end, it's the Director of Operations who ends up deciding on the procedures because—or they don't read the procedures, we also gave them the manuals. We never received comments from them, but we couldn't wait for the approval and then okay, if the Director of Operations and at least Madame Chair gives us the go-ahead, okay, we go, But, it's not right, it's not right because then they don't have a clue.

Just today, one of the commissioners was saying there were no procedures for the police or the staff to vote on polling day if they were registered within that ward, but in a different center. There were procedures for that, but they were saying no, there where not, and we told them not to do it. It's in the manual, we trained them to do it, but—yes.

McCANTS: Are there any aspects of election administration that you think need further research or evaluation?

OTERO: *Of the process here in Sierra Leone or--?*

McCANTS: Of election administration in general, from your experience.

OTERO: *No idea, because I don't know—well, or I don't get the question, or I definitely don't know the answer. Because you are saying if there is something else in the electoral administration that should be researched or--.*

McCANTS: Yes, in the administration or the running of elections in these kinds of environments, post-conflict or fragile environments. Are there—do you think that there are things that should be further studied, difficult questions or--?

OTERO: *Okay, yes. I don't know why, probably it's my ignorance about the history of these post-conflict countries, but what you see is that there is no experience. It's like there were never elections, or I don't know who were conducting the elections in the past, but it's like you are in most of the cases dealing with people with definitely no clue. Even people that came from the diaspora, or were not here during the war, and don't have a clue of what happened in the last elections or--. So, no experience at all, and that creates a specific situation, different if there is a—I don't know, an electoral body or more permanent or more experienced people.*

There is one second - all the finance, money, cost, who pays for what? But, it has to do also with the culture and in many post-conflict countries because they are undeveloped countries, the level of corruption is too high and then everybody wants to get money, to make money out of the election process. I think that needs be like yes, studied somehow, how to deal with that, how to yes—I don't know.

This time, as you may know, the money was administered by UNDP, but the NEC is not happy at all with that. They just hate that, because they don't have the control of the money and they cannot just expend on whatever they want. No matter if it is for the election, I'm not saying that they want to put the money in their pockets. It's just that they, for example, they wanted more cars for the operation. It was thinking on the operation, but as they don't have the experience and they don't know exactly how to plan an election, which is another topic which could be, I don't know, somehow developed—the planning. And yes, you also— in a previous question you said if they were ready to do it and I said lack of coordination, definitely lack of planning, and the NEC lacks of that.

As they don't know how to plan, they expend a lot of money and they waste money just because of lack of planning. So, I don't know what is best. If they have the money and they learn, or if there is a need of still like having a neutral entity controlling the expenditures and the whole basket-fund, or what. That is the question, it's the question. I think it worked well here, but definitely the NEC didn't like it, yes.

McCANTS: Well thank you so much. That was very, very interesting.

OTERO: *You're welcome. Yes, it was also interesting for me too.*