



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of  
the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs  
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,  
Princeton University*

---

Series: Elections

Interview no.: A5

---

Interviewee: William Hogan

Interviewer: Ashley McCants

Date of Interview: 01 August 2008

Location: United Nations Headquarters  
Freetown  
Sierra Leone

---

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: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. We are here in Sierra Leone with Elections Interview Number 4, with Mr. William Hogan, UN (United Nations) Logistics Team.

We like to begin the conversation by learning a little bit more about your personal background. Can you tell us specifically about the position you held during the elections here in Sierra Leone?

HOGAN: *My role here is as a logistics advisor, which is different from other jobs that I've had with the Chief of Logistics. The logistics advisor role is to work with the National Electoral Commission and their logistics team to ensure that they do two things. One is to complete the job appropriately, to appropriate standards, they get the programming right, they get the planning right, and they get budgeting somewhere near right. And to build their capacity on the way through, so that in the end, the ideal situation is that we can walk away and they can conduct the business by themselves. However, inevitably that doesn't work.*

McCANTS: What about it doesn't work?

HOGAN: *What about it doesn't work? In most situations where I've been in this position, the constraints are too great. The timeframes are too restrictive. The staff are dramatically under-skilled, and don't have the ability to plan or the authority to execute. You get into complex situations, they lose concentration, they can't see the relationship between 'I' and 'F' activities. They don't understand that to get activity 'P' happening that you need to start to plan three months in advance for that to actually happen on time and in an appropriate way. So, their planning skills are very poor, their ability to think complexly is difficult, and their discipline in completing programs and processes and business systems is virtually non-existent.*

McCANTS: Can you tell me more about other jobs that you've had before coming to this position?

HOGAN: *By way of background, I worked for the Australian Electoral Commission for nearly 15 years. This is about my sixth UN mission, and I've been in a variety of countries. Here we are in Sierra Leone, I've been in Afghanistan, East Timor, I've worked with them in Cambodia, South Africa, Mozambique, to name a few.*

McCANTS: What are some of the other positions you've held with the UN missions?

HOGAN: *My first role was in 1993, as a UNV (United Nations Volunteer). I went into Cambodia for the 1993 elections, which were the first elections after their civil war, and that was as an electoral observer to—or monitor, an international monitor, I think it was called. Our role there was to make sure that the election was run appropriately at the polling station. That was a very short program; I was only there for six to eight weeks—eight weeks, as I recall. That was the first one. Everything else since then, I've been the Chief of Logistics.*

McCANTS: What would you say are the biggest challenges that have arisen in this past election environment?

HOGAN: *The biggest challenges have been, in general, for the whole, or the program, have been that the election date was established without consultation with the international advisors. The election date was established in November by the National Electoral Commission, without any advice, and allowing us merely six*

*months from the time—five months, actually, from the time that the first of the international advisors arrived to conduct an election. Last year alone we had five months between the finish of the electoral registration program and the actual election. So, this year we had to do all of those activities in a compressed timeframe. Our advice at the time was that the program should have been about nine months long. As a consequence of that, standards have suffered. Things have not been done as well as we would have liked, as thoroughly as we needed, we would like to do them. There were some errors on the way through, not critical, clearly, but there were certainly errors and they caused us a lot of heartache and heartburn. We worked for very, very long hours to get through this, particularly with the data, and the registration data was terribly compromised in some places.*

McCANTS: Are there any particular strategies that you used to help you cope with that restraint?

HOGAN: *Well, the first thing you do is you go to, well, what's the bare minimum that we need? What can we do without? What parts of the program can we do without? What parts of the program would be good—that we can do without? They mostly relate down to education, civic education, public education, which are programs that you take a lot of time, effort, and energy to put into place. Data—registration data becomes compromised. You work on old data; you work on old estimates. As a result of that—the very fundamental tools for every electoral program is to know where your electors are, how many they are, and in what places, and how you are going to manage and to service those electors. So, when you are working with compromised data, you always buy too many things. You might only need 10,000 widgets but you might buy 12,000 widgets to get through the program, because you are just not certain of the data. You spend too much money in many—in some procurement areas. There's a whole range of things that get compromised on the way through, to get through, to pull back the timeframe. You do things out of order, as we did this time. We held—which is probably unique in the universe—nominations. We called nominations for the election prior to the registration program. I've never, ever, ever seen that and it was a great risk that we carried, but we had to do that otherwise we could not have got the ballot papers printed and delivered to us in time to get the program going.*

McCANTS: Do you have any general advice to offer other people working in similar contexts about the timing or sequencing?

HOGAN: *Well, the timing varies according to the circumstances of the country you are working in and depends on a number of things. It critically depends upon infrastructure of the country—that includes both air and roads, security issues in the country, your communications infrastructure, whether you have good, bad, or nil. The security environment is a very big player. It was a very big player for us in Afghanistan, of course.*

McCANTS: Could you speak a little bit about the legal framework, and specifically, the electoral system. Do you know what kind of considerations influenced the choice of the system here?

HOGAN: *No, I don't. It was—mostly those decisions were made last year for the program and I wasn't here last year, thankfully.*

---

McCANTS: What about the election management body? Do you know how it was established or did it exist prior?

HOGAN: *It existed prior to my arrival, so I don't know how it was established. I do know that it was terribly compromised the first year by partisan membership of the commission—terribly—but was compromised the first year round. However the make-up of that body has since changed.*

McCANTS: How would you describe the relationship between the Elections Commission and the government? Generally, people feel that it should be independent of political party interests or the party in power. Do you know what steps were taken to make sure that it's an independent institution?

HOGAN: *I think, as I recall, and from the little of the legislation that I've actually read, it seems that the electoral body does have a fair degree of independence, at least legally. No electoral body, that I'm aware of, ever has financial independence from government. So, how it can conduct its business with free and fair advice when they're financially bound by the government—that's a compromise and makes it difficult. Politically, I understand that that was one of the areas that was compromised last year, where there were some quite partisan members of staff in the organization. My understanding is that there was a small revolution between the end of the presidential election of last year and the beginning of the program this year, and many of those members were removed from the organizations—those staff were removed from the organizations. So, they were blatantly partisan. I mean, everybody has their own political beliefs but as long as you act independently, then you should be fine.*

McCANTS: Who has the power to fire or dismiss those people?

HOGAN: *As I understand it, that's the Chair of the Electoral Commission. That's where I believe that action came from.*

McCANTS: Were the meetings of the electoral management body public? Was their work made published or made public?

HOGAN: *No. No, to both of those questions.*

McCANTS: What about their budget? Was that open to public discussion?

HOGAN: *I really don't know what the status of their budget was, and whether it was open for public discussion. I really have no idea.*

McCANTS: Can you tell me about—the UN was involved in supporting the budget financially for this election?

HOGAN: *Yes, it was.*

McCANTS: So, can you just tell me what the budget was, or what other sources of revenue were used?

HOGAN: *I'm only very clear of, or reasonably clear about the UN side of the business, but I was vaguely familiar with the overall make-up that the Sierra Leone government did meet a certain percentage of the budget. But the international community, the donor community, donated some 22 million dollars that was required for the operation. They donated to a UNDP (United Nations Development Program)*

---

*fund, which was called the Basket Fund, and that was very clearly the greater amount of money that was used to fund the operation. I think that budget came down by a couple of million dollars within the first draft of the estimates. But, they are expensive operations—elections—very expensive operations.*

McCANTS: Was the cash flow available for you to meet your needs on a timely basis?

HOGAN: *Coming from logistics, my concerns about money are very limited. As long as I get the resources to do what I need to do—but as I understand it, yes, we didn't have any great difficulty with funding or funds being available.*

McCANTS: Were there financial accountability structures in place?

HOGAN: *There were, yes, but again that falls outside of my arena.*

McCANTS: Do you have ideas on how to make the electoral process less expensive the next time around?

HOGAN: *There would be ways to make it less expensive next time around but the organization, the Electoral Commission, needs some very basic support mechanisms to be put in place now, so the costs will elevate in the short-term to purchase those infrastructure requirements. But next time, the UN will not be here; we will not be able to run air operations as we did this time. The UN will not be here to manage and fund the transport operations. So that requires the Electoral Commission to actually review itself and review its own operations, and review the requirements and its outcomes, and how it's going to meet those expectations. But this is one of the worst cases of an aid-dependent organization I have ever seen. They just don't care about these things, they are completely carefree and careless about it because the international community is being reasonably irresponsible and that they've just said to the Electoral Commission "Yes" to every request that they've ever made. "Yes, you'll get it, yes, you'll get it" and without question. So, it's a bit of a devil of their own creation.*

McCANTS: Can you tell me a little bit about the staff size that you had for logistics? What was the size of your staff?

HOGAN: *Internationally, I had six staff. The National Electoral Commission had eight staff. My staff worked hard. I don't know what the other staff did, and that is part of the problem here—is that there is this great dependence upon us. We were in a compromised position between being advisors and assistants and given the timetable that we were confronted with, our advice role dropped dramatically and our assistance role rose exponentially. So, we were just—we were working, all the time.*

McCANTS: Did you think the staff size was adequate?

HOGAN: *Well, I think our staff sizes were fine, yes. I had enough resources and we worked some very, very long hours. On a few—many occasions, we worked 24 hours a day at peak periods. We were able to spread that load appropriately. But again, the national staff—they would disappear. They were not available; they were not there. They had other responsibilities.*

McCANTS: What kinds of skills did you think were lacking, either on the national or international side of things?

- HOGAN: *The greatest lack is in project management. Elections are not much else, other than a great complex project to run. They are, outside of warfare, the greatest operation that any country runs. So, project management skills are an absolute base requirement. Planning skills are a base requirement. Dedication, discipline, communication processes are really fundamental, and most of those were missing. Not so much from the international side, but certainly on the national side of the equation.*
- McCANTS: Were there any mechanisms in place to monitor any staff that were working out in the field for compliance with rules or procedures?
- HOGAN: *The Field Operations Unit would be able to advise you about that, but I understand that there were—but how good that information was, I'm not certain.*
- McCANTS: Can you describe how the boundary delimitation process worked?
- HOGAN: *No, I have no idea.*
- McCANTS: Okay. Any ideas about some of the logistical obstacles to that process?
- HOGAN: *No, no. Done without my presence, thankfully.*
- McCANTS: Can you tell us about how the registration of voters took place during this election?
- HOGAN: *Yes, this registration exercise was not a full registration program, as was conducted last year. This was an opportunity for people to register if they hadn't registered, to register if they had turned 18 since the last registration had closed, and to change the address of registration if they had moved premises from the last time. So, it was a much smaller operation and the expectations were much smaller. We utilized the same machinery that was utilized last time, which was basically a simple analog process of a Polaroid camera, hand completed forms, and they were laminated on the spot and provided to the elector.*
- McCANTS: What controls were developed to prevent multiple or false registrations?
- HOGAN: *There were none in the field. The only one in the field was that as each elector registered they were marked with indelible ink, which stays on the hand for up to a week—which was longer than the program. So, that's the only mechanism that was utilized in the field to stop multiple registrations. However, data matching and data cleansing was the second part of it. When that data came back to the data warehouse and it was input into the system, if there were duplicates that data was then investigated and cleansed—however, you're probably better off talking to those technical people who do that work.*
- McCANTS: How was the integrity of the registration lists protected after they were completed? What steps were taken to prevent them from being tampered with?
- HOGAN: *Again, you are better off talking to the people from the data center.*
- McCANTS: Were there particular logistical challenges that were encountered during the registration process? This can be last year or this year.
- HOGAN: *Not—well, the infrastructure in this country is appalling. The roads are—you get off the main highways, which are quite good, in fact, and the secondary roads are*



*very poor, very poor. There are villages in the middle of nowhere, way up on the top of the mountains, right out of the edge of islands. So there are logistical challenges and we were lucky that we ran the registration during the dry season. If it were a wet season, during the wet season, we would have had great difficulty in getting to those places, or those electors or potential registrants getting to the registration center. The roads are sometimes no more than tracks across the top of a mountain, so, that's the worst of it. Some places are unreachable by road. That's where we had to run air operations to get the materials out there. One guy, when I was up on helicopter up in Koinadugu told me that he was 18 hours away from the capital, by road. I don't know how you get fuel up there to do that, to run vehicles. I had to actually run a motor vehicle up in those places, so 18 hours is unbelievable.*

McCANTS: So, mostly you used road and helicopter for unreachable places?

HOGAN: *Yes, we had used UN helicopters. There are no other helicopters in this country that are owned by government. We used the military—an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) was struck between the National Electoral Commission and the Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). So we asked RSLAF to make available up to 80-odd vehicles for us, of variable compositions in that number, to support the Electoral Commission through the whole program. That MOU thankfully finished yesterday. It was a real pain. We spent quite a lot of donor money in getting these vehicles up to a condition where they would actually be somewhere near roadworthy and actually useful, and spent a lot more money in keeping those vehicles on the road. But they are the only—they have some of the only vehicles in this country that could actually get over the terrain and into these very remote areas where we required them. So, we were fortunate that we were able to do that, but again, I don't see how that is sustainable.*

McCANTS: Can you talk a little about the system of polling centers and stations set up, and how well you think that system worked?

HOGAN: *Again, those things—. It my broad understanding that those things—where you allocate polling centers, and the number of polling stations within those centers—come down to the registration data. And they were also compromised by the Electoral Commission. We made certain decisions about how we would go through that process. There was a period of reasonably good data available and their registration data was cross-meshed with the statistics data. So, we made assumptions and did an allocation, and then that was compromised by the Electoral Commission saying, "Well, we can't have these villagers walking 20 miles to go vote, so we need to establish other centers." There was discussion around that, so those smaller—it's those things, the practical things come into play at the end of that process. But that's, by and large, how that was run. But again, if you want more data on that I'd talk to the operations people.*

McCANTS: Were there any special steps taken to protect the list of results during transport between polling stations and headquarters?

HOGAN: *Yes, there were. They were under escort all the way. They were escorted by both an Electoral Commission person and I believe a police person was in the vehicle with them. They're in an envelope, which is called a tamper-evident envelope—which it is pretty reasonably self-explanatory—so that you can't get into that once it's been sealed to tamper with the information in the results sheets. It doesn't stop you tampering with it before it goes into the bag, but it certainly stops it post.*

---

McCANTS: Talking about communication, you spoke a little about this already, how were the communications organized between headquarters and operations in the field?

HOGAN: *We're very heavily reliant upon mobile phones and satellite phones—they were the two devices that we used, which are excellent, both of them, throughout this country. But they also had their failures, in that the infrastructure is fragile, not so much for the satellites, but for the mobile phones sometimes. You had days where you couldn't call one of the districts or they couldn't call you, because the carrier for that particular mobile system was down.*

McCANTS: Were there maps or mapping services available?

HOGAN: *There were, but this is outside of field of expertise. But now my understanding is that we got it from the Sierra Leone Bureau of Statistics and we had reasonably good maps. They weren't excellent, but no—.*

McCANTS: Were there other logistical challenges associated with procurement or transport of materials?

HOGAN: *Oh there are in that there is nothing available in this country of any value, or of any quality, absolutely nothing. Everything is imported into this country, which is a sad position to be in. So everything has to come from outside of the country. Surrounding countries provide very little, can provide or are able to provide very, very little. You are able to buy basic stationary equipment locally, although it's of very poor quality sometimes. You certainly can't necessarily get it in the numbers that you require, in the volume that you require, and in the timeframes that you require, because they've got to import it to get it here. So, everything had to go out—almost everything had to go out to international procurement exercises. Once you start to talk about an international procurement exercise, you're talking about at least a 10-week program to start from the beginning to somewhere near the end of the procurement, and it depends where that material has to come from. Some will come from Europe, some will come from China, some will come out of Asia, further down into Asia. So, yes, once you get in international procurement lines, it's a very long timetable. And that's to purchase simple, simple things sometimes. But, also including sensitive and complex things like the ballot paper printing, that was done in London from here. That's their long-term timetable; there are long timetables.*

McCANTS: Can you talk a little about your relationship with the local personnel? What kind of two or three ways would you—two or three ways that you would like to improve that working relationship?

HOGAN: *To improve it will take time. The relationship is fine. The relationship between my guys, my unit and their unit, is good. There's nothing wrong with it. I deliberately employ a lot of other African guys here, and women. These are people I had worked with previously, who I was impressed with, and that worked well. I think that was important, that it wasn't just the white boy making the decisions. It was a fellow African, and they have modes of behavior and communication that people from the west do not have, and there's a certain level of respect. One of the guys I had here was a Nigerian, and the Nigerians in this side of Africa are seen as the big man of Africa and command a bit of respect out of that. But these are people you've—the relationship has got to be good, but you've got to also compromise here. You also want a friendly relationship, but you also need a business-like relationship. There's got to be senses of discipline and order, and you've got to command a level of respect and authority through that. I carry that because I'm a*



*white guy, which is very sad, but it's true. I carry that and that became obvious to me through the time. You've got to work on those sorts of things during the relationship, and our relationships with these people, with the national staff, has been excellent all the way through. Our abilities to get them to actually follow the business disciplines and programs and planning cycles that I've been talking about is not as good as it should be. The understanding of business systems is not as good as it should be. The understanding of the reasons for those appropriate business systems is nowhere near what it needs to be. So, I would like to conduct a long-term capacity building program here, post the wind-up of this event.*

McCANTS: Is there any aspect in kind of your overall UN experience of UN policy or donor policy or management that you think works better now than it has in the past?

HOGAN: *Now, it's a terribly compromised process. People want the outcomes and they are prepared to pay for it, and that can create that aid-dependency I spoke of earlier.*

McCANTS: Do you think it works less well now than it used to?

HOGAN: *I think it works the same as it always has. It has never got any better. I don't think that it—I think that we're in a compromised position because we make the donors the experts. We go to the donors with a program and seek their approval for a program. This is a program that is being put together by a group of international experts in their field, for the program that we want to conduct, and the donors get to make the decisions on that. I can't ever work out the logic of that. We are making the donors the instant experts, and they carry with them their own personal agendas, either their country agendas or their personal agendas into that program. So, it's a compromise.*

McCANTS: What do you think are the biggest challenges that the elections management body will face when the country is conducting their own elections?

HOGAN: *Infrastructure problems. They will face infrastructure problems. They will certainly face financial problems in being able to conduct it to internationally acceptable standards. A lot of their staff will not have the appropriate skills—there will be a terrible skills gap, to be able to conduct it to international standards or to appropriate national standards. And yes, the infrastructure, the commodities base, is not here to be able to enable them to conduct it with local resources. So, they will have to go out to the international community and there they don't have the skills to be able to do that, to be able to negotiate and manage internationally.*

McCANTS: Is there anything that, in your view, can be done to prepare for or avert some of those challenges?

HOGAN: *Yes, there are. Some of those things can be done if you start by, I think, the beginning of next year. If you start with the beginning of next year and you start, sit down and take long-term strategic decisions, strategic views of the structure of the organization, the skills required of the organization, and the training programs that need to be put in place. These are long-term capacity building programs that I spoke of a little earlier that need to be in place to ensure that the national staff can conduct the programs with their own—of their own volition. But that still doesn't give them the money to do it.*

McCANTS: Is there anything that you think the local personnel did particularly well?

---

HOGAN: *Yes, some were—they were quite good. When we put them into a position—and we did this quite deliberately several times—put them into positions where we established the processes, we bought all the resources together, and said that you had to conduct these particular exercises. We had a group of staff that we focused on to start to develop them in thinking about processes, procedures, quality assurance, quality control processes, when we're doing things in this—it was simple things like packing the registration kits, the polling center kits, the polling station kits. Though you've got to get a hundred percent correct—this process isn't going to be 100% right each time. They had to take on that responsibility and stand up to that responsibility, to say, "Well, we're not going to do it—the internationals are not gonna do it, this is your business and your elections. You conduct this exercise." These are critical parts of the process, it's not—you've got to get them 100% right. We had a handful of people that we focused that on, to give them those responsibilities, and they stepped up to the plate each time. They didn't get it 100% right each time, but they got very, very close to it. There are good skills here; it was really just a test to see where the skills level was and how people performed under pressure. By in large, they did it well. So, there is good quality here. There's good quality—they are both intellectually and physically able, and it just needs to be a little further developed.*

McCANTS: Were there any other countries whose experiences you found useful in this context?

HOGAN: *I've had mostly the—yes, experiences in Afghanistan were reasonably similar, just because the process was similar. The people we used in Afghanistan had a completely different set of skills and it's a completely different set of problems, as well. But all experiences build in each other. The closest to this that I've had was actually the experiences of East Timor, where there was an oppressed and repressed and angry group of people in East Timor. And people who had very—their will had been broken and that was also the case here, where sometimes people were just too subservient, too easily and too quickly. When you asked them to do something, they wouldn't stand up and say "No, I don't want to do it that way, I want to do it this way." They would just say, "Yes, whatever you say is true." That was not the response I wanted. So that was a bit disappointing. But yes, you get those things every now and then in different areas though, each time.*

McCANTS: Did you learn anything from those experiences, specifically in East Timor and Afghanistan, which helped you here?

HOGAN: *Oh yes, yes, patience. I don't naturally have the gift of the patience, I've learned it. I've learned that and I've learned to control to my—the language that you use and the way that you speak with people. One of the great problems that comes out of these missions is that when you are speaking with people for whom English is a second language, and it is here—Creole is their native tongue or the Lingua Franca, and for most people English is like the second language—you've got to use less complex English, simpler English. Structure your thoughts and processes in different ways and speak to people in different ways. But you can do that, it varies—their English complexity varies from person to person, of course. Some are able to handle more complex thought processes; others are just not able to. So, that's the lesson I take out of here, and the problem is, you then take that home. You go home to a country where English is the first language and you start speaking in the same way that you have been for the last seven or eight months, so that's a bit difficult, the readjustment process.*

McCANTS: Is there anything that you think would limit the ability of others to borrow innovations or lessons from other countries, things that don't translate well across contexts?

HOGAN: *Everything is about context. What happens here in this country will not even happen in Liberia, the neighboring country. They will be different, because the geography of the country is different and the infrastructure of the country is different. But, you can go there and see how they do things and see how those processes may be borrowed, or some of those innovations might be borrowed and brought into here. Everything is about context. The law makes a big difference, how the law is structured. As the infrastructure capacity of the country changes, these are major things that change the environment for you.*

McCANTS: Is there any particular aspect of the logistics or election management, in general, that you think needs further consideration, research, and evaluation?

HOGAN: *Here? Yes, I think the electoral law needs to be reviewed. The constitution needs to be reviewed as well, but I think that process is going on. The electoral law needs to be reviewed; there are several weaknesses. But I'm sure the legal advisor will tell you more about that. Other things that need to—there are tremendous gaps here in capacity, and that's an area we need to focus on with the donors, in our view, where the donor community needs to focus on. Whereas the biggest problem that I see for the Electoral Commission here is that they don't see those gaps. They don't see them at all. They don't see that their business processes and systems do not allow them to manage their business properly, and that I think is a huge problem—where the senior management doesn't see their own flaws, then nobody will do anything about it.*

McCANTS: Is there any other area that you feel that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to speak about?

HOGAN: *At this stage of the morning, no. Thank you.*

McCANTS: Thank you so much.