



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

AN INITIATIVE OF
THE WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
AND THE BOBST CENTER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Series: Elections

Interview no.: H 7

Interviewee: Mohamed Konneh

Interviewer: Nealin Parker

Date of Interview: 6 August 2008

Location: 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

PARKER: This is Nealin Parker. I'm at the National Democratic Institutes (NDI) office in Sierra Leone in Freetown, and I am speaking with Mohamed Konneh, who is a program officer with them. If we could just begin by you explaining a little bit about your role and NDI's role in this election.

KONNEH: *I am Mohamed Konneh, the program officer for NDI. As a program officer, my task is to support all programs implemented by the National Democratic Institute regarding elections, whether it has to do with civic education, working with political parties, international-observation effort, working with domestic effort. All of these projects are supported as a program officer, as support to the entirety to make sure that we reach the initial objective and also reach the program as designed and established. So I work throughout. Most times, I say I am everywhere. I go to NEC (National Elections Commission), I go to PPRC (Political Parties Registration Commission), just to ensure that [Indecipherable 1:09].*

National Democratic Institute is an institution that works to strengthen and expand democracy. So for Sierra Leone, specifically on the elections, the task was to help Sierra Leoneans have elections conducted in a free and fair atmosphere. In doing that, a series of projects were implemented, such as support for civil-society organizations to go out and motivate citizens by giving information, to empower them to engage in the electoral process, working with political parties to adhere to the code of conduct established by the NEC and the PPRC, a commission established to monitor the activities of political parties, and also meeting the rules and regulations established by the National Elections Commission, a body mandated for the administration of elections in Sierra Leone. And also NDI is working also to support domestic effort in having elections and supporting the new and bringing civil societies together to discuss issues that will promote free and fair elections, helping political parties to develop that type of message, etc., etc.

So in summary, we are working as an institution to help Sierra Leoneans have elections conducted free and fair and by the end of the day citizens accept the outcomes or the results.

PARKER: You mentioned that you worked with political parties. Could you briefly describe party politics before and after the election?

KONNEH: *Party politics in Sierra Leone to me has really much been on the regionalism. That is how the political parties have operated in Sierra Leone, because each of the political parties you talk to will say, "This is my stronghold and this is my stronghold." So that shows the elections where political parties are based on regionalism. However, that ideology seems to be reducing, because in the recently held elections, we realized that the All People's Congress (APC) were able to win some seats in the southern region and the SLPP (Sierra Leone People's Party) also won some seats in the northern region, but clearly it comes—.*

PARKER: What is the SLPP?

KONNEH: *The Sierra Leone People's Party and the All People's Congress, both of them won seats in their strongholds, and the stronghold of the SLPP and the stronghold of APC. That shows the idea of regionalism in politics is a bit*

minimizing in Sierra Leone although it still remains. We cannot discard that fact. Politics is still somehow regionalism.

But with a lot of effort by civil-society organizations, I'm sure the politics may begin to move away from regionalism. Also, the party politics in Sierra Leone in my mind has been a kind of realistic statement coming from political-party leaders, those contesting the elections by just making a statement. They actually know they cannot accomplish. But since our country's high level of illiteracy, people can't accept that, because you can't imagine a candidate saying, "If I win the elections in Bo city, I will provide each one of them with a flush toilet." I see this as a very unrealistic statement. Where are the resources coming from?

So basically, the party politics in Sierra Leone, still seem to be on regionalism, still seem to be unrealistic promises that they cannot actually fulfill. That's how I look at the politics in Sierra Leone.

PARKER: You mentioned that through great effort of civil society, some of the regionalism was diminishing. What are civil-society groups contributing? How are they able to do that?

KONNEH: *They are able to do, help minimize by conducting civic educations. You know to the citizens it is through using different strategies such as theater groups, dramas, organizing football event where people can actually come together and share about the elections and the electoral process. Having forums like here at NDI, we used to organize a forum with [Indecipherable 6:00] masters where civil-society groups leaders and political parties come together and actually talk about issues that actually promote policies, not based on regionalism, not based on nationality but based on issues.*

PARKER: Roughly how many parties emerged at the beginning of the electoral period?

KONNEH: *Which, from 2007?*

PARKER: Mohamed Konneh, part two. How many parties emerged at the beginning of the 2007 election?

KONNEH: *Basically, seven political parties emerged. That's inclusive of the All People's Congress (APC), and SLPP (Sierra Leone People's Party), PMDC (People's Movement for Democratic Change), and Convention People's Party (CPP), and People's Liberation Party (PLP), and NDA (National Democratic Alliance), UNPP (United National People's Party). I think those were the seven political parties that actually emerged as the political parties during the elections. Basically, two of those parties were very new—the CPP, Convention People's Party, and the People's Movement for Democratic Change.*

PARKER: Could you characterize those parties? Were they based on regions? Were they based on platforms?

KONNEH: *The Convention People's Party leadership emerges as a means of [Indecipherable 1:38]. He has the charisma. He is able to move the country forward and actually contested in the elections, of course. That party was given confirmation to participate about less than two months to the elections, and it had no stronghold like the other parties; it had no stronghold to me. But I would have seen it to be one of the parties that could have stayed and actually served as an*

alternative party to a domineering party, the SLPP and the APC. But that seems to not have happened. It is now very nearly dissolved. They don't have office currently, and the leadership has abandoned them. It is in the western ward. I used to admire him very much. He was a very strong guy anyway. If you asked him to articulate issues he can do that very well, but he did not stay to actually accomplish his mission.

For the PMDC, it was a splinter party from the SLPP which was established as a result of its leader losing the leadership position of the Sierra Leone People's Party. It has some support in the south, the southern region, where it won about 10 seats in the parliamentary elections.

PARKER: And the two main parties—are they based on regional divides?

KONNEH: *Yes, that seems very much clear. That's regional divide, because the recent elections clearly indicate that. The local-council election and even the presidential and parliamentary elections indicate that. The APC has strongholds in the north and western area. That is the urban, the Freetown, the western area, urban. And the SLPP has a stronghold in the southern and eastern region of Sierra Leone. This is not, to me, very much good for the political landscape in Sierra Leone, because let's say you go to the south, specifically to the Pujehun District. APC may put up a very strong candidate, but since the party has very little support in those districts, at the end of the day, the people will [Indecipherable 2/3:58] most time one week, they will just decide and vote for the SLPP candidate even if that particular candidate is not competent to actually represent the people. That's why also you come to the APC like in the western area—a second party will put up a very strong candidate, but because here is the stronghold of the APC people will decide to forget about the SLPP candidate and vote for the APC candidate. This is not good for enhancement of democracy in Sierra Leone.*

PARKER: What would you recommend to someone who was trying to deal with regional political parties?

KONNEH: *One of the recommendations I would give to somebody working to break that issue of region in politics is beginning to help political parties to come up with realistic political campaign messages, based on issues in realistic terms that can actually improve the lives of the people. What I mean by that, instead of people going out to lie, to say vote for me because of this X, Y and Z party, the candidate should say, vote for me based on these issues that are affecting the lives of the people and I, as a candidate, looking at my past track record, I make a difference. So vote for me on those issues rather than saying vote for me because of the party. So I think it is the politicians themselves that are actually using this issue of regionalism. So, in short, politicians come out with campaign [Indecipherable 2/5:43], based on the issues.*

Secondly, helping people to actually know what is happening in the other region. Let's say for instance, the southerners knowing exactly what is happening in the north in terms of development initiatives, whether undertaken by the SLPP or the opposition or taken by the APC in their ruling, because [2/6:08 Indecipherable] and APC is doing very well in that region or is doing very well in this district. I think we have to follow them because of the [Indecipherable 2/6:19] they are doing on the other side. [Indecipherable] also, to have very good representation.

PARKER: Mohamed Konneh, part three.

KONNEH: Yes.

PARKER: What responsibilities did the election-management body have for regulating political parties?

KONNEH: *There are two bodies, one is the National Electoral Commission, that is what [Indecipherable 3/00:20] for Sierra Leone. We have the NEC, and we also have the PPRC. The PPRC I'll talk about, their own role. They are actually responsible for the registration—.*

PARKER: What is PPRC?

KONNEH: *Political Parties Registration Commission is the body responsible for the registration of political parties. Also monitoring their activities in the electoral process, such as parties adhering to the code of conduct that was established by the parties themselves and the PPRC, and monitoring their financial management, such as reporting their financial cost in the electoral process. Where necessary negotiating between political parties, between and within political parties. It is an institution where they are not able to actually set through the differences between parties; it is now brought to the Sierra Leone Police, the SLP, which has the mandate to actually investigate and, where necessary, to take these issues to court.*

So in summary, political parties, PPRC registers and monitors the activities of parties. The NEC, as you know—they are the body responsible for the administration of the entire elections, such as boundary delimitation, voter registrations and a host of other things—preparation of ballot paper, anything that has to do with the actual management and administration of the election. So those are the two bodies in Sierra Leone responsible to ensure the conduct of elections in the country.

PARKER: So if a candidate had wanted to run, would he register with the PPRC and the PPRC would hand that over to the NEC, or how did that work?

KONNEH: *The candidate that wants to contest for election directly registers with the NEC, which is a nomination phase in Sierra Leone. They take their candidate profile to the NEC. The NEC will look into their credentials, and they will be able to determine whether that candidate is qualified to contest in the elections.*

PARKER: So what does registration mean?

KONNEH: *Registration by the PPRC is that—you know political parties, for local political party, it is an institution where a group of people that have similar ideologies actually want to manage the affairs of state. They come together to form an association. That association can only be confirmed as a political party when you have registered by the PPRC giving you a temporary certificate and investigate into the background of the party, whether they meet the criteria as established by the electoral law. That permits the party, the association can operate as a party.*

PARKER: Did the NEC dispense any to political parties?

KONNEH: *In Sierra Leone, not to my knowledge; that is not happening currently in Sierra Leone. That is one of the challenges of the main political parties, accessibility to funds.*

PARKER: Did they administer any penalties or infractions?

KONNEH: *Penalties? Not directly. It is the Electoral Court, the 2002 Electoral Act was reviewed and that brought in the establishment of the Electoral Court where crimes committed in the elections are treated and also the Election Petition Court. So those are the two courts responsible to administer penalties on people that flout the laws of the elections in Sierra Leone.*

PARKER: And the Election Petition Court, is that a civil court?

KONNEH: Yes.

PARKER: And is it housed within the NEC?

KONNEH: *It is not. Somehow it has to do something with the NEC, but it is a form of independent body, outside of the NEC directly.*

PARKER: Is it the first place that you would go with a claim?

KONNEH: *When you make a claim, first you take it to the NEC, the court of complaints. If a candidate or party is not pleased with the final findings of NEC, they announce [Indecipherable 4:56]. If it is a petition, you take it to the Petition Court. If it is a criminal offense committed in the elections, it goes to the Electoral Court. And each of these courts is present in the four regional headquarter towns of Sierra Leone—Bo, Kenema, Freetown, Pujehun. I mean Bo, Kenema, Mekeni and Freetown. Those are the regional headquarter towns where the court normally sits.*

PARKER: Did the NEC or the PPRC handle the registration of political parties? Skip that. Did the NEC or the PPRC play a role in vetting candidates, or how did they vet candidates? What did they say was necessary to be able to register, for them to be able to—?

KONNEH: *To contest in the elections?*

PARKER: Yes.

KONNEH: *In Sierra Leone, for the position of the presidential candidates, one of the criteria, you have to be Sierra Leonean—that's the first thing. Secondly for the presidential post you have to be at 40 years and above and you should be mentally fit and not somebody that has been found wanting in a criminal situation. I think those are the key—there may be others but those are the key, Sierra Leonean, more than 40 years of age, and be mentally fit. For parliamentary seat, you have to be up to 21 years of age and also Sierra Leonean and not insane, you have to be mentally fit. Those are the three main criteria.*

PARKER: How did the NEC or the PPRC try to maintain fairness?

KONNEH: One of the ways these people maintain fairness is the way they did and serve as individuals, the way they conduct their service. It seems they have proved to me to be very much neutral, to be very much professional, and the whole, which is very much key because, if you want to maintain fairness, the person has to see that in your behavior, in your attitude, the way you respond to your job. So that is one of the—both of these institutions have maintained fairness. Also, having information sharing, because if I'm working, information is not reaching me at the [Indecipherable 3/7:40] and begins to question the activities of those that are supposed to provide me the information. So for the National Electoral Commission, they have the Political Party Relations Committee, the PPRC, where parties' leaders, meet every 14 nights to discuss issues that promote free and fairness into the electoral process. I normally attend that meeting on behalf of National Democratic Institute. I think NDI and IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) are the only NGOs that are permitted to that meeting. Also they make information, conferences or press conferences, make information available to the political parties, to civil society. So these things have, having parties, being present during the accounting at tally centers, you know polling states. You know all these things to me are part of the fairness.

Otherwise, if it is only done by the NEC [Indecipherable 3/8:42], the political parties' presence will begin to question this thing [Indecipherable] only done by NEC. But since they invite other stakeholders, they call press conferences, invite civil society, political parties, [Indecipherable 8:57] ask them for more fairness. In some meetings, political parties are making suggestions that even the local council elections.

NEC initially had planned not to have the pictures of candidates on the ballot paper. I was in that meeting when the parties brought up the issues to NEC. They thrashed it out at the end of the day, though, by the NEC has taken a policy on it. But decided to reverse it because the parties were saying no, we want to have candidates' pictures on the ballot paper. So in all fairness, otherwise NEC was saying no, we cannot reverse again or interfere with the nomination process.

Also from the PPRC they are doing the same papers, the same things, all these conferences, inform the political parties, remind them on the particular code of conduct that this code was established by all of us, it is a written document, it is a very [9:54 Indecipherable], we have to adhere to it; otherwise you will be breaching the law of the elections, which is, if they ask commissions to ban the party from taking part in the elections.

PARKER: Were political parties required to disclose their sources of funding? Sources of money?

KONNEH: That has been challenged in other ways. Actually the constitution has [10:21 Indecipherable], which the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, IFES, is providing leadership on that role, to help parties to actually disclose their sources and funding. It is not really very well, because since the last elections I am sure it is only the People's Movement for Democratic Change that have clearly disclosed their sources of funding during the last elections. The other parties I'm not sure whether they have met that particular material. Somebody met me recently from the PRP, he was discussing with me, they took this stand that the party should disclose their assets, especially on funding elections. The other two leading parties—that is, the APC and SLPP—have not done that. So it is really challenging. You know these things are very new phenomenon to Sierra

Leonean politics, and changes do not take place in a day; it has to go through a series of phases. We are just on the first phase. By the time we go to the second phase and the third phase, there may be other parties.

PARKER: Could you describe the way that political parties campaigned?

KONNEH: *That's very much dismayed, I don't like it at all. If I had the power I would stop the way they campaign because the campaign is not a campaign, it is just a matter of going to the street, dance, use abusive force against one another. Better meetings are not organized where candidates are really asked critical questions on how they are going to achieve X, Y, Z plan they have. What is this town, where will the resources come from? What is the timeline? This is the kind of campaign I want to see happening in Sierra Leone, but rather it is the opposite where youth are given [Indecipherable]. They go to the street with guns. They insult [Indecipherable]. They cause havoc. I don't like it actually. I am thinking by 2012 we have [Indecipherable], bigger place where candidates can actually have meetings. People go to those meetings, candidates say all their campaign messages to them, they encourage people to ask them questions, that can really test yes this guy is just lying, we don't have to vote for him. He is just lying, he lacks the necessary capacity to actually deliver the promises he is making. If this does not happen, you realize future elections will begin to experience voter apathy, because recently I was talking with some friends. I said, to me, one of the reasons for the low voter turnout in the local-council election is the nonperformance by elected representatives. They are not delivering.*

So the citizens are saying, "Look, even if I vote, there are no differences. That is not going to make any difference whether I vote. I know that this party, this candidate is going to win because this is the stronghold of this political party." So, [Indecipherable]. So like we say, I want to see that's organized campaigning. Meeting organized, people ask questions, to actually determine the capability of the candidate contesting the election.

PARKER: And what kind of support do you think the political parties need, or what kind of encouragement do the political parties need? How do we get the political parties to have platforms, to campaign in the ways that you are describing?

KONNEH: *To be frank, it is a continuous form of training, especially on planning, organization of event, having very good outreach sessions in the communities. It is basically capacity building on training and planning, coordination of events, developing realistic campaign messages, how to organize. How to really organize a campaign? I tell you for free that there are certain candidates at elections that can be heard; we thought that candidate, even organization a better meeting to actually tell people. Like the ward I am residing in Freetown; we have had election twice, I have voted twice. None of the candidates have actually campaigned to me. But because of this political device on regions, we vote at the end [Indecipherable], even if it is a very weak candidate. So parties actually need to be taught on how to organize campaign, a good campaign. What do you mean by good campaign? What does active mean? What is outreach?*

Explaining to people what is the political-party policy, what the party stands for. All of these things are actually lacking. You go to parties, there are no better structures to promote, and ask communication from the national level to the district level. Most times when we have sessions, NDI with these political parties we can plan it in Freetown with the hope that those in the region will receive

information through their parties. You will be surprised when you go down, they will say we don't know—actually they don't know which is a slap on my face and also the party's. So I want parties to actually improve their communication channel, have a very good communication structure.

PARKER: What support is being given to political parties now? Were they being trained in the substance of elections? Were they being trained in how to conduct meetings? Were they getting any of that information now?

KONNEH: *No, I'm not sure. Even with support also from NDI, we do not really cover those areas much like what we only did in this local council election on campaign. We only did that in Freetown with a very limited number of people, forgetting the rest of the people in the region. So really, to me, donors abandon political parties, which I do not actually appreciate. You know they focus a lot on civil-society organizations, on NEC, on PPRC. By the end of the day, all of us will blame the parties. "Look, parties did not educate their people. Parties did not better organize campaigning. Parties did not adhere to the code of conduct." Why? Because they don't have the capacity on the national level, regional level, district level to actually engage the people.*

So donors actually need to focus some attention on political parties, to really lift them up. Like right now, elections we had, there is going to be some support for civil-society groups to conduct, to be providing civic and voter education. So let's say by 2012 the civil-society groups, NEC, PPRC will be at this level, why parties will be at this level. So to bring it to that level will be very tedious work.

PARKER: Were there any party boycotts during the election procedure in the beginning, and on what grounds if there were?

KONNEH: *Not to my knowledge, there was no boycott. From the beginning of the process the parties engaged in all the activities, though what kind of representation those that were assigned to the various events, the [Indecipherable] representation that remains to be asked the questions.*

PARKER: If you were providing advice to other countries, what steps that you've taken here with respect to regulating political parties, would you recommend to others?

KONNEH: *One Sierra Leone institution is very unique: the PPRC method is a very good, unique method we have adopted in this country. That is actually regulating the activities of political parties. Also, I like the issue of the Political Party Liaison Committee established by the NEC. I like it very much; that is very good. It helps better to really interact. Of course, the issue of party agents now has been acclaimed worldwide, but also election management body needs to put emphasis on that, having party representatives in the entire process, from the boundary delimitation to voter registration and everything so that actually they know what it entails in the electoral process. It is not just on the day of elections. Having party agents or party representative in the entire process; at the end, no party will say no, we don't know, we were not involved if they have a representative who signs and says, I am the representative X, Y, Z. The NEC or the election management body will just say OK, here is a document that ascertained the presence of the representative in the boundary delimitation exercise.*

Both the boundary delimitation exercise, in the 2007 elections and the recent one were very problematic, somewhat problematic you know. [Indecipherable] any

power, did not want to approve the last boundary delimitation for parliamentary. They saw that to be a slap on their face, and this recent one also, even civil society cried on the way the boundaries got delimited for the elections. People had said that's one of the factors why people did not turn out to vote, for many people they are not sure they know the boundary of their wards.

PARKER: Moving then onto election violence, victims and spoilers. Was there an assessment of the threats done against the process before the election?

KONNEH: *Yes, on our side, NDI, I think we did an electoral assessment during the elections, at the very [Indecipherable] of the electoral process. That encouraged this institution to have violence campaign, education, candidate sensitization, organized in the 112 constituencies in Sierra Leone. So actually provide people information on the electoral process and methodology. We adopted what we called the PALS. The P stands for Pause, Assess, Listen, and Solve. It was good. I transformed that into a local language in one of our sections. Many people took it outside the training—that look, this election we have to be PALS, we have to remain friends, we have to observe, we have to assess and be able to solve the problems as it is happening.*

So as a result of the findings, the assessment that we did, we still have the findings in the main office to determine where there are possible threats during the elections.

PARKER: During the assessment of the threats, who were thought to be the likely victims and who were thought to be the likely perpetrators?

KONNEH: *The likely victims would be children and women and the perpetrators would be youths because these are able-bodied men who [Indecipherable] on that who cause havoc on the elections. At the end of the day, none of the politicians would be caught because they know where to keep themselves, to keep away from trouble. But the women and children who are completely innocent, who are not physically strong as compared to the politicians, the youths, will become victims of the violence.*

PARKER: Did these predictions turn out to be right?

KONNEH: *Yes, it turned out to be right, because when we started Pujehun District was prone to be one of the most [Indecipherable] areas and indeed the early part of the elections attacks were done in certain villages, houses were burned down. And also Bo was one of the troublesome areas. So [Indecipherable], the assessment was right anyway, really, on all sides.*

PARKER: Did you do anything to try to respond to the kind of assessment that you had done?

KONNEH: Yes.

PARKER: Or did the NEC do something?

KONNEH: *The NEC, well the strategy we adopted was, like I said, we used to have a meeting here on every Wednesday which was called Toastmasters, and to these toastmasters we invited police, we invited the army to provide their own preparation for the elections. What are they doing to support the elections, to*

deter violence in the elections. Where are they now with their preparations. We have the police, we have the SAP. Sometimes we invite the Office of National Security to this meeting. Everyone is the—we also invite political party leaders, civil society leaders. So through those dialogues, through those discussions, to a certain level it helped to help alert the police of problems somewhere, to help alert the military or the Office of National Security. Even the NEC, because they used to have people from the NEC come in to discuss at the meetings and also from the PPRC.

PARKER: Who were your security partners? You've mentioned the military and the police. Is that mainly who worked on election security?

KONNEH: *Yes, those were the key, although you have the Office of National Security which is the one presence at state house, but you have outlets in the districts. Like when we went to each of the districts to organize conflict resolution forums, were run by the Office of the National Security for those forums and provide citizens in most instances for the elections. How would they minimize violence for the elections. What do they expect the [Indecipherable] to do in case there is violence in their communities.*

PARKER: Sometimes security forces also lack funding to conduct their regular duties, and in this case the security forces have to expand significantly to be able to be at each of the polling stations. What would you recommend to someone who was faced with that but still trying to maintain security in a country with an election?

KONNEH: *Can you rephrase that?*

PARKER: Yes, no problem. It is basically that in most places you have a security force that is a certain size, and then for the election it needs to be much bigger—but there are still the same numbers of resources. So the question is, if you were faced with that, what would you recommend? How would you deal with that issue?

KONNEH: *This is a very interesting question. I just went to the police, just before you came; there had been some finding also. They want people to assess their role during the elections. I told them that I was very pleased with the entire performance of the police, but I was not pleased with their presence in the remote villages. There had been the number of policemen were very minimal. Apart from the election, they have some other duties to perform. So I told them I would encourage them to use the native administrative police at chiefdom level to help them in the security exercise so there would be presence in each polling station even in the remote village like my village where I come from. I call it [Indecipherable]. They have put police security presence. Maybe if that is not enough, they can even go through private security institutions in the country, because at the end of the day if there is no peace, those who have those private securities will not be able to make money.*

So when elections come, talk to them. This is a national call, this is a national function. Help us to work to improve the security, provide us—. If they can go to each of the private securities and say give us 10 manpower, 20 security, we'll have up to—many of these security institutions. At the end of the day, that will beef up their number. I was just telling them that you have to use very innovative ways to have their presence, the police station. They were very pleased with such advice. They said they were not really thinking of that. Why? This national call.

PARKER: Do you happen to know were there any trainings on security of the poll workers? Were the poll workers trained in security or were the police trained in elections?

KONNEH: *Yes, police organized a series of trainings for the guys who were to man the electoral process, training was conducted*

PARKER: OK. In terms of civic and voter education, would you describe the responsibilities of the NEC as it related to voter and civic education?

KONNEH: *The NEC, like I said, they are responsible for the entire administration of the elections. Therefore, they are responsible for the designing and production of voters' educational materials or civic educational material generally. That is the responsibility of the NEC. The designing, the production of those materials; however, they do not have enough human resources to actually go out and now disseminate this information, design and produce all these things. So in that sense they are limited. Because look at a district having one voter education officer, like Koinadugu District, a very big district with very limited logistical support. That individual cannot cover the entire district. We then contact the civil society groups to actually help the NEC. The NEC was very honest in those directions.*

I remember, last year, or was it 2006, they call it a planning forum to talk to all civil-society organizations, NGOs, to help them in the voter education effort.

PARKER: How effective do you think the voter and civic education was?

KONNEH: *Effective to meet those of us who have access to what they are providing; ineffective to meet my father, who is in the village, who does not have the facility, I mean as in Freetown—such as radio stations, being literate. So it was effective for some of us who live in the urban areas because of the methods they used. But it was ineffective for our parents who are living in the remote areas that do not have access to radio, who cannot read and write, where a voter-education officer could not reach.*

PARKER: What would you recommend?

KONNEH: *More robust voter education with support from the civil-society organization which also has a well-coordinated plan. The NEC being on top of the situation. I worked on the Liberia elections, I was in Liberia working with civil-society organizations. But that was basically on election monitoring, [Indecipherable]. I worked with [Indecipherable]. So in Liberia I saw much of voter education coordinated by the magistrate at district level but in Sierra Leone I do not see that happening. Actually, the voters, the electoral body at district level have infrequent meetings to actually coordinate what the civil society organizations were doing. So all of these things cause lapses in the voter-education effort because this organization can go to one community and the same community just because it is closer on the road the national organization will come to that same community, forgetting those remote villages.*

So if NEC could actually have a better coordination of the effort, or a robust effort by civil society organizations, by telling them OK, so-and-so area has been covered. If you want to do voter education, you could cover this direction, this area. That will actually help the information to the Sierra Leonean citizens.

PARKER: What do you think is the best way to convey information?

KONNEH: *In an illiterate community like this one, I think, though it may be challenging is face-to-face interaction, whether you are using a theatre strategy, role-playing is key. Sometimes story telling, you know, though it is challenging the face-to-face interaction is challenging. Second may be radio, because many of the people in a community may have radio and have information and then share that with their colleagues in their communities.*

PARKER: Could you tell me a bit about the party agents that were observing?

KONNEH: *Yes, party agents, in both the national- and local-government elections, they are provided. Of course, we did much in the national elections on the issue of party agent. That was why to me they were better prepared at that time than these elections. In the national elections, we trained all of them at regional level and inviting party representative from each of the districts, for instance, to come to Kenema for the eastern region. We provided training. We provided their checklist and some form of stipend was given to the agent during the run of elections. So agents were better prepared, better trained, better paid, with some form of funding to actually have their presence in the polling stations. As a result their presence helped to make the election free and fair because in polling stations where they think things don't go down well, they disagree. They refuse to sign the final tally results from the polling station and then brought those complaints to the party secretariat. The party secretariat now takes that to NEC and later on to the election, the Electoral Court.*

PARKER: In 2008?

KONNEH: *In 2007, in 2008 complaints—like yesterday I met one candidate who I just talked to and he said they have already petitioned the election from their own ward. So their process has just started. Of course, these too also they are a party agent, but I'm not sure whether they are actually trained. That's how we did it in the last elections. The argument for that by donor and my institution was that we already trained them during the last elections. But I said, agree, we trained them, but this is a very different election and there is possibility that most of the agents that were trained may have moved from this country to another country or may have moved from one party to the other, or vice versa. So I do not see us just organizing party-agent training in Freetown and only do it in Freetown though there are party agents in the interior. To a certain level, I'm not sure they used the checklist as are those in Freetown use the checklist. Because at the end of the day, the checklist helps you to determine what actually happened at the polling station during the entire process from the way out to the counting of the votes. [end of tape 3]*

The question I really want to ask, it has to do with funding of electoral support coming from. You know our election has been widely supported by international community, so that the election can meet international standards. However, in my mind the funding was coming very late, and that therefore it is not properly used for the purpose for which it was donated by the donors. What are the donors planning—to help not only Sierra Leone but some other countries where they are supporting elections, to actually having the funding being available a year to the election, especially on the civic-education effort.

PARKER: Thank you very much. I wish I had an answer to that.