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Interviewee: Thomas Du

Interviewer: Nealin Parker

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PARKER: This is Nealin Parker, I am with Mr. Thomas Du who is the Senior Program Officer at NDI (National Democratic Institute) in Liberia. If we could just begin by talking a bit about what your job was and what your role was in the 2005 elections and in the bi-election.

DU: *Thank you Nealin. Prior to the election I was recruited and hired by NDI as Program Officer at first and basically provided technical programming support and was head of program. At that time we were providing support to civil society organizations to politically engage the transitional process. We want to see how some civil society semblance has returned to Liberia and to see those key components that were relevant to lead us to elections in 2005. So what we did was we provided support to numerous organizations: youth, women's and pro-democracy institutions. And basically they were engaging the transition authority on the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that came from Accra, which was the instrument used for bringing peace to Liberia.*

               And there were two key things, one was to provide support so that civil society organizations could well interpret different components of the agreement to the Liberian public and to see how they understood it and see how they could contribute in terms of the implementation process.

               The other thing we did was to engage the political authority of the transition on the implementation process. That was to critique the government, or to call the government's attention in a way, an accountable process, into how the agreement would then be implemented. And by the close of the first year, in 2004, because the agreement was signed in 2003, we had a review process that brought together pretty close to 68 civil society organizations and government authority. And basically it was a constructive engagement as to how successful the implementation process had been. In that meeting also constraints and challenges were discussed. And suggestions and recommendations were made from civil society organizations as to how to continue.

               Prior to that meeting time NDI did focus group research, at least trying to get a perception of the public, especially Liberian people, as to what are their expectations from war to elections and what is their own rating and how do they feel about what an election could be like. The issues coming from the report on the focus group discussion formed part of the recommendations and discussions that we had with government authority.

               In 2004, NDI's support came from the National Endowment for Democracy, NED. In 2005 NDI received support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for electoral support and basically there were three components that NDI was engaged with, one to provide support for domestic monitoring. We felt that it wasn't only useful to provide international observation on election day but that it was also important to follow on with different activities leading to the election. So the domestic monitoring was on pre-election activities, electoral activity itself and post election activity. The pre-election activities were on voter registration, civic education, electoral law enactment and other sticky issues that developed prior to the election. Election monitoring was basically on election day and to report on some of the issues and some of the things that were taking place at the different polling centers.

               Post election was to report on different reactions from political parties, especially opposition parties and how people resolved disputes and other issues that came

out of the election activity. We also provided support for civic education but in collaboration with the National Election Commission (NEC) and the UNDP (United Nations Development Program). Also, in collaboration with the Carter Center we did international observation. The Carter Center provided long-term international observation and we did the short term, which was mainly focusing on the election day by deploying international observers to polling places around the country.

So basically that was what we were engaged with during the election period. Just before the election, we took a group of civil society representatives to Ghana as a shadow study and exposure learning, to engage with other civil society organizations in Ghana as to what their role has been in the electoral process in Ghana. As we knew prior to our election, Ghana had been able to successfully hold elections for two, three periods. So it was good to learn from them as to how civil society organizations had been very meaningful in terms of assisting candidates and in the entire electoral process.

So we were there for two weeks, even after the election—we left a few days after—that helped to further strengthen the work of the civil society organizations during the electoral process.

PARKER: Great. Moving to political parties, would you briefly describe party politics before and after the election?

DU: _Quite frankly, party politics in Liberia hasn't been a very participatory process. In our political history, political party formation was based on different skin pigmentation especially with our historical formation. Our politics was predominantly controlled by settlers who were repatriated from the United States after their freedom from slavery. And in that group you had darker skin and lighter skin which provided the different divide, the marginalization. The lighter skinned were more or less people who experienced a better life in slavery because a lot more of them were children that were made from slave masters and slave master children. So they are a little privileged as compared to those who are working directly from the field and gained their freedom while working in the field._

In the repatriation process back to Liberia, there was better support for the lighter skinned than those who didn't have the opportunity to be children of ex-slave masters. So party formation was based on the two different outlooks and skin pigmentation. So part of the politics in Liberia, was centered around the settler dominance which marginalized a lot more of the people in Liberia; because the settler population is, like, at most 5% of the total population at any given time.

During the 1943 election, there was a dramatic change, where one of the leaders of the True Whig Party, President Edwin Barclay, decided that the political arrangement in Liberia had been mainly Monrovia-[Liberia's capital city] dominated and this time he wanted someone who was outside of Monrovia. This is how (William)Tubman, our 18th President, was selected. His coming to power changed the entire political landscape. He stayed the longest in power, in violation of the Constitution, in violation of the political and electoral laws of the country. He stayed 27 years perpetuating himself. And that helped to establish a one-party rule for a very long time.

Then the military came in 1980. The military intervention, were forced to reckon with a process that would take the country back to civilian rule. And that brought in the election of 1985. However Samuel Doe (Liberian president from 1980-90)

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transformed himself from a military leader to a civilian leader and rigged the election and came to power. But during the election it was one of the first times in a long while in the country's political history that there were more than two parties, a multi-party representation in the electoral process. There were five contesting political parties including the one that Samuel Doe headed at the time.

And when he rigged the election he didn't give much room for political opposition, he didn't give much opportunity for more engagement, political engagement or opposition. This pushed a lot of people into a situation where our country saw the war that came in for 14 or 15 years as a means to end the political intolerance in the country.

To end the war there was an electoral process that was suggested because the international community and other players thought that the best way to end the Liberian war situation was to hold an election that could allow people to select whoever they wanted. But during the 1997 election period it was quite different from 2005, where people's security, personal security wasn't guaranteed, there was still a heavy presence of warring factions throughout the country, especially the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) of Charles Taylor. There were a lot of intimidations, physically and psychologically. Mr. Taylor [Charles Taylor, Doe's procurement chief] continued to demonstrate to the country and to the people that he represented the best way out for peace. He could not reckon with anything below the presidency.

So one could understand how unwillingly our people voted, trusting that since he wanted the presidency as a bargaining for bringing peace, we will give you the presidency hoping that he would have been satisfied with that and move the country to the next level of stabilizing and building a country that would come out of war. But that didn't seem to happen. He became very intransigent and wanted to perpetuate his rule and that led to another level of war for which there was much more, greater attention. And thanks to all of the different stakeholders, international communities, they decided to negotiate a peace process that was more comprehensive and thorough.

And then we had another election in 2005. But what has happened is that given the last two, three elections, there were much greater possibilities for openness. There were much better possibilities for some sort of competitive process, so too many people saw this as a first window of opportunity to engage in the electoral process. With that we are seeing an increment in the multiplicity of political parties. In 1997 we had thirteen political parties, as compared to 1985, where there were six political parties. That also increased in 2005 to 22 political parties. In real substance, all of these political parties are organized around the formation of an individual's ambiguity, their desire to become President and their effort to negotiate political office as a lead to achieving the presidency. So political parties are mainly used as vehicles to get to personal desires for big positions in government and to acquire authority within the legislative and judicial branches of government.

So party affiliation has not been based on ideological differences and practical differences in terms of beliefs, in terms of values, in terms of principles, or in terms of strategy. Party formation has been mainly based around the ambition of a few elites and one would say greedy politicians who desire the presidency or using the party as a vehicle to negotiate positions in government.

PARKER: During the 2005 elections did any of the parties developed armed wings or youth wings?

DU: *It was probably difficult to develop armed wings because of the heavy presence of the international troops, the UN (United Nations) peacekeeping force that demonstrated the utmost training for securing a peaceful environment. Again the demobilization process, the disarmament process helped a lot to reduce the presence of arms and ammunition throughout the country. So it was difficult to develop armed wings. But there was a heavy presence of a youth wing. And these youth wings, one could say, symbolically represented all these guys as armed wings. They were not armed, they were not sophisticated, but they were a group that could be quickly mobilized. They were people who could pose threats. They were the youth that were used to move abnormally into political rallies and other things and they made the bigger noise. Some of these attitudes presented some threat of violence and provided some form of insecurity, however they were not very substantive. People had the opportunity to organize rallies throughout the country and in some instances there were minor situations where there were clashes. But it didn't provide electoral insecurity.*

PARKER: Why do you think the—what kept these things from exploding? Why were there only minor incidents? What would you recommend to keep those incidents down?

DU: *I think one reason was the hope and desire of the youth, which had been misled into violence, that structure that kept them together had been broken. That structure, up to the time of disarmament and demobilization, still represented "one single strength", which provided protection and defense for that group. The second aspect is that they are more or less in the minority, those who were taking the lead. Taylor was able to manage this little group to the extent that he provided them the greatest resent the influence and protection in such a way that they could influence and carry out violent acts without been prosecuted.*

And the bottom line is that Liberia is a country of young people, of youth. The majority, or very close to the majority of the people, are young people. This country has not been able to see how to meaningfully give the kind of opportunity that would develop these young people into productive young citizens. They have been marginalized in many ways. They are among the illiterates, they are among the most unskilled, and there hasn't been any way to recognize their neglect. There has been a total neglect that in some instances manifests rejection. Now, it then became a situation of who will take the lead to give them some sort of hope. People of the likes of Taylor provided some false hope for them. And they're taught to believe in this and no matter how long it was going to take, that Taylor had some good meaning for them. So they were made to follow him, do those things, like killing, maiming people and engaging in all things, and one day Taylor would be able to take the leadership of the country and turn their hopes into practical successes.

But sooner or later some of them came to realize this wasn't helpful. They were being seen as enemies. They were being seen as people who were outcasts of society and Taylor was only using a very few of them to get to what he wanted to do, to get them to do what he wanted to do. So eventually it got to the level where there were only a few people he was controlling. Once he was removed and that protection was not provided any more, the entire gang was broken. However, there are still a lot more young people in this country that are very frustrated. They don't really see hope into their lives. Too many of them have seen long years of neglect. Fifteen years of war is not very small. If you were 8, by the time the war was ending you were 23. Those are supposed to be some of

your best times in your life, to begin engaging yourself, preparing your life, to become a useful adult. But there still is not much hope.

Our school system is still far below pre-war level. Our middle level training possibilities are very, very limited. The job market stays closed. Unemployment is estimated between 80-85%. Investments that are returning—I mean returning to the country, have been done under watchful eyes. People are not very confident, they're not very—they don't really trust that Liberia has returned to a very normal situation. And yet years are passing on and these young people don't have any real hope for survival.

PARKER: How would you recommend engaging young people, specifically in elections?

DU: *I think it should be more productive. First, I don't like this thing of a youth wing, categorizing young people into a different segment and only utilizing them for violent purposes, for mobilizing rallies, for swelling halls or rooms or the environment that you have, political meetings. I think they should be engaged thoroughly through the entire political party processes, electoral processes through issues of platforms. What are those things that affect young people? How do they see it? What could be useful if a party wins? In the first one, two years in terms of a youth development program, what is the outlook of the political parties towards young people, towards the youth? What is the development plan? What are their programs?*

                This is an issue in this country. Every well-meaning political party should have a platform that will address, or part of their platform should be directed toward addressing the issue of young people in this country. It is not just about making a youth wing and transporting them from one point to another point. During the 2005 election they were recycled. One political party would organize free transportation, mobilize the young people from one area and take them to a rally point. The next political party will come and take the same people, rally them and transport them to their meetings, and so forth, and give them handouts and give them chips and they make all the noise. I think the electoral process, the electoral engagement of these people should go beyond that.

                Now political parties should maybe begin discussing, especially with the youth and the women, holding informal round-table discussions and other kinds of engagements, other kinds of dialogue. Town-hall meetings to talk to young people. What are the issues affecting them? How can they be addressed? If a government is in place how do we address these issues?

PARKER: What were the responsibilities of the NEC (National Elections Commission) for regulating political parties? For example, what was their role in dispensing and regulating funds that the political parties were using? Did they have penalties for infractions when the political parties broke the regulations? Do they handle registration of the parties? Things like that.

DU: *In 2005 I will tell you, NEC was far more very compromising and very lenient. And perhaps one of the reasons was that we were coming from war. They wanted to provide opportunities for everybody to be inclusive because some of the parties could not meet up with the regulations and it seemed difficult to penalize them at that time. This could have been interpreted politically as marginalizing them and trying to keep them out of the entire process. Even up to the point of enforcing some of the rules on electoral law like the 30% requirement for women representation in the entire structures of political parties. That couldn't be enforced; the parties were not ready for that. NEC couldn't find a way to*

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enforce that because it would have kept a lot more of the parties out of the process. And people would have seen that as a direct attempt to marginalize some groups or targeting some people outside of the process altogether.

In terms of party spending, NEC has its own limitations. They don't have the kind of capacity and mechanisms to monitor campaign finance and electoral spending. Even tracking contributions was quite difficult. Perhaps given some of the work that IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) and other donors and funding partners are doing with them, they might be able to set some policy rules by which parties can report their financial capabilities and then they can monitor some of the finance spending, maybe in the coming general elections.

Again parties are not able to live up to some of the requirements. In recent times NEC was able to begin a process of penalizing some of the parties that could not even meet up with the least requirement of having a functional—having functional offices, even within Monrovia, at least in one county, which is the capital. Some of the parties cannot even have a functional office, an office that is open where you can get in there and you see staff. You can see functional activities like there is a computer, there is a typewriter, or there is some equipment that people are working with. They don't even have that.

Those parties are then asked — and they have to do that through the legal process, been asked to revoke their registration license or certificate. At least that is some method that they're using. They are claiming to do more than that but the bottom line is that they don't really have the capacity and the mechanisms to really get in and do that.

PARKER: Was there any kind of NEC political party convening body?

DU: *Yeah. With the help of IRI in 2005, the International Republican Institute, one is that the political party themselves established a code of conduct to manage their campaign and different engagements during the 2005 election. They also organized what is called the Interparty Coordinating Committee, the IPCC, which was chaired by NEC. It meets regularly to discuss issues, issues that you don't need to take to the court system, issues that you don't need to maybe get to the newspaper and other things, but that can be thrashed out internally or that the first mechanism or process is to meet face-to-face and say, "This is what you are doing." So the IPCC meets regularly and discusses something, and that is the most established body that coordinates political parties' engagements.*

PARKER: Were there rules in place where political parties had to register where they were going to campaign?

DU: *Well, no. The only thing the rules say is that political parties are entitled to the utilization of any public facility. They should not be denied the use of any public facility. And the other thing is that to avoid conflict and maybe wrangling and clashes during political rallies, it was useful or good to have the meetings some distance apart from areas that…for example, if you were having meetings in a particular vicinity, it might be useful if the locations could be well apart so that members don't, or party members don't try to hinder each other and so forth. Since we have not reached—or, we don't believe to have matured to a level where we can tolerate each other much more. So there were some rules on that. Also, with radio stations and things, the media, you don't want to have two or three parties at one program. Then you've lost the essence of the program, where maybe instead of debating the issues, people become very personal, very*

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insulting. So there were some rules to guide on those, and that was also a part of the Code of Conduct for political parties.

PARKER: Contacting voters can be very expensive. How were, particularly with limited infrastructure and the cost of fuel, what were the main methods that political party leaders used to try to reach voters?

DU: *I think two basic things were used: the media and some form of network in terms of outreach and material distribution, postal and so forth. Where political parties rely on members throughout the country to reach every outlet and every community, they did some networking.*

PARKER: Did these methods have any particular advantages or disadvantages in your opinion?

DU: *Certainly. For those that had the most efficient network they were able to provide some opportunity for engaging voters. Because one is the voter's…too many of our voters are illiterate. They look for graphic and audio or pictorial kinds of materials. Now, if you had a strong effective network that could reach every village, as you pass these materials out you have to see one or two things: what sort of materials are you giving? Whose picture is on the material and what does it represent? This provides the opportunity for engagement. That is, if you had effective machinery, a network of people that would explain and articulate those things, then you had the advantage of wider outreach.*

             The radio was doing that too. Our people are very accustomed to listening to the radio during the evening. If you were successful in buying airtime at very prime moments, that is, if your feedback from the different communities can tell you that most people listen to radio at this point in time and you can buy that time and do your campaign, you might have better outreach to people out there. Especially when you were doing that in very simple, plain, Liberian English or in the local languages that the people speak within that community, if you had that possibility that was far better.

PARKER: Were there any party boycotts?

DU: *For the last election?*

PARKER: Yes.

DU: *No.*

PARKER: If you were providing advice to other countries what steps have you taken in Liberia with respect to regulating political parties that you would recommend to other people?

DU: *I think it is good to open up the process as much as possible for broader participation. At the same time you want to guard against crowding the field because if it is too open people will take advantage and sooner or later you have the kinds of numbers that are not quite manageable. Second, you want people to have credence and respect for the whole process so that it doesn't look like a mockery of the entire system.*

             So there should be room for coalition building, but I think what I'd advise again from our process is the openness of our process that allows for the quick fixing of independent candidates. I think we should begin developing more rules and

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possibility for political competition and then other countries could learn from us and see how we can strengthen political parties and institutions; as institutions that represent the interests and aspirations of our people instead of individuals.

And some of the things we'll go into is what parties say they stand for and how they articulate those things. It is not just about elections, it's about how a party functions. Therefore the electoral management issues should be about getting political parties into the process where they can be even more efficient and vigorous after elections, not just during the election period. It gives more time to know when these political parties will do as they say or not. I'll tell you one example right now. With all due respect to the ruling party, the Unity Party is much more visible in Monrovia. If the National Election Commission were more thorough and vigorous, even the Unity Party would have problems, given the rules on the books.

We went to a situation in one of the counties, Bopolu, during the bi-election. We wanted to do an assessment. Not even the ruling party, the Unity Party, with all their "resources" had an operational office in the county in which they were contesting. This was very astonishing. So I think what other countries should learn from all this is about how to hold the rules down to the letter to encourage more possibilities for institutional building.

If parties were in institutional building, some of the offices can be managed by local people, in a very efficient way, cost effective. But because the elite and few political leaders want to stay in control of the working of parties, they want to keep an individually controlled process, which is why it is difficult for parties to decentralize and begin establishing as institutions. Because the more they are established as institutions, the lesser the influence, the more they get away from individual control. And other countries if they learn from that, should see how these entities are built as institutions.

The decision-making process, the funds generating mechanism or strategy within the parties, the existing structure, the management and administrative procedures in terms of coordination and programming—all these should be defined. And the election commission should find a way to enforce some of these aspects.

PARKER: You mentioned the media and the role that the media played. Could you characterize the media? Was it government run? Was it independent? What were the major sources of media at the time of the election in 2005?

DU: *To be honest with you, our media is very, very weak. It is developing. But there is a lot of enthusiasm. People are really determined within the media profession to do media work, to do professional work. But again, there are too many hurdles in terms of how the profession is treated, in terms of what we, who are non-media practitioners, perceive of the—of those who are making a little effort. It is almost like how sometimes we see other professions like football, like policing and so forth. People think that is an area for—a dumping ground maybe—for people who are not the smartest in society, which I think is a wrong perception. And therefore, we tend to treat the media within that context. And this is what is digging into the very fabric of the media, which undermines its potential, or effort to become more independent and more critical.*

PARKER: What do you think the media sources need to be able to cover an election for example, what sort of support would they need? Or is it regulation from the NEC that would help?

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DU: *I think the media is making some effort. One of the things I think that has played into what the media should be doing is our own closedness in our society. For a very long period, a very long time, our society was very closed. You could find only government-run media entities in terms of both electronic and print sources. We had almost a police state where everybody was on each other. It was difficult to have independent free minds that were articulating objective, constructive views and opinions. So when the opportunity came to open up the society, to allow freedom of expression, freedom of speech, I think we took it to a much wider level which opened up so much that we have a crowded field of this "freedom of expression." Now it is about time to streamline so that we get the best out of what we want or how we see this freedom of expression in a very helpful way.*

PARKER: How did the NEC use the media during the election?

DU: *Yes, for civic education purposes, for information dissemination, for reaching out to voters. Yeah.*

PARKER: Were they using radio or what other sources?

DU: *They used both. Radio, print, even, how you say, mobile dramatic media presence where they carry big group of cultural dancers and things and then use the open-air radio.*

PARKER: How effective was the media campaign do you think?

DU: *I think it was very successful. In terms of the voter turnout, in terms of the voter registration, in terms of targets, I think it was very successful.*

PARKER: What made it so do you think?

DU: *I think two things. Too many of our people saw this election as an opportunity to regain Liberia as a state. Our people also saw this as an additional opportunity to rebuild our country. And so, people were eager to hear how they could participate in this process that would rebuild our country. Therefore they saw the election as one key component that would give them that chance to participate.*

           For once, in too many ways in Liberia we haven't had opportunities that allow us openly and freely to get involved in a process that will lead us to selecting our leaders. Not even the legislature. Today you have a legislature that is mixed up of all those different, different parties. There is no clear dominance of any one political party. There is no clear dominance of one group of people. You have elites, you have grass root leaders, you have illiterates, you have people who clearly represent the interests and aspirations of people; and it is not based on any academic qualifications, it is not based on any long-term political values or activism. It is that people believe that this person can protect us, can protect our interests, can protect our aspirations. Even warlords, former warlords were elected in a very massive way. That demonstrates to you that some people are thinking that the best people to represent their interests in a post war situation are the warlords.

           So our people took this as a glaring chance to demonstrate how they too can participate in a free process. I think we should continue holding more stable, free, open elections. They will get to other issues that would be of interest to the

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people and based on that they will choose leaders who they think represent those issues and interests.

PARKER: What source of information do you think people relied on most to make their decisions about the election?

DU: *For 2005 there were a number of things. There were situations in which people felt that they were coming from war; they needed somebody who could represent those things, who could protect them. There were also people who lived and worked in the community, were involved with community work, involved with mobilizing community people, talking to them, discussing issues of development. For those people those were their representatives, those were their leaders.*

There were also people who voted based on traditional values. Our forefathers did represent particular interests. If those leaders produced sons and daughters and they came back and said, "I represent those kinships, I represent that interest, that leadership," people took them based on those understandings. There were too many factors that motivated people, which made people vote the way they voted. Some of them on clear issues, especially at the national level, felt as though this person could best articulate Liberian interests. This person has far more good experience and good understanding of how to run a country. This person has much more desire and some idea of what it is to take a country from out of war, they had the contacts. In some instances people voted on the fact that this person represents the interest of this group, this ethnic group, or these political interests. It was not necessarily that they were tribalistic, but they felt that particular people represented particular interests for a group in terms of protection, in terms of security, or in terms of issues revolving around this group. So there were a lot of factors that went into how people voted.

PARKER: I want to make sure that we cover a bit about the domestic observations because you were very involved in that, if I'm not mistaken.

DU: *Mmhmm.*

PARKER: So, would you describe the use of election monitors and the goals for monitoring established in the election?

DU: *Actually there is a tendency to bring in international observers right around elections or on Election Day and it doesn't seem to work well because people could manage their attitude and behavior in those very few days knowing very well that there is a huge international presence. And then observers will report on what they see, not necessarily what they don't know of. And then they can categorize the election as being a very free process, a very credible process.*

The goal of the domestic monitoring is to, first, get away a little from that kind of process; second, add more local value and ownership to the process. The third thing is for people who are objective enough and understand the different issues entering, to add their own credence and their own respect to the process. Because, however, it might get to the level where elections become very domestic, where you wouldn't have international presence. Or you wouldn't have to count on goodwill from the international community to always observe your electoral process. Then it becomes more domestic and more national.

The tendency is to develop these characters, the potential, and the ability of local people who can follow all these activities throughout the existence of the electoral process.

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PARKER: Were there any political party monitors involved?

DU: *That's a separate program altogether, which was done by political parties' agents and political party observers. But the domestic monitors were more independent civil society and community-based organizations' representatives.*

PARKER: How did decision makers either within NDI or within the partners of NDI decide how many monitors were needed or how much monitoring to do?

DU: *Well, I think the monitors were determined based on the different activities at a particular time. Particularly around the voter registration process there were more monitors. Around the validation of voter registration there were more monitors needed and deployed. All in all we normally had between 500 to 700 monitors for those different activities.*

PARKER: Do you think this was a sufficient number?

DU: *It wasn't but we were limited based on our ability and capacity.*

PARKER: How many people or what kinds of skills would you have wanted to see more of?

DU: *With the monitors?*

PARKER: Yes.

DU: *Well, I think in terms of the skills we tried as much as possible to blend other kinds of training and activities from other places, especially where monitors were more—have been more efficient, like in Ghana, Zimbabwe and other places. What we may have needed a little was to increase the number much more, maybe double it, so that we could have our presence in most of these things. And the other thing was to enhance the endurance of the presence of people. Because we had a limited number, we overstretched some of the monitors beyond the targeted expected time because some of the process went into longer hours. For that we may want to provide some more training so people can endure longer times when they're stressed out. But that is again based on individual ability and so forth.*

PARKER: How did the NEC liaise with observations? What was their relationship? For example, was there a special unit within the NEC that was the liaison body with monitors?

DU: *Oh yeah, of course we informed NEC of every aspect of the monitoring and they provided accreditation for their presence so that there wouldn't be conflict, so their local officials and staff understand specifically why this person is out there and what are they looking for. And, as you might know, monitoring, evaluation and auditing are aspects of life that people find to be a little tricky and think you're trying to police what they're doing. So we wanted to avoid this as much as possible, instead of seeing it as being counterproductive, seeing it as being an effort to improve on what they were doing so they could lend more credence to the public eyes. And it was about correcting mistakes and improving on the system and not necessarily being critical or unduly critical.*

     However, we were pointing out those challenges in a very objective way, not to their liking in some instances, but in a very constructive way. So there was cooperation.

PARKER: How well do you think the NEC's response, their sort of liaison body, worked for monitors?

DU: *How…?*

PARKER: How well did the NEC's liaison body work for monitors? Were you getting information in a timely fashion? Were you getting accreditation in a timely fashion? Did you feel like you were communicating well, those sorts of things?

DU: *Yes. Each of the reports was passed onto NEC, they were made public, or somewhere published in the newspaper and some of the issues were discussed in meetings.*

PARKER: Great. How were observers assigned to polling stations? And, you mentioned that the NEC was told I had a time for accreditation purposes. Were there other people who were told they had a time?

DU: *Yes, outside of our domestic monitors there were also civil society organizations that wanted accreditation to some of these processes. Some did apply and got their accreditation, but they didn't succeed because they didn't have the kind of support—financial support or logistical support—that could take them to some of these areas. So at times there were some sort of what I'd say was duplication or presence of other civil society organizations in just about the same place as where we had monitors.*

Deploying…we did our best to deploy throughout the country, or in selected areas because of the limitations of the number of persons. Two, because of the accessibility of the country, and three, for the best security of our monitors also, the security of the person. As you know, Liberia was just coming out of war and we couldn't guarantee 100% protection. The country was not yet in total recovery, with maximal security. So we selectively took some of the key areas in all of the counties.

PARKER: Two things: how did you first find people who were nonpartisan or who would act as observers, domestic observers, instead of de facto party agents? And the second thing is, how did you keep domestic observers from being, for example, bought off during the process?

DU: *Well, that was a very difficult thing to do given our political processes and so forth. But we challenged people to their conscious and their desire to do a piece of work. And there were a lot of screening processes both utilized by participating organizations and the expertise and experience from others who helped with the process. So the vetting process was sort of tedious. And it took us to a much more comfortable level, that we can say between 98 and 99% of the people did not prove to be pro-partisan or active party workers. They were not engaged in debates or dialogues. We didn't receive any reports that people were canvassing directly or indirectly for political parties while doing their work as monitors. We got very good feedback from the public about how the monitors were able to move, listen, and observe. In some cases they pointed to problems and made that known to some of the election officials.*

PARKER: And then how did you keep them from being bribed or being bought off during the process after you vetted them?

DU: Perhaps one of the things that worked was that they weren't the only group in the field, so if you wanted to bribe you had to bribe almost everybody else. The second thing is that the process was very competitive to the extent that political parties watched out for the other parties. Each party was watching... and because parties were watching the other parties, they wanted an independent entity that they could report to outside of NEC. They wanted to find a group that appeared not to be partisan and that they could talk to in order to address some of the issues that they themselves could find as problems or as issues.

So if you were bribing to favor you, then the other party might want to bribe for a favor also. However we didn't find any reports of bribery, but we didn't keep a police kind of situation where we were watching each monitor.

PARKER: Is there evidence that you could share that monitoring had an effect on the fairness of the election in this case?

DU: The presence of monitors and the clear identification of those monitors may have in a very good way contributed to making the process fair. The other thing too is that the help from the international community, including all of the different players and stakeholders, was in such a way that each institution or entity wanted to demonstrate commitment to ensuring that this could happen. I don't know for what reason but there was a lot of good will towards Liberia. So everybody went through every aspect of the electoral process with the objective of ensuring that this process was credible enough; I think that helped to make the process fair enough.

PARKER: What were the overall findings of the observers?

DU: Well, the overall thing is that…unbelievable, Liberia had the kind of election that proved to be very remarkable. Unbelievable we had an election that was far, far less violent, violence-free. It didn't have any semblance of people antagonizing each other and beating and killing just because you're opponents, especially the way we were coming from war. We had an election in which, for the first time, people were very tolerant towards each other. There were times that people engaged in heated arguments but they didn't go to the extent of having a whole group of people fighting. So we appreciated each other. And lastly, we respected the process. How little effort and how nonprofessional we might have been, we believed and trusted and respected the process.

PARKER: Is there any advice you could offer to others about using and managing domestic observers?

DU: Yes, that thing is a controlling factor. It helps people to establish ownership. It helps to encourage a local administrative mechanism for election management which sends down a good lesson that it is not all that has to be imported. But you need to value local attitude, local ownership, and local knowledge combined with whatever additional experience and so forth.

PARKER: Could you describe the responsibilities of the NEC for voter and civic education and how these were shared with civil society?

DU: One of the biggest things was to come up with the Civic Voter Education Manual. I think that helped to provide a guide, a national guide that tried to suggest structuring the message system and providing a kind of target. What do you tell

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the voters, at what point in time? What do you do and what should you not do? That helped to design a framework that didn't confuse a lot of people. Working from NEC and any other partner institution, it was a single message saying the same thing about voter registration, about the voting process, about party platforms and so forth.

PARKER: How did they go about crafting these types of messages? How were those messages crafted within the NEC?

DU: *There was a framework, the manual was one. Then NEC designed different poster samples. Like every kind of message, it might not be directly quoting from those messages, but the message was still around those sample posters in terms of where and what to do.*

PARKER: And at which point during the process were these messages released? When did the manual come out in relation to, say, the registration period or the election itself?

DU: *Far in advance. The manual came out in early 2005, somewhere around January or February, the first draft. And it was finalized before the voter registration in April. So it was finalized around February or March.*

PARKER: And during this process were there any particular groups that were hard to reach and how did you overcome those sorts of things?

DU: *Groups in terms of?*

PARKER: For example, either groups that were very far in rural areas that were logistically hard to reach or groups like maybe, for example, urban women who have jobs and also go home. They might be hard to reach just because their schedules were difficult or something like that.

DU: *The civic voter education was mainly robust. At times there were spot messages. You can capture the women while they're doing their farm work instead of waiting for them to come to the town. You can follow them in the field. You follow them while they are fishing; you follow them in the markets. Then there were other situations that attracted people. In our different villages we have what you call market days where people come to sell and buy. Then you have a massive turnout of people. Those occasions were also used. On those occasions one of the strategies was to use dramatic, cultural dance performances. So some what you call "edutainment," using entertainment to educate people on a different process, that targeted women.*

             For youth it was mainly the use of sports, especially football, and for the girls we got something called kickball. It is patterned along the baseball game in the United States. They play almost the same way but our women will play it and they don't play with a bat but they kick the ball. So we call it kickball. So we used kickball and football for the young people, the youth.

PARKER: If asked advice about how to best convey information for voter and civic education, what would be your top recommendations?

DU: *I want the government, through NEC, to find a way to encourage more networks. During the last civic voter education campaign, most of the support for civil society organizations and other kinds of organizations came from the international, non-governmental organizations. The government should find a*

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way to provide support for some of these people. Because what they are doing is not purely about international support. And there will be times where there may not be international support anymore. They should begin encouraging wider outreach with these institutions, partnering with them.

PARKER: Speaking of that, an election is a very expensive endeavor. Can you think of ways that you, on any of the topics that you've discussed or others, that Liberia could reduce the cost of an election in the future?

DU: *One way I think we should do that is to keep our current tenure even though it is far longer, six years, but we should keep it. The reason is that there is so much to do in this country and if we reduce the tenure to four years as has been suggested, no government will do much in two or three years. That is, you will have two years to do something and then in the third year you begin thinking about being re-elected. So some of the effort now goes into preparing for elections. So in real terms you have only two, three years to do real government work. For now we can keep the six years.*

               And again, in doing that, that means every four years you have to find funding. And unlike 2005 where we had huge international support for elections, I don't think that will be repeated in 2011 and so forth. And that will cause this small, tiny country that has not many resources, for the huge tax of development, it will cost so much. And the other thing is, I don't think we have reached the level where we have an intermittent, competitive political situation where people spring out every other time. Even our leaders, our political leaders have not grown to the level where they do honestly and practically what our election is intended for. Besides revolving around the personal ambition and desire. And I think our election is not all about that. Since it is not about that, six years wouldn't be much to take us through in finding money, finding the resources, putting together all the mechanics, carrying on voter registration, upgrading our election system, working to further institutionalize political parties and engaging more constructively into dialogue between ruling leading party and opposition parties and so forth. I think that, to be able to manage that would be…I mean limit our presidency by two terms. Nobody should try to manipulate or try an effort to seek for a third term. Two six year terms is quite enough.

PARKER: Do you have anything else that you would like to add to this? Any questions that we should be asking that we're not?

DU: *Well, not questions. I would just like to make a comment. I think it is a good process to evaluate some of and what we do, some of the efforts from Princeton University and other institutions. But this kind of effort is quite useful. It helps us to reflect and maybe to think a little in bringing out some of the other ideas that could be useful in the rebuilding of our country. Also, we think that the effort should not only end with 2005, or only go to 2011. It may not be at the same spectrum and the same level, but I think there might be a need to begin engaging the women and youth into active political work, especially in terms of cultivating leadership. I think we lost out in our times to build, or instill, the idea of leadership in our people, especially young people from different meaningful activities.*

               Political work in the schools should be strengthened at the university level, at the secondary schools, to symbolize leadership, the true meaning of leadership and the true meaning of a democratic process. It is not just about student leadership but how people can manage a good representation, good leadership at those levels. We can also do that in our local governance structure. See how we can rework the local governance structure to be more independent and responsive to

community needs. People can be truly elected based on what the aspirations of the people are so that our local leaders in the different communities can begin manifesting, demonstrating good leadership and so many people can develop later into being representatives and senators. I think we should not only focus on broad, national, general elections but how to cultivate leaders in the different aspects of our life, in the different engagement of our life as a people. So I think it is useful to reflect on some of these things. And I thank you for the opportunity.

PARKER: Thank you, thank you very much.