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Interviewer: Nealin Parker

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PARKER: This is Nealin Parker. I'm at the IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) office with Mr. Moi Sellu who is the Program Officer here. Before we begin talking about the election, would you just give me a sense of your job and the goals of your job?

SELLU: *Well to start with, IFES is going to be working the Sierra Leone program providing technical support to the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission. Basically, IFES is an election-focused institution having a field office here in Sierra Leone. IFES has been working with election institutions Sierra Leone since 1996, liaison in 2002 elections, 2004, and for the 2007 general elections and local government elections of 2008. IFES is providing technical assistance to the NEC and PPRC in areas like voter education, candidates' nominations, training and capacity-building, and to the PPRC in terms of developing regulations, elections-related violence, mitigation and a host of other elections-related issues. So in whole that is what IFES is doing. And I play a pivotal role in doing this in terms of program support. So basically, that is what IFES is doing.*

PARKER: Perfect. And would you mind giving a sense of your background a little bit?

SELLU: *Well I am a Sierra Leonean, who lived in Sierra Leone all these years and—*

PARKER: —the jobs that you had before this?

SELLU: *Oh yes, I studied political science and after that I was a lecturer in a polytechnic in international relations, and peace and conflict studies. Later, I worked with civil society, National Forum for Human Rights as research and information officer. I joined the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in 2006 as public relations and voter education officer. Then I joined IFES in my current position as program officer in March 2007, and this is my current position, program officer for IFES in Sierra Leone.*

PARKER: Perfect. Okay. So most of this interview will focus on your work with IFES but if you have insights from your work with the NEC that's also very, very welcome. And again, we're looking for creative solutions so if you have any thoughts that don't fit in with the question but that you think would be helpful to someone who is trying to work on an election in the future, then please feel free to add those in.

SELLU: *Yeah.*

PARKER: Okay. What would you say are some of the biggest challenges that arose during the elections?

SELLU: *Well, I would start by saying that overall, the level of illiteracy in the country is very high. That poses a big challenge to voter education work because, in terms of materials production, you have to do materials that are more dealing with demonstrations rather than text, which is quite significant. The other issue also deals with—we are working with the National Electoral Commission, which is a well-established institution with qualified staff and, in terms of providing technical support to the NEC, it will appear that you're dealing with people who are strangers, who are very new to the process. So you have to take your time in getting them over to build you up. That is also a challenge.*

The other issue has to do with coordination and liaison between other stakeholders. Since different institutions and stakeholders get funds from different donors and almost all of them work on similar goals and themes, it is also possible that you have clashes in terms of program activities—whereas you go out in voter education, another institution will have sourced funds from another donor doing the same work with the same people. And at times, these clashes of interest and programs are also a big challenge.

I think, overall, those are the issues. We also have things related to archiving and materials—making reference to materials that have been used in the past. These institutions have not been keeping adequate records of some of these things. So you have to start afresh in terms of developing procedures, regulations, and guidelines to guide their work, which means a new system. In the sense that we are not only helping them put together these resources in terms of materials, but to put them on track on how to archive them and keep them in good order for future elections. So these are some of the constraints that we went through.

PARKER: In some settings, international organizations run the elections and in others the national body is in charge. Where would you put the Sierra Leonean process in that spectrum?

SELLU: *Well, basically the international donors, or international organizations working on elections, I can say they have more technical input, which ranges from the UN (United Nations) Electoral Assistance Team, which is here handling logistics, procurement, and other technical assistance like operations and IT. Then you have other institutions, like international organizations like, IFES, the NDI (National Democratic Institute) and the like, which also have technical inputs in terms of working with civil society groups and like. The NEC, that is the National Electoral Commission, which is a national EMB, election management body, has its task of primarily running elections in Sierra Leone, all public elections.*

On the national front, the NEC takes the lead, and the international organizations working on elections give a kind of support, program support and technical assistance. So that is the way. In some areas, I can say it's a complementary work between these groups.

PARKER: How would you characterize the security situation around the 2007 and 2008 elections?

SELLU: *Well, overall, I can say the security situation has been peaceful and calm though we cannot rule out isolated incidents of violence, which are mainly between supporters of leading political parties.*

The two main groups of political parties that have had their supporters eating up high during elections period are the ruling APC, All People's Congress, and the opposition, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) which was the ruling party before the elections last year. So, as you can imagine, having a new regime, a new party coming on board after over twenty years in opposition, which means the elation, the dancing, will lead to other forms of intimidation of the opponents. And these were incidents that happened nationwide, but they were more prevalent in the capitals, Freetown, because of the concentration of people, the population density, we expect more of these.

And considering also that, in Sierra Leone, the political divide is more upon regional lines. The north is predominantly supportive of the ruling APC, the All People's Congress, whereas the south and east are predominantly supporters of the opposition, Sierra Leone People's Party.

In recent years—in the past couple of months, realizing that the ruling All People's Congress has started making inroads into the support base of the Sierra Leone People's Party, it is creating huge problem in terms of intimidations and some isolated cases of violence. But on the whole the elections have been conducted in a peaceful manner and these incidents have been controlled by the security sector, mainly the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and some other conflict mitigation teams set up by different organizations including the NDI, IFES, through the PPRC, that is, the Political Parties Registration Commission.

PARKER: Okay. The election management body—the National Electoral Commission. Would you describe how the election management body was established?

SELLU: *Well, the setting up of the election management body, which in Sierra Leone is called the National Electoral Commission—basically it has a constitutional mandate. It was set up by the Constitution of Sierra Leone and prior to 2004 elections. It was a government institution in the sense that the composition of the EMB before the 2004 election period was mainly like government staff or civil servants. And after that, the Commission, the NEC, went through an entire overhaul, a restructuring process, wherein all its positions were rendered redundant and tried to make the Commission an independent commission.*

Now the EMB has its task, which is in line with the Constitution of Sierra Leone, the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, and the Electoral Laws Act. The Electoral Laws Act outlines the mandate of the EMB, their functions, duties, including staffing and resource mobilization. All these are embedded in the legal documents, the 1991 Constitution and Electoral Laws Act. Now with this legal background to the setup of the EMB, it has a composition of commissioners who are mainly appointments made by the government of Sierra Leone. These are five commissioners: one is the Chief Electoral Commissioner who is also the National Returning Officer and Chairperson and four other commissioners having oversight responsibility of each of the four regions.

Now, these commissioners have a kind of policy responsibility of the EMB, but in terms of secretariat and management functions, it lies with the head of the—can I say, the administrative level—is the Executive Secretary. That person is in charge of basically running the Commission, the EMB, in terms of staffing, human resources, resource mobilizations, administrative functions. He is supported by directors of departments and chiefs of different units—having different responsibilities ranging from voter education, training, logistics, procurement and the like. The EMB's function is basically conducting all public elections in Sierra Leone. And these include presidential, parliamentary elections, local government elections, by-elections and the like.

Over the years the Commission, I mean, the National Electoral Commission, has had great support from international donors. The main thing is that Sierra Leone has emerged from the war just about ten years ago. So there was need for some kind of technical and logistical support to the EMB. But, in the past couple of years, we realize that, having peace restored again, that the Commission is becoming a little—the NEC is gradually becoming independent and is able to

man its affairs with less, or minimal support, which means that the government is also a little constrained in terms of financial resources. So the Commission, in the period covering 2007 to 2008 elections, has been run mainly from donor funds with one part of the funding coming from the government of Sierra Leone, which mainly goes towards administrative costs. Two-thirds of the funds from donors go towards electoral support, technical assistance and management. So, on the whole that is it about the EMB.

PARKER: Were there any eligibility requirements to be part of the National Electoral Commission?

SELLU: *Well, there are different stages of entering in the Commission, and all of these have their set criteria, eligibility criteria. Now, becoming a Commissioner, there is no academic set requirement for that. These are mainly political appointments. But it is obviously required that being a Commissioner will require you to be have some educational background, some prior knowledge in election management or in the civil service or public sector which will enable you, the person, to take up some managerial tasks. These are some basic criteria.*

And you look at these so that because they will be taking up policy matters of the government and different stakeholders. Now, coming down the ladder immediately after the Commissioners you have the Executive Secretary and Directors. These are required to possess in terms of academic qualifications like Masters degrees and very, very advanced professional experience in election management, governance, democracy and the like, and some administrative background.

Then if you come also to the different units, which are mainly professional units, the eligibility criteria for entry to these positions would be set according to the task ahead. For instance, if someone is to be recruited as a training officer or head in the training unit, he or she should have an academic background in terms of university degree and some professional background in the related field—training as it could be, logistics, procurement, and the like. So there are various eligibility criteria set based on the positions.

PARKER: How would you describe the relationship of the NEC to the government?

SELLU: *Well, the Commission—the NEC in Sierra Leone have enjoyed very good relationship with the government. That in no way will not mean that there have not been some kinds of struggles at some point. And my own opinion is that at some point, they will have some difficulties, especially in resource mobilization, thinking that the government of Sierra Leone is mainly donor dependent. And, for instance, the 2007 general elections was projected at 27 million dollars and the government of Sierra Leone was supposed to provide one-third of that amount, which means that this money was to be provided to the NEC on a quarterly basis—and then they will have to negotiate with the government, say that, “We need this money, this is a quarter.” Then at times, it is a little overdue before they get the monies from the government. So that could be an issue. But, in terms of independence, the NEC is enjoying relatively or, to a greater extent, its independence with very little or no political interference in their work, except as I’ve mentioned in terms of resource mobilization.*

There is a lot of complementary support. For instance, when it comes to transporting of elections materials, through the Sierra Leone Military or the

government relationship, Sierra Leone Armed Forces provides vehicles to the NEC to be used in transporting materials. In terms of electoral security, the Sierra Leone police force is assigned to the NEC to provide security. So there is this kind of inter-relationship and good coordination.

PARKER: What would you say are the positive elements of the way that the NEC is set up and the way that it operates—?

SELLU: *Well—.*

PARKER: —in terms of what you have been describing?

SELLU: *The positive elements, as against the negative, I think the positive are greater in the sense that after its restructuring, in an independent commission allows them free hand in running their own business in terms of administration and election management, which is good, yeah. Independence is a very good positive element. Secondly, the staffing, the human resources, they have very good guys who've undergone series of trainings. For instance, the BRIDGE training— Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections. That has been offered to most of the permanent staff of the NEC. Some have done up to ten modules, which means they are really good in managing and administering elections.*

And another good aspect is that the Commission is present in all the fourteen electoral districts, which means a national spread, you know—it is not that they only have regional offices or only headquarter offices. And these offices are maintained right throughout the period, not only during the elections period. So all that could serve as the beginning of positive things that enhance the work of the NEC.

PARKER: Transparency and the appearance of fairness are very important in elections. What are ways that people in the NEC have tried to maintain transparency in their work?

SELLU: *Well I think, in terms of transparency, the NEC has taken a front lead in that. Now, there are a range of issues to that. In the first place, the NEC has very strong leadership who is very bent on fraud and transparency, and they have taken several actions in the past couple of months to ensure and let the populace know that they are actually geared towards ensuring transparency.*

Now in terms of electoral issues, transparency in the conduct of elections, the electoral process is open to observation and monitoring from the outside public, including observers, political party agents, who are given accreditation tags prior to the conduct of the elections, which makes them accessible to the entire process ranging from transportation of logistics, polling day procedures, to the tally center. All these are transparent measures. And now it is also clear that at the peak of elections period, I mean, for the voting day itself, the NEC will need additional staff who are mainly ad hoc staff. And they usually recruit a very large number of people to be deployed in all the polling stations as ad hoc. Some of these, they can't vouch for their credibility and integrity because they did not go through the kind of rigorous recruitment as they are just ad hoc staff.

Now in the past, there are those incidents of malpractices and fraud. These have been seriously dealt with with those who are found guilty as culprits have been

blacklisted from taking part in future elections. That has been a very positive step of the NEC because I could remember after the general elections in 2007, about 477 polling staff were blacklisted because they worked in stations where there were reports of malpractices. And these people have their name gazetted and were banned from working as election staff in Sierra Leone. That's a very big step for the NEC, you understand? In all their work, the Chief Electoral Commissioner keeps saying that the NEC is against fraudulent acts; it's transparent. We are all welcome to see what is happening at the Commission, which is a very good step.

PARKER: Was the budget subject to public debate?

SELLU: *It goes through parliamentary approval. I don't know if that could be referred to as public debate. But it's—in the first place the NEC prepares its budget, presents it to the Ministry of Finance and to the House of Parliament, which is there for approval.*

So being that the parliamentarians are representing Sierra Leoneans, then I can say it's open to public debate. You see, it goes through parliamentary approval before the monies are assigned.

PARKER: Do you know if the members of the EMB were required to report on their personal assets?

SELLU: *No. I'm not aware of that except for maybe political appointees—that's Commissioners—but the other staff are not required to report on their personal assets.*

PARKER: What are the responsibilities of the NEC now that the election has finished?

SELLU: *Well basically between elections periods, like now, when the election is done the NEC is working on post-election activities, which are mainly geared towards training and capacity building of their staff. These range from internal and external trainings, additional capacity period training on election management courses. That is mainly the focus. And I'm also aware that they are working on strengthening—things like materials, keeping materials safely to ensure that it could be reusable materials. That's the logistical aspect. Ensuring that things like ballot boxes are kept properly, retrieving materials from the provinces and bringing it back to warehouse—these are the kinds of work that they are doing.*

PARKER: Perfect. Now during the election, did the NEC review and clear candidates? During the election did the NEC review the candidates and clear them for running?

SELLU: *Yes, and that happens through the candidates' nomination period. Here it's called "candidates nomination exercise." Basically, how it works—the political parties will have their own internal nominations. They have people vying for positions and a list is sent to the NEC. For instance, Party A will have 500 candidates for a local council election, by wards or constituencies. This is sent to the NEC with passport photographs. Then the NEC has a nomination exercise where these people are expected to turn up in person, and they have people nominating them who should also be eligible voters come and say, "I, Mr. this, nominate this person for this position," and look and see if this person is okay—he or she is a Sierra Leonean, is eligible to vote or be voted for. And then he or*

she goes through the nomination process. After that, a compiled list of all nominated candidates is released.

PARKER: Perfect. Did it determine the way that polling places would be managed?

SELLU: *The polling places?*

PARKER: The polling, the voting—

SELLU: *Okay, yeah.*

PARKER: Did it create the procedures and determine how they would be managed?

SELLU: *Yes. The NEC creates procedures for each of their electoral exercise and phases. When it comes to polling and counting period, they have polling and counting procedures, which is made public. These procedures are used in training proposals for their polling staff and are also given out to other stakeholders, like observers who wish to know how things should work, and these procedures are created by the NEC. They actually create them.*

PARKER: And who was responsible for civic education, for voter education?

SELLU: *Here in Sierra Leone civic and voter education is separated in most cases. Civic education is left in the hands of other institutions, government institutions. Basically—like there is a National Commission for Democracy (NCD) and there is also a Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL). And you have a host of civil society organizations, which do civic education on a continuous basis, not only when election is coming. But when it comes specifically to voter education or voter information, the NEC has the primary responsibility. There is a unit set up in the NEC with staff who are charged with that in terms of developing voter education strategies, carrying out strategies, monitoring strategies and liaising with other stakeholders working on voter education. That does not mean that the NEC's powers are limited or has sole responsibility of voter education. Other groups external to the NEC also do voter education although they interact to ensure that they have one message going out rather than distorted messages.*

PARKER: And who determines that message?

SELLU: *The NEC—.*

PARKER: The NEC.

SELLU: *It determines where to vote, when to vote, who should vote. The NEC examines that in their procedures.*

PARKER: Did the NEC resolve election disputes?

SELLU: *Yes, there is an Electoral Court and NEC has the mandate of resolving them. But all this, if a candidate, for instance, wants to complain or is angry over some particular issue, he or she should put that in writing and submit it to NEC. Then NEC will look into that. But they always have timeframe set for that. They have particular days for hearing those appeals.*

PARKER: How well did that process work?

SELLU: *Well, I really can't remember exactly—it's usually a short period.*

PARKER: Perfect. Okay. If you were providing advice to somebody else in another country about how to build an independent electoral commission, to what particular challenges would you—what would you tell them about that were challenges?

SELLU: *Well, you have to group these in different facets ranging from resource mobilization—that could be a big challenge for an independent commission. How do you fund this commission? From which coffers does it come? And how do you ensure that those who pledge support to fund the institutions actually meet up to this? The other one could be staffing. How do you ensure that you have the right people working on the commission or, once they are employed, how do you ensure that they maintain their credibility? And naturally, the political parties are always ready to lure them to work in their interests. How do you ensure that you have such people who are not partisan or who remain transparent and credible? That is about the staffing.*

And about staffing as well, you can talk about giving the staff of an independent commission regular trainings that will keep them up to the task, because elections, though it happens once in a while, it's a very big exercise and it requires the tacit knowledge and experience to handle it. They also come up to things like controls. How do you ensure that you control the finances of the commission? You can give advice on that to ensure the independent commission stands or else, when your operations are at the peak, everybody is utilizing resources—financial, human, material—and a unit for auditing should also be set up ensuring that funds are actually controlled.

Then there should be very strong supervisory or monitoring mechanism internally, which should ensure that after particular elections, future elections would be run at a minimal cost because certainly you're using materials that should be kept. Certain regulations that were created can just be improved upon and used again, some of this stuff.

PARKER: Could you tell me about a particular success of the NEC in the election that we were discussing?

SELLU: *Well, for me, I think the NEC scored a very great success and this has been recorded in reports from different observer groups—the Commonwealth, the EU (European Union), ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), AU (African Union)—these in their reports mentioned that NEC did well. Now the areas that have been mentioned remarkably are, basically, voter education had they done well in actually informing people about the process. The other thing is about preparations because the NEC always has a timeline of activities—what happens and when. Then this is made known and they always try to keep within this timeframe. That also has been recorded as a very good success for them.*

They've also have been very good in terms of being steadfast, being very strong. When they say, "This is the deadline," it is the deadline because at times, you request the political parties to present certain information or list of candidates and they want extra time. But when they say, "It's this," it is this. It's final.

Then, even in terms of taking affirmative action against their staff, if any staff is found wanting in terms of malpractice, that one's fired or disciplinary action is taken against them. These are good successes, you know. Even in terms of—

there's a transparency, as I mentioned earlier, as also they scored high. For instance, allowing people to observe the process right up to tallying center. You have party agents there, observers there.

PARKER: In some places it's very hard to have disciplinary actions.

SELLU: *Yeah.*

PARKER: There isn't the sort of political will for it. What recommendations would you give to somebody who is operating under those circumstances?

SELLU: *Where maybe there is some kind of political influence, interference in the Commission or the EMB. Well, I would say first recommendation would be to strive to be independent, but if it doesn't work—the system calls for one where it has to be done by government decision or whichever—then I think it should be embedded in the laws. If there are regulations set up by the institution managing the elections, disciplinary action should be mentioned. So, if the person at the top there wants to take action, always have a point of reference that "I am taking this action based on what is in the institution's mandate, the institution's laws" and that is—.*

PARKER: How did leadership in the NEC in this election play a role?

SELLU: *Well, it's played significant role in the sense that each of the regions, as I mentioned earlier, one Commissioner has a kind of oversight function. That was to ensure that the staff within the region actually ensured that they work in compliance with the NEC's rules and regulations. So the leadership has been very firm in terms of decisions that we make and in terms of ensuring that the staff comply. I think it has been very good with this.*

PARKER: Perfect. Okay. In terms of political parties and contestation, could you describe the party politics before and after the elections?

SELLU: *What do you mean?*

PARKER: Roughly, how many parties there were—if the numbers changed during the campaign period?

SELLU: *Yes, the numbers changed. In the 2007 elections—that was presidential and parliamentary elections—there were nine parties and two dropped off. We had seven left. And just a year later—that's the local government elections—we had four parties contesting. So the numbers changed. Among these are three main parties: the two dominant ones are the Sierra Leone People's Party and the All People's Congress, and the new one was the People's Movement for Democratic Change, PMDC, which is a breakaway of the Sierra Leone People's Party and draws most of its support from the southeastern regions as well. So, basically, we had more parties last year. For local government elections, we had four.*

PARKER: How would you characterize the kind of parties that emerged? Did they have different economic interests or different cultural interests?

SELLU: *Um-hum.*

PARKER: Were they mainly associated with particular personalities?

SELLU: Can you come again?

PARKER: Sure. The last one is, in a lot of places—and I think this is actually not the case here, but I'd like to hear your thoughts—in a lot of places the political party is associated just with one individual, so people are really following a person rather than a party or a platform. So the question is, how would you characterize or how would you describe the political parties in Sierra Leone?

SELLU: *The situation here is mixed. I actually understand what you're saying now. Some of the parties, like, for the general election in 2007, they had a kind of charismatic leader who had drawn the support from all of them, you understand? And the PMDC is one such party. Its leader was a minister under the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party. He broke away and formed PMDC. And if we can, through a kind of survey, realize that he has his support and there is no kind of support base in terms of say, "This is our regime or origin. This is just centered around that one man."*

And another party was the NDA, National Democratic Alliance. It's also centered around one man, the leader. When he's out of the country, the party can't function well. You understand? He unilaterally takes certain decisions. But for majority of other parties, they are actually like institutions—the SLPP, the APC, and the like. They are actually institutions. They have party executives who take decisions. They have hierarchy. They have conventions where they do appoint their leaders or run candidates for positions. They have offices in the regions and the like. So you have more parties that are actually well established institutions, and not centered around an individual and a few others.

PARKER: Did the parties develop youth wings or armed wings during the campaign?

SELLU: *Yes, I think most or all of the parties have youth wings, and they have youth leaders in charge of these youth wings. And what happens is that the way the parties are structured is that you have some kind of national executive or a national youth wing, a national youth leader. And at district or regional level, you have similar arrangements there. You can say in Bo District there is Bo District executive, or this Party A in Bo District has a youth wing as well, or is like they have strict instructions from the national body, you understand? But at district level, they operate as a youth wing. They have their own section there or leader there for that party and they can organize events or activities on their own—they are under the party.*

PARKER: Did you have a sense that the leadership of these parties was in control of the party message or of the party?

SELLU: *Yeah, for bigger parties—the three big parties mainly, APC, SLPP and PMDC. They have a kind of national hierarchy and structure. Therein decisions or messages are developed at national level. They have regional coordinators to whom these messages are disseminated down to the other grassroots supporters. You understand? So it has that kind of flow—from the top they are going.*

PARKER: And what responsibilities did the NEC have in regulating the role of political parties?

SELLU: *Well, over a period of one year, the NEC has not been involved much in working with parties or related activities. As you might be aware, the 1991 Constitution, which I can say legally had the basis of setting up the NEC, also had the establishment of the Political Parties Registration Commission. But that body did not come into effect until 2006, over ten years after the law made a reference to it. So the NEC, prior to the 2007 elections, was doing the work of the PPRC in terms of registering parties and monitoring the conduct of political parties. But for the 2007 elections until now, the PPRC has been a viable institution. They register political parties, they inspect the offices to ensure that they have offices in all areas as mentioned in the Political Parties Act, and they also have a function of regulating the conduct of political parties because the PPRC has what you call a "Political Parties Code of Conduct." That document is one—it's a document wherein all the parties' leadership called together in 2006 to say, "Put together something that would be a guideline for your activities so that you ensure that Party A will not come and victimize Party B, or the posters of Party A could not be easily torn by Party B supporters without action."*

But, as I'm saying, this is a code. It has no legal enforcement. So it is like a gentlemen's agreement. They all came together in 2006, put together the Code and they appended their signatures to it—all the political parties back then, and there were seven of them.

PARKER: Was it your sense that they followed the Code of Conduct?

SELLU: *Well, to some extent. And what the PPRC did then was to also ensure that they set up monitoring committees at the district level and to go around and ensure that the parties adhered to the Code. In doing this, each of these district-monitoring committees had a composition of the parties themselves who appended their signature to the Code. Civil society, the media, the NEC, at district level—they are all part of those committees, about twelve or thirteen people by committee—and their main task was not to adjudicate because they are not lawyers, but basically to mitigate or prevent conflicts. You understand?*

So it's also a kind of early warning signal they can do in the sense that someone says, "Oh, I understand Party A will be having their rally tomorrow, and Party B also wants to go out tomorrow." They can say "No. To prevent clash, Party B should be out another day." You understand? In terms of preventing conflicts because if the two parties rally on the same day at the same time, there is possibility for them to clash. So these are things that the monitoring committees, code-monitoring committees, could do.

But there is something also quite interesting. The NEC, when they are nominating candidates, there is a Code of Campaign Ethics¹, which is signed by every candidate as soon as you go through nomination process. It's a kind of complement to the Political Parties Code of Conduct. In the Code of Campaign Ethics issued by the NEC, each candidate will sign, "I adhere that I should not tear another candidate's poster. I should not do anything that's intimidating to this." A host of them—things are listed. And the difference there is, for the Code of Campaign Ethics, the candidates individually appends his or her signature to it, and by doing that will have promised to go by it, whereas, the Political Parties Code of Conduct was only signed by the leaders of the political parties and not the candidates.

¹ National Electoral Commission Code of Election Campaign Ethics

And the difference also there is that we had some problem in ensuring that the independent candidates comply to the Political Parties Code of Conduct because they don't belong to any political party. They will say, "Oh I don't belong to any of those—I don't have a leader that signed that Code, so I'm not aware of it." You understand? But in the sense of the NEC's Code of Campaign Ethics, whether you are independent or belong to a party, you sign as a candidate. So it makes sense that the Political Parties Code of Conduct needs to be reviewed to be all encompassing, bringing in independent candidates, which means here that that led to some kind of possibility of being breached.

PARKER: Were political parties required to disclose their sources of revenue, where they got money?

SELLU: *Well, from period 2007 until now, yes. Before this time, the 1991 Constitution and the Political Parties Act all made provision for political parties to declare their assets. In fact, income and liabilities—how they get money, who should give them money, their expenditures, you understand? And this should be done in two sets of reports. We have pre-elections reports, and post-elections and end-of-year reports. When it comes to IFES, not that I'm giving us the credit, you know (laughs), but basically it was IFES that ensured that the PPRC enforces that. And as it stands now, we had all of the parties complying with the pre-elections report and the post-elections report and bringing out—. We did a lot of trainings through the PPRC for all the parties, candidates, executives and finance officers, and it seems to be working.*

PARKER: What are the main ways that political parties and their leaders use to reach voters?

SELLU: *Mainly it's to give them information on how to go and do voter education—.*

PARKER: How did the political parties reach voters more than how did the National Elections Commissions?

SELLU: *The political parties—basically it's more through media, the media, using IEC (information, education and communication) materials and radio stations. Interestingly, the two main parties own radio stations for themselves. The APC has one and the SLPP has one.² Both parties also have newspapers.³ So every day, these papers are out and they publish things for which their voters or supporters can see or hear on the radio, you know? They also have face-to-face meetings—community meetings that go out, talk to them, hold rallies, peace marches and the like.*

PARKER: And what were the advantages or disadvantages of those methods?

SELLU: *Well, the advantages of that, for me, in a kind of young and upcoming democracy the disadvantages seem to outweigh advantages in the sense that last year, prior to the 2007 elections, these radio stations were shut down because they had a lot of inflammatory messages that they are giving out, which led to more tension, you know? They would sit there and say, "Oh, go out—Party A wants to—Party A wants to rig now. They are at polling center this. They are doing this, you understand?" And it will be all lies. We'd just be sitting up there in studio telling*

² APC owned Rising Sun FM 88.8 and SLPP owned Radio Unity FM 94.9

³ APC owns We Yone Newspaper and SLPP owns New People Newspaper.

their supporters to go out. "Don't allow Party A to do this. There is a fight there." They were all inflammatory. So at some point the radio stations were asked "Could you guys shut down until after the elections?"

PARKER: How did you make sure that didn't happen in the local elections?

SELLU: *Well, interestingly, there is a government institution, a commission for that, Independent Media Commission, IMC. The role of the IMC is basically to one, register all media outlets, radio stations, newspapers and the like. First to see that they have the necessary gadgets, instruments, the right staff who should talk radio, and the like. But, as I said, this also is a new institution. Prior to the 2007 elections, it hadn't the kind of capacity as you have. And they also have problem of political interference. I mean, the IMC, because they are all appointed by the ruling government and if the ruling government's radio station is doing anything wrong, you can't go and say (laughs)—you understand? So that is a flaw on their own part, the IMC.*

We actually saw them coming on hard on these radio people after the elections to say "Oh we don't want this to happen again." And they even put in different laws to say, "If you do this, this is what we'll do, penalize you—the station will be closed", and the like, so it was a little less.

PARKER: I want to ask you now a few questions about electoral violence. Was there an assessment of the threats against the process, against the elections before the election? A threat assessment before the election started?

SELLU: *Well, not a general one. Different institutions could engage in it. For instance, the UN or the NGO Forum⁴—there is an NGO Forum here. It's a National NGO Forum, which comprise all NGOs and they have a kind of security working group, which the UN [UNAMSIL, previously called UNOMSIL] basically runs. And they look at threat factors—areas that are considered to be more prone to violence prior to elections or after or during elections, you know? They're kind of focusing—*

Then you also have—the NDI was working with some civil society groups who are doing some conflict prevention work. They also had their committees who were disseminating posters. And they had a kind of election violence map, which would state that this area, for instance, would be more prone to violence during elections, this will not be—. And they also had instances where someone with great experience or who have worked here for a while can tell. For instance, there is a district called Kono, it is a diamond-rich area. Kono was predominantly SLPP and after the 2007 elections, the APC won and the Vice President and the First Lady hailed from Kono of the ruling APC.

So it became a very hotly contested area for local government elections because I personally had to travel to Kono with the PPRC to do conflict mitigation meetings to ensure that it was calmed down.

We had about 90% of parliamentarians, MPs (Members of Parliament), from Kono belonging to the opposition SLPP. On the local council elections you had the opposite. Up to 90% of the councilors are now from APC. You understand?

⁴ National NGO Forum (NANGOF)

So the analysis there is that in certain areas you can actually foresee that something—this area will be hotly contested because of this and this factor.

PARKER: In looking at the elections generally, you've mentioned one, but who did people expect to be victims and who did people expect to be perpetrators of violence?

SELLU: *Well, mainly it could not be generalized. In certain areas where you think it's the stronghold of the ruling party, the perpetrators are mostly from the ruling party. And this seems to be having the strength at the moment, that is their area. Similarly, if you go to the opposition strongholds, the opposition is more the perpetrator and the victims are the—but, in general terms, the reports we are receiving, newspaper reports, showed that supporters and in some cases people holding positions in the ruling government were more often perpetrators. So it was more the ruling government really committing problems, and the opposition and some independent candidates were the victims.*

PARKER: What were the security things put in place to support the election, for the election? What security mechanisms?

SELLU: *In terms of future elections or in the past?*

PARKER: In the past elections. Or if you have plans for the future elections, then that too.

SELLU: *Basically, I think the police, the Sierra Leone Police, have been the key security apparatus. There is an Office of National Security, ONS, which is a government institution as well, but they operate from the Office of the President. And ONS works with the police and the NEC in ensuring security in election policing. Now, what they do is—for me, I think they should firstly ensure that they have adequate police staff in areas that are suspected or could be hot, and send out strong signals for people who will get involved in such acts. And thirdly, to actually set examples. Then finally, there was some kind of—in Sierra Leone—a lot of political interference. People are afraid—the police—the bosses are afraid of losing their jobs because some of the appointments are political appointments. I can give you an instance in Kono when it became heated. Conduct an interview with the police there. They will tell you that "Man, make an arrest and someone from Freetown will just call and release that person." You understand? And so these are some of the things. There is a lot of political interference in their work. They are afraid of being sacked for it. That one is difficult to control. It's really, really difficult.*

So the police on their own part in ensuring that their work could use those strategies have a lot of public awareness on what citizens should do, what they should not do, and what the repercussions might be if they get involved in any acts of violence, and to actually start setting examples.

PARKER: You've answered some of these so let me skip. So, in the normal operation of police duties, you would need so many police and they would need so many cars and so many resources. For an election, sometimes you need to expand that. How did the police deal with that?

SELLU: *Well, there is already police presence in every district. They have police posts. Some districts have two or three police posts, personnel and vehicles. What they will usually do is when an election is coming up, as I said earlier, they also do their own survey about areas that are more prone to violence. Then they will*

build up their structure there. But in terms of funds required, that is the internal argument about how they allocate funds—by station or by district. But only that we realize that in areas that are more prone to violence, you realize that you have more police—the presence of more police personnel around parading the streets and even during voting—you have them stationing at polling stations that are more violence-prone.

PARKER: Did they keep a record of which polling stations have violence this time around for the next election?

SELLU: *Well, I'm not aware. Maybe the police do that. But throughout the day of polling the radio stations will have their reporters in all the stations, or at least all constituencies. And if you listen to the radio, they will keep calling and say, "In polling station this, there is a report of violence there. It has been handled by the police." So if you're listening in the area, you will actually have an idea of where an incident has occurred and what has happened. But maybe the police will keep track of that. I am not aware of any station actually saying that.*

PARKER: Do you know if there was a code of conduct for the police?

SELLU: *No, but I'm aware they have their own regulations on policing. And they also develop their own election policing mechanisms here and—*

PARKER: Like what?

SELLU: *A kind of strategy which is for themselves. And the only time they told the public about it was when the NEC was briefing observers. But they could not go in depth because it's a security issue (laughs). So they would just say, "There is an election policing strategy in place and you'll see us as you get in. There are phone numbers that you can call in case there is problem." But they will not tell you what exactly the operation will be like. (laughs)*

PARKER: Do you know where they trained in crowd management or in riot control or any of those things?

SELLU: *Yes, I understand that's part of the strategy actually—riot control, crowd management and—.*

PARKER: Was there a period after the campaigning where there couldn't be any campaigning before the election? Sort of a cooling-off period?

SELLU: Yes.

PARKER: Or did the campaigning go straight to the election?

SELLU: *There is usually a one-day cooling off period. For the local government elections, which were on the fifth, the campaign ended at 6 p.m. on the third and the fourth was cooling off period when no one was expected to campaign. Then the other day voted.*

PARKER: And was there a media unit for security, meaning, was there a group that was conveying information or giving information to the security?

SELLU: *Well basically the police—it's well structured. They have an information unit throughout, not only for elections.*

PARKER: I think I explained it poorly. I guess what I mean is information in media on the role of what the security is supposed to do, so people knew what they were supposed to do.

SELLU: *Yes, well, that was done at different—in different ways. Yes, in the sense that if you listen to what the NEC was saying about polling procedures and counting, they informed people that, well, a police officer isn't expected to go right in the polling box or stand by the ballot box. It should be outside. They understand what their role should be. That was communicated to people. The security person should not be inside. They should not be holding guns. A guy inside is kind of intimidating, you know, and will create fear. Except where there is serious tension, then armed personnel will come and back them up.*

PARKER: Perfect. And this is the last section on voter and civic education. Thank you so much for your time. Okay, what were the responsibilities of the NEC for voter and civic education, specifically what was the NEC in charge of?

SELLU: *Well the NEC, to start with, was responsible for putting together a voter education strategy. That one, IFES assisted the NEC in doing—putting together a voter education strategy, which was communicated or is usually communicated to other voter education stakeholders. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, all certain civil society organizations also receive funds from different donors to carry out civic and voter education. But because the NEC always wants to ensure that all these institutions go out with the same message and not distorted messages from the NEC, they tell them that, "This is our sensitization plan or strategy. These are the resources you require. This kind of training you need. These kinds of materials are needed." These are the messages we developed, all embedded in a strategy or plan and now—which means they actually initiate it—they are the ones who initiate it, tell their stakeholders, and they all go out with the same message.*

Then they also have the task of monitoring civic and voter education done by external groups—groups external to the NEC—to ensure that it's not distorted as well. Then they also have the task of producing materials, like the posters you've seen. Well, it could be with support from the UN or any other donor, but the NEC will decide on the messages on these posters, the graphics, to ensure that because—I will give you an example. When I was working at the NEC, by then the ruling government was in opposition and we were called to go and sensitize. The NEC was invited to go and sensitize them and inform them about the voting process. So I took posters with me and one of the posters had someone wearing green trousers. Yes, green trousers. And that is the color of the opposition, the SLPP. So the first question was "Oh, so NEC, you started using the opposition color now on your posters?" You understand? (laughs) To ensure that such things do not happen, the NEC would like see the graphics sample, agree on messages, on IEC materials, not only posters, banners, but all this stuff. And they will disseminate; they will distribute to other groups. So they have the staff there.

PARKER: You mentioned this before, but could you speak about what made voter and civic education effective? Why did it work so well this time?

SELLU: *Basically, I think the voter education work was done well in the sense that it was a combination of face-to-face, materials, the media, that is, using the radio, community theater, you understand? A combination of all these resources and*

groups were used. And it was far reaching in the sense that it was not only concentrated in Freetown. In fact, there was much more concentration in areas where the illiteracy rate is high and, in such areas, the NEC employed face-to-face education using the local languages which was much more effective.

You can't go and take a poster with inscription in English for someone who cannot read, you understand? So they had used such things, which made it effective—the combination of style, what they used, materials used, personnel. In terms of the personnel, the guys you met at the British Counsel, they are the district voter education officers and each district had one voter education officer. You might think that one person cannot do voter education in an entire district, but he was like coordinating voter education there.

And IFES provided up to three or four trainings for these guys, ranging from message development, working with the media, inclusive voter education—that's bringing gender issues. They had all these trainings, which combined with the experiences gained through these trainings materials used, and made it very good work.

PARKER: If you were asked advice about how best to convey information in a similar setting what would you say?

SELLU: *On voter education?*

PARKER: On voter education, yes.

SELLU: *Somewhere else or in Sierra Leone?*

PARKER: Similar to Sierra Leone, but somewhere else.

SELLU: *Well, first you try to ensure that you have very good guys working, a good voter education team and have a timely voter education plan or strategy. Timely in the sense—for me it starts with—I should really put it the other way. You start by getting a plan, voter education plan, a voter sensitization plan, which will have staffing, which should be brought on board, the resources needed—human, material, finance, everything, and messages that we need. And from this broader voter sensitization plan, you can develop smaller manuals based on the activity of concern. When it's time for boundary delimitation we have something focused that could be fewer pages than entire bulky manual. When you have voter registration you have something specific—just messages on voter registration, where to register, who should register, when to register. When it comes to polling as well, you develop a smaller manual from the broader voter education plan you have put together. That should happen months before the elections.*

PARKER: How many months?

SELLU: *Preferably, I would think it should happen like at least six months before elections, four but—now it could be different. (laughs) In a country where they've already been used to the electoral process and they've had regular elections, you have six-month before elections. Whereas a situation where a country is coming from war and illiteracy rate is so high, they are not participating in frequent or regular elections, and you could start this as early as a year before the elections. Then that would outline now who should come on board as staff, in terms of staffing for the work, who should be employed.*

Once you get them on board, provide adequate training for them. So let's say it starts with putting together a comprehensive plan, bringing up staff, training them, then you all could put together materials to use, which is in the plan already in terms of IEC materials. And a kind of social research could be conducted with these people who are now on board in terms of which materials could be much more suitable for a particular locality. Can we do posters for district A and do radio drama for district B, you understand, based on who is there? Do a kind of solving on that—which materials would suit particular people or location. Then people go out and start their work.

Then once they are on the field there should be a very good network. Voter education is centered around stakeholders and networking in partnerships because even if you have fifty people in Freetown team voter education, it's not enough. You need other groups—some you even don't need to give funds to. Just give them materials. They can go out. It's a kind of national effort, you see. Once on the ground—this could be very good advice, you know, given to—as I said earlier, it could vary based on a particular scenario and their political elections background.

PARKER: One of the problems that I have seen before is that when you have a number of different groups that are providing civic education or voter education, particularly if it's NGOs with international funding rather than funding coming from the NEC, they will have their own goals and things that they have to accomplish so they will say, "I need to work in these four areas." And then the other group says, "Well, I'm working in three of those areas and I have to work in those three areas also." How would you recommend dealing with that situation?

SELLU: *Well, it's quite difficult in certain situations, especially the donor international organizations providing the funds for those elections. Let's say the UNEAD (United Nations Electoral Assistance Division) brings in voter education experts. They are funding the elections and he or she—the experts—brings in these reports and what other things should be worked on. An interesting scenario you often hear: the head of the outreach voter education unit, she refused having the voter education expert from the UN team. Her explanation was simple that the expert would come in two months to the elections when they will have done all the work.*

So she stood firm and did not assign that person to her. She had done all the planning, deployed the staff, and two months to the elections, the UN said, "We're bringing a voter education adviser. She said, "No, I don't need one." So that was just a kind of aside. But basically to say this: you could as well try to be firm in showing that you know the specific situation in the country. That could be one. Or you can still strike compromise with the person, whoever comes as a kind of expert. See? Let the person understand that this is the scenario here, let's try this. Let's try this. I think it will work if you strike compromise because apart from the fact that the person will have—let's assume he's not from any of the donor organizations, but the fact that he or she is employed as an expert—he or she might have ideas that are different from yours and might be very good. So it's good that you have kind of complementary efforts to put together a team.

So my own point is that you should have a meeting point on ideas of what you should do or, if possible, the experts should come a little earlier and that could be nice. (laughs)

PARKER: Thank you so much. That is my final question. I really very much appreciate your time. Again, if you have any other questions, you have the card and you should feel free at any time.

SELLU: Yes.

PARKER: Thank you.