



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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

Series: Elections

Interview no.: D5

Interviewee: Senesee Geso Freeman

Interviewer: Nealin Parker

Date of Interview: 8 August 2007

Location: IFES Office
Monrovia
Liberia

Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA
www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

PARKER: This is Nealin Parker, I'm in the IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) office in Monrovia, Liberia with Senesee Freeman who is a Program Officer for IFES, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. If we could just start by your explaining your role during the 2005 elections.

FREEMAN: *Thank you Nealin. First got in contact with IFES in April of 2005 and I was recruited basically to work in IFES civic voters' education program. It was quite challenging because then several donors had come in to view, to get involved in the civic and voter education component. The European Union through EC (European Commission), the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and other domestic groups. So what we first did was to find a synergy between all of those organizations and the NEC (National Elections Commission) in actually working out and coming up with a uniform kind of approach in carrying out civic and voters education activity. To do that the NEC, as part of its elections operation, had a committee that was responsible for civic and voter education spearheaded by a consultant. Fortunately that consultant today is a member of parliament. He left the Electoral Commission and then later vied for a seat in the House of Representatives and is now a member of parliament.*

What we did during that period was to critically look at civic and voter education messages, first generally about why the elections? Why was there a need for elections after a period of conflict? Then later we looked at issues related to voter registration, encouraging voters to come out and register to vote, those who had met the legal requirements. Voter education messages were also spread out in areas outside Liberia where you have a huge population of Liberians who were living in refugee camps or displaced people centers. They were also encouraged through the voter education messages to come and do a registration process.

Now to help facilitate and synchronize all of the different ideas, IFES and UNDP came up with two manuals. One manual was instruction on civic and voter education messages, and then IFES as part of this effort recruited and trained civic educators in the fifteen counties of Liberia and we also worked with about twelve disabled people organizations to carry civic and voter messages to targeted disability groups that were formed in Liberia.

PARKER: So could you describe the responsibilities of the-- [end of file 1]

Nealin Parker with Senesee Freeman in Monrovia, part two. Could you describe the responsibilities of the NEC for voter and civic education?

FREEMAN: *The NEC is the statutory organ, which is responsible to design and coordinate all of the different groups including the national partners that have a desire to carry out civic and voter education. Now my responsibility in IFES was to work with the NEC, partners and our program manager at the time to ensure that all of the different views and interests from different indigenous groups were incorporated so as to have an effective civic education program looking at Liberia's diversity and its high rate of illiteracy. All of that was taken into consideration. Those messages were designed appropriately. Our task was also to recruit and train civic educators in the different counties that we were working in to ensure that what was disseminated was in line with messages approved. [end of file 2]*

PARKER: Nealin Parker with Senesee Freeman, part three. So if you could just give me a little bit of an idea of what IFES' role was in the election and also a little bit of your background coming to 2005 in April when you started working for them.

FREEMAN: *That's good. IFES as part of its Liberia elections support program, a USAID project was part of what I can call the CEPPS arrangement. CEPPS is the Consortium of Elections and Political Party Strengthening.¹ That CEPPS arrangement brought in IRI (International Republican Institute), NDI (National Democratic Institute) and IFES together to work with three components of the Democracy Development Process. IFES was responsible directly to work with the Electoral Commission. NDI was responsible to work with the legislature and largely with civic society organizations and IRI with the political parties.*

IFES first worked with the legal framework and the NEC in coming up with a new electoral law that guided the National Elections Commission and suspended particular portions of the Liberian constitution to pave the way for the conduct of the 2005 elections as Liberia had just come out of crisis. After that was done IFES along with the UNDP and UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) and other partners worked with the NEC in putting together a budget and operational plan for the whole electoral support process, from voting operations to external relations, publicity and media and what have you.

IFES also brought in consultants that first worked on voter registration. At the end of the results of the voter registration, IFES brought in experts to work on boundary delimitation, that brought into birth 64 electoral districts that were used for the elections and also provided technical and financial support. IFES built six offices for the National Elections Commission in different parts of the country, refurbished and provided machinery and equipments to all of the NEC offices including furniture. In some of the offices IFES also provided video equipment, but not all. IFES also supported partly some of the scanners that were used for the data center. IFES also brought in cameras and consultants from the Electoral Commission of Ghana to work with the NEC in the voter registration process because our component of our voter ID card also had pictures. So cameras were brought in from Sierra Leone, cameras were brought in from Ghana and some were bought and these guys worked with that.

IFES also brought in experts that dealt with the mapping—after the demarcation process and mapped off the different electoral districts so that it could be clearly seen so that candidates knew where to campaign and where voters could look at the choice of candidates. IFES also provided support for the ballot papers and also what we call “Know-your-candidates” posters. In addition to that IFES provided a wide range of civic and voter education materials including civic and voter education manuals for civic educators and a lot of posters and flyers that were used all around the country with the NEC.

IFES also had consultants that were deployed at the headquarters of the NEC and they worked day-to-day with the NEC in its operation to ensure that the [Indecipherable] election had a level of credibility that a lot of our colleagues in the international community claimed it to have. IFES also worked with disability organizations, disabled people organizations. That was not largely in the purview of the NEC but because this is one group that we felt critically needed support to be part of the process. IFES first realized that disability organizations, while they

¹ I find Consortium for Electoral and Political Processes Support
[http://dec.usaid.gov/index.cfm?p=search.getSqlResults&CFID=7775&CFTOKEN=99688013&p_searchtype=detailed&p_sortby=datepubf&p_sortdir=desc&q_instnmx=Consortium%20for%20Elections%20and%20Political%20Process%20Strengthening%20\(CEPPS\)&p_exact=yes](http://dec.usaid.gov/index.cfm?p=search.getSqlResults&CFID=7775&CFTOKEN=99688013&p_searchtype=detailed&p_sortby=datepubf&p_sortdir=desc&q_instnmx=Consortium%20for%20Elections%20and%20Political%20Process%20Strengthening%20(CEPPS)&p_exact=yes)

had some degree of formation but they were largely disjointed so we worked with them. It was important to get a clear and defined format that we helped them. We trained them in accounting, the financial reporting procedures. We trained them even in how to conduct civic and voter education.

At the end of the project all of the twelve disability organizations we worked with have all established bank accounts with credible signatories and were transacting through the banking process. They were also able to empower them through our instrumentality and through our level of work with them. We also brought in a consultant and she worked with them. A few months after the elections the disabled organizations were able to go to the national legislature and a Disability Act came into being that is now guiding the work of the disabled community in Liberia.

Basically those were some of the many things. There are so many other technical things that time has not allowed me to go into detail but basically those are the things that IFES did.

PARKER: And your background?

FREEMAN: *My background basically I study economics but I have largely been working in democracy and development work. I started off with a local NGO consortium called NARDA, New African Research and Development Agency. NARDA is an organization catering to building the capacity of local NGOs and I worked with them. That is where the whole process of program management and design started. I was fortunate later to be employed with another local organization that had a lot of international flavor [Indecipherable]. Our task largely was to work with peri-urban communities, marginalized people in different parts of Montserrado and other counties and helping them to look and see for example how they can get re-integrated and what are some of the catalysts towards helping to do that. We implemented some programs to address the issues of people that had been affected by the war. I recall the project, a skills training project.*

It was while working with these communities, especially in having had to identify their needs and looking at solutions to some of their problems that I got in contact with IFES. It was a little strange because while it's true I had not come from a political background I had been someone had been keenly interested and had been keenly participating in political issues. When I was at the University of Liberia I was actively involved in student politics. When I was a junior student I was elected President of the junior class of the university, that was in 1997-1998. I unsuccessfully ran to be President of the senior class. I lost because of some degree of complacency thinking that I had a large support from the Business College. I lost by 14 votes, let me just say for the record.

Since then I have always been active. I was active in the 1997 elections. In the 1997 elections I principally participated working with the then Alliance of political parties headed by Cletus Wotorson who is currently a member of the Senate for Grand Kru County. But as we came to 2005 and looking at the dynamics of where we are, quite frankly I must tell you, if I'd not being "high-jacked" by IFES to work, I think I would have again ventured off into more robust politics. But I will also say for the record that it has been all part of my veins, helping to ensure that Liberians have a voice and that voice should be translated through equal representation. That has been my desire.

When I think of the work with IFES over the years since 2005, it has kind of reinvigorated me to do work to ensure that this happens. That is my goal to continue to work in that line. So that is how I came into contact with IFES although not from a background in politics, but politics in experience, practical politics. Then I met IFES and it was such a great team, or it is such a great team, that we have worked together since then and we have been here.

PARKER: Great. Before we cut off the recording, before we started talking about the messages that NEC and IFES and UNDP and others were crafting for voter and civic education. You mentioned that you had tailored them for the illiterate population. What were some of the messages? Who was involved in some of the development of those and which ones do you think were most effective?

FREEMAN: *For example, let me give you an example of the IFES. IFES civic and voter education messages targeted three things. First they targeted "why elections?" So we called that "why elections?" Then the second part was, let's participate in the elections. So the first thing was why did we have to have elections? The second part was let us participate. That was to give people all of the different information on the election process, who to vote for, what to look for in a candidate, when to vote and why was it important to vote. Then finally, let's get involved in civic life. Because people's expectations were high that after the elections we would have manna from heaven. Things would pick up so fast, so much so that people's expectations were very high. So as part of the education process, the last part of the civic education message was let's participate in civic life.*

That was to highlight that after elections it is not out of your hands. That is when the real work begins. It is not work that is done only by members of the legislature or by the President or Vice President. It is a concerted effort of all of us.

If you ask, how did we do it? We had a lot of practical illustrations. Let me give you an example. For example we said, democracy is a long-term process. They said what do you mean? I said, have you made a farm? They'd say yes. I'd say what farm do you make, do you make a rice farm? Everybody says yes. I say now tell us the process in making a rice farm. And they went into how you first locate the land, you brush the land, you burn the dirt. Later on you plant the rice. When the rice starts to grow you go there and you try to drive the birds. Later on after a period of time you harvest the rice. You take the rice off, you dry the rice and then, you either, go to the machine and ground the rice, or you peel it in the mortar and then you have the rice to eat.

So I asked, I said, think about that process. Is it a one-day process? They'd say no. It is six months or even longer and it is difficult and you have people to work together, it is difficult. So the essence of that message was, if you must have the finished product, the rice to eat, it involves toiling, it involves working, it involves a lot of processes. That is something you can do alone? They said no. So you see, in this democracy we have now it is like today we will find the right spot. So in other words we have brought in the government but to clean up all of what has been destroyed, to bring us back to where we want to go, the government and us must be involved.

They said, Ahhh, I see. So that was one practical way. The other practical way we'd say, tell us who are married here. I am married... So tell me about the

process in marriage. Then they say oh, I see the girl, or I see the boy and I like him or I like her and I go to him and I tell him I like you or I go to the girl and I tell her I like you. And then what happens? They say then if she agrees we go to her family and my family and her family meets. Then later on we schedule a date if we have sufficiently agreed now to have a relationship and marry. Then we have the wedding, we plan the wedding in the traditional way or how we call the civilized way through the church or through the mosque and then after that the woman and the man they are asked, then are you finished? They say no. They are at the beginning now. The woman has to make sure she does her part of work, the man has to make sure he does his part of the work. Then together they have children and build on the relationship. Is it a small process? Everybody says, no, it is not.

So we use those two illustrations in many places. One thing that helped us was that even the artists we used to draft some of the different images, we took those images in the field, in different parts of Liberia. We took it at Grand Bassa County, we took it at Lofa County, we took it at Maryland and we took it and we wrote it in Montserrado. All of these counties and we did a few tests. They said well that picture is ok but maybe if you draw it this way or you draw it that way, so that was the indigenous touch. So that was one thing that made it very effective. We drew it out, we conceptualized it, took it in the field and there were a lot of changes. It was painstaking, it involved a lot of time but finally we came up with a finished product. I can tell you quite frankly it was a very good instrument that enabled a lot of people.

Quite frankly, the result of the election was that even more women voted than men. So that was a very good thing.

PARKER: *At which point in the process were the messages released and in what form were they delivered? You mentioned that there were manuals that came out. So maybe you can talk about the manuals but also posters and face-to-face and trainings that you did.*

FREEMAN: *The sequence was like this. First after we field-tested the manual, then we brought in all of the different groupings that the NEC had accredited to do civic and voter education. We brought them in a big meeting and we gave all of them copies of those manuals and they went over them and they also gave suggestions. Based on the suggestions, the manuals were again field tested before the final copy was sent to printers for production. [Indecipherable]. Then what did we do? We also brought in a core of civic educators, people who had backgrounds in social work, teachers, young activists who were just out of school and had an intense desire to work in the communities. Those groups of people were put together and they were trained through a rigorous civic and voter education training section. That lasted on the average for most areas two to three days or two and a half days.*

What we did was to allow them to do a cascade kind of training where they train and their colleagues critique the presentation until they all got it at their fingertips. Then they were sent in the field. Then we also did spot checks and monitoring. We did our first monitoring of all the civic educators, but also what helped was in the process we designed civic and voter education and monitoring forms that tell us for example how many persons would be civic educators, the kind of materials they used, whether it was a face-to-face or a house-to-house section, how many persons were in each one, the number of men, the number of women, whether

they were disabled groups. Then basically for them to give us feedback in one or two nights as to what was their impression.

So basically those were the different methods that we used to ensure that people got the message and we also went back to those towns and villages not really trying to go behind the civic educators but rather to see whether the messages have gone across. In many places we saw people proudly putting the posters and flyers in strategic positions in the towns and the villages, in places where people congregate. That routine made it quite effective.

PARKER: You mentioned that some of the trainers were teachers or activists. Where did you find trainers?

FREEMAN: *What we did was we worked with the National Elections Commission field officers in all of the counties. Most of those who were field officers as magistrates for the NEC had been people who have lived in their communities for a long time and had been working in elections. So they along with us did a recruitment of those people. Then what we did also, we went in a few and did an oral interview and a written interview with all of them, asking them basic questions about their mobilization skills, their skills in working with their colleagues, team building and team work skills and general knowledge on political and social issues in the communities. It was after all of this we were able to pick the cream of them. What we did also was, we took a sample of those who we felt were ok and they went for the training. After the training, those who were more up to the task, were more open, more able to speak, able to present and interact with their colleagues were people that we selected to work in the program.*

PARKER: How effective do you think the voter education process was and how would you measure effectiveness?

FREEMAN: *That is, when we did post election evaluation of the electoral process one thing that continuously played was the fact that civic educators have limited time. The timing was limited. The resources were very good, but the timing, it is not possible to make somebody who has been part of a failed state system for so many years, to now see that these elections would have been different from all of the others. So it needed going and going and going. But in many places it was a one-shot thing. Went to this community, talked to them and had to move on because people needed to get a glimpse. So one of the shortfalls was the timing. Another shortfall was the climactic condition. It was at the peak of the rainy season. Most of the roads were impassable, very, very difficult roads. They had been neglected for fifty or more years so places were completely inaccessible. So that was another drawback, the inaccessibility of most of the terrains that civic educators had to wear with people.*

The other thing also was that most of the people were in displaced camps. They were in displaced camps and because they were in displaced camps they were not too keen, they were not too open to want to—I mean, to put their soul into the process because they were thinking elections will be over, we are being asked now to start thinking about going back, we are going back to the towns and villages that have been destroyed, how are we going to start life. Those are some of the things that were in their mind. So for them yes, it was good, but practically that thought level hindered most of them from actually going on.

So a combination of some of those factors that must have inhibited what the civic education—but, I must say with all of those difficulties, still people came out. People voted. Once, for many times, most women, though some of them were still under the influence of the husband, but most of them went in that polling place, went in that voting screen confident that the vote, that the people they voted for were people that they and not people who had influenced them would vote for. That's one thing I can say.

PARKER: Speaking of internally displaced camps, that is a feature of many post conflict elections, what recommendations could you give to someone about reaching people in IDP (internally displaced people) camps?

FREEMAN: *It is a very challenging terrain. Because you see, a man knowing himself or a woman knowing herself with a family size of maybe seven to ten persons, being able to fend for themselves, all of a sudden now having to rely on somebody giving a hand out. It is so deplorable, depressing. So many times it is difficult for people to penetrate. If we were asked to do it all over, the only thing I would say Miss Parker is that I think with time, with time and with persistence, let people know that if you do this, you are in this current state, but think about the future of your kids. That if you vote rightly some of the conditions you are in today will be conditions that you will not experience tomorrow and you will be building a sound future for your children. So keep that at the back of your mind and get involved in the process. Play on their consciences to realize that what they will be doing is not for themselves but for their kids and kids unborn. A series of persistent visits to those places I think because there's nothing else you can do other than encouraging them and giving them to spirit to continue to move on.*

PARKER: Do you think there were some messages and media that were more influential than others and why?

FREEMAN: *Yes, there were, I can't right now maybe put my hands, or think directly of some of the messages but I can give you—for example, politics in Liberia has largely been influenced by handouts, give people rice, they vote for you. So one of the messages was take the rice because you need it, you're hungry. Take the cash, or vote your conscience. There were many places where that message worked. There were many places where that message worked because it is not practical to tell somebody see a man in a displaced camp is hungry. If you tell him he says look, don't, or take that person food. It's not practical because they won't listen to you. In African politics largely it has been surrounded so much on what I can give you now for your vote and then I'll turn my back.*

So that there was a need to play around that. The play around it was vote your conscience or take what they give you. We were not saying go and beg for it, but if you bring it, good. Difficult to say what I meant here so could be deleted!! Let me see you carry it back, eat it, but vote your conscience. That's one message. Another message that was quite helpful was to tell citizens that vote for people based on their track record. The issue of track record was something I would stress. If a man says he will do this for you today, think back about what are some of the things he did that convinced you that he can do this.

Another thing that was quite effective was helping citizens to realize that they were voting for the future of their children. They were voting for the future of their children. Those three actions were very strong and inspirational key messages that largely went across and helped people in shaping the way they voted.

PARKER: If asked for advice about how best to convey information and messages on elections in a similar setting, what are your top two or three suggestions?

FREEMAN: *Top two or three. Ok, the first one involved the process that we feel has been effective. Up to today IFES is still using it. That is in every community, or every county or every administrative district there are people, they may not have a university degree, but they have one thing. They're honest in the vernacular, they're honest in the people, so you need to tap all those people. Do a form of cascade intensive training with them to understand what the issues are and what kind of messages you want. Because those people are in the background it is so easy to be accepted by the people. That is what we have used in Liberia that has been very effective. Go to the communities, select—identify people and then use them to carry on these kinds of things.*

Another thing also that was effective, a second thing was the use of our indigenous mechanism, that is the use of town criers, the use of cultural performers and the use of jingles. Jingles in the vernacular and jingles in simple [indecipherable] Liberian Pidgin English. That's the second way I think is effective.

Then the third way I think is effective is the use of the media, radio stations and television if available, talk shows, spot messages and what have you. I think those three are quite effective in assuring that an effective campaign can be carried out.

PARKER: Were there any groups of people who were particularly hard to reach with information and selection and what steps did you take to remedy that?

FREEMAN: *Yes, one particular group, were disability people, people with disabilities. Because although we had a great disability population and the war exacerbated it, and there are a lot of young people disabled, and they felt marginalized and neglected. They needed a sense of direction and what other way, other than having a disabled coming to talk to the disabled. We used disabled groups to go to the communities, because they already knew where they were and how to get in contact with them. For the blind we used tactile ballots, tactile ballot guides in other words. We also had audio cassettes that were very helpful in helping them because most of them are largely illiterate to Braille so that was the only effective means of getting them involved.*

Another marginalized group was women's groups. So as part of doing that directly with us, as part of the process, there were certain posters, flyers, images, that were specifically designed to cater to women. Let me tell you for example, one of the posters said, it told the woman: On voting day, get up early, do your housework, feed your husband food and go and vote. So what this message was telling women was, it was acknowledging that women had a role but while they had a responsibility to carry out their civic duty but their foremost responsibility was in the home. So they were encouraged to do their home work or their home chores early and then vote. You know what that did for most of the men? They appreciated that the people were sensitive to the needs of our women. So some of them encouraged the women, you see the poster there? The people say, well hurry up do your work and go. Some of them encouraged the women to vote.

Some of the other things we also did were to have a particular queue for disabled people, pregnant and lactating mothers, even mothers with very young babies so that they could easily go through the process and vote and then go back home. So women's groups also played a part. Women's groups mobilized women and went to places they frequented like the markets. Women's groups went to the markets. Women's groups went to religious areas and met with women's organizations in churches and mosques. All of that was geared toward encouraging that population of Liberia that would not ordinarily go out, especially in the indigenous areas. So those were ways in which some of the marginalized groups, or groups that we call disenfranchised groups were able to be reached.

PARKER: Was there anything in particular done for youth?

FREEMAN: *Yes. But quite frankly I must say that the youth, it was one group that didn't need much in terms of mobilizing their desire, their interest, it was always there. It was always at a boiling point. But what we did was to help shift their minds to know that following the crowd wasn't the way to go but rather to think positively and know why they were going to vote.*

So most of the concerts and other jamboree that would play actually involved helping youth to realize that this is their future so they must vote wisely and don't vote because the person is handsome or whether the person has got a lot of money but vote because that person will be able to deliver for you in the future. But, in terms of mobilizing that group there wasn't much effort in that, they were already there.

PARKER: What obstacles generally did you experience in trying to ensure participation by marginalized groups and how did you try to overcome those obstacles?

FREEMAN: *The obstacle first was that most of them felt that they were somehow rejected. The marginalized groups felt they were somehow rejected. So the entry into them was somehow difficult, but what was done—. I always give the example of the disability groups. What was done was to use people of their kind, to use people of their kind to go to them with the information that we had and that was quite effective. That was one way we did it. Did I answer that question? Is there any addition to it?*

PARKER: No, I'm going to move to boundary delimitation and districting, ok?

FREEMAN: Ok.

PARKER: Often there are difficulties in boundary delimitation or districting prior to an election. Would you describe how the boundary delimitation process worked in 2005?

FREEMAN: *You see Liberia is a very complex society. We have a combination of people who live here in what is now Liberia and we had a great population of people who migrated to what is now Liberia. But the people who predominantly stand out are people who were former slaves who came to Liberia and gradually took hold of the social political life and then dominated. And there are many different sub political divisions in Liberia. What we've had over the years has been resourceful, indigenous chiefs, [Indecipherable] who have lived in those places, who know the ins and outs, the specifics of waterways, lakes, hills, that have a significance to a particular group of people.*

The first thing the delimitation process sought to do was to tap other people. So to tap on the indigenous experience of the chiefs and others all over Liberia. The second thing they did was to look at existing maps from the Ministry of Lands and Mines, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, also the demographic unit at the University of Liberia. Now that unit and other components of the different statistical areas have now been changed into what we now call LISGIS, Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services. That's the group that just conducted the 2008 census.

So what this group did was to go into the different counties, meet with these resource persons, look at what was covered in the maps. Look at specific tribal features, specific social and cultural features and see how they could be blended. Then experts seconded by IFES and the UNDP and UNMIL met with all of these people and technicians and then drew up what we call a draft letter of district cycle. Each of these different groups was invited to different presentations. Say for example you see Montserrado County. You had a map of Montserrado County. All of these people from Montserrado county come and see where you have all of the different graphings in terms of these are the places you want to do, what do you see? Our chiefs come and say no, that area there, the people over there will not feel satisfied to be joined with these people. These people are, for example, in Lofa, these people are Loma people. It will be more safe if you put the Loma, maybe to an area we'll call x or y instead of you putting them all together.

So this is the kind of feedback that they give. Then they also took cue the voter registration, numbers they had, in terms of the population of those people. So it was based on that that the demarcation process took place. So it involved a lot of meetings, a lot of consultations and a lot of talking and sharing of ideas. We took all of the different factors but I must tell you principally it was [Indecipherable] at the National Elections Commission and the magistrates in those different areas. Then finally we came up with 64 electoral districts and they were subsequently submitted to the Legislature for approval.. But what was also interesting was that the transitional assembly or the transitional legislature at that time was also part of that process. So they also had input from members of the legislature into working about all of that so that by the time it reached them they were already knowledgeable and understood what the processes were before that happened.

PARKER: What kinds of operational and logistical obstacles were encountered during the conduct of the delimitation process?

FREEMAN: *There was a lack of available maps. Although later on the Bureau [Indecipherable] and others expressed that they'd do demarcation. Or technically as Liberians we have experts but they do not have the requisite materials. So some of those things were brought in and it was tracked. Now some of the obstacles also were because of political and other influences people disagree on a lot of issues that would have been easily resolved because interests were at stake. It reminds me of something they called the gerrymander demarcation process where this guy in the States, I think he was a senator or something did something but I think you know about gerrymander stuff. That was already paid for.*

PARKER: How would you recommend dealing with that?

FREEMAN: *To deal with that in the future we will soon be embarking with the NEC on a re-demarcation of the constituency now that we have reverted to the constitution. First and foremost people need to understand why that process. They need to know for their own sake what we seek to achieve so that it won't look sinister or it won't look like people are trying to play on interests. What is also important is for people to understand what are or what we call the best practices available in dealing with that and what are instances of examples of demarcation that happen in other places, ok? Then you have an extensive dialogue process with all sectors of society. You have a dialogue process with local authorities. You have a dialogue process with the indigenous people themselves. You have a dialogue process with members of the legislature. You have a dialogue process with political parties who have a stake and an interest. You have a dialogue process with the media and civil society.*

So it involves a lot of time and effort because in the end you want all parties to largely, quote/unquote, be satisfied – though everybody can't be satisfied – to largely be satisfied. This approach came about because of the process that was inclusive, participatory and now we are where we are. I think that is the best approach of formula to move [Indecipherable].

PARKER: Did insecurity or lack of infrastructure hamper the process and how did people in charge adjust?

FREEMAN: *Well, insecurity, not really, because only it was largely all around, but yes a lack of infrastructure, a lack of infrastructure seriously hampered it. Some errors were made based on the kind of input from what indigenous people said but was not actually verified. But that was, for example, it's quite strange if you went to some areas inside the electoral districts you were part of a particular segment of an area and then move into an area that you think is another electoral district, part of it you'll see is for this electoral district because all of those technical details may not have been available to do that. So that may have been some of the problem.*

PARKER: In terms of the group that was charged with doing the delimitation process, was that body independent of the party in power?

FREEMAN: Yes.

PARKER: What laws shaped the work of the boundary delimitation commission?

FREEMAN: *It wasn't a commission. It was a committee comprising people from different sectors of the government. You have most of the legislature, which is the legislative branch. You have elements or technicians coming from the executive and then you had the Elections Commission as an autonomous body supported by its counterparts or members, supported by its international partners. Ok? So they all together work in that committee. But I must tell you by law there is no organization or boundary delimitation commission yet. For example, how you see for example in other countries. I think in Ghana or Sierra Leone there is this but it doesn't exist yet here.*

PARKER: Did any delimitation issues disrupt the election after the delimitation process and what steps did leaders take to produce reconciliation or acceptance?

FREEMAN: *I don't think so. The only thing I would say is that certain elements of political parties felt that, certain districts, certain areas as was demarcated and assigned*

into a particular electoral district should not have been there. So it did not really bring a rift but these were some of the concerns raised and what have you, but it wasn't something that had actually marred or had a hindrance on the—.

PARKER: There were no boycotts?

FREEMAN: *There were no boycotts.*

PARKER: Moving to registration. Would you describe how registration of voters took place in 2005?

FREEMAN: *Voter registration, how it took place. The process first was the electoral calendar came up with specific dates where educators would [Indecipherable] and inform people that from this time to this time, registration would take place and the registration process was set up. People were trained to work as voter registration officers and they were shown all of the different steps that they were to perform before they could become a bona fide voter registrar. Political parties and civil society organizations were asked to observe the process and I must say for the record that very few really took an interest in the voter registration process in terms of sending people there to do observation. Through the use of the media and through town criers and cultural performers, people also knew when to go through the process.*

What was interesting was that most people in Liberia were complacent and felt that they had a long, long time. So what happened was getting close to the last week of the voter registration a lot of people started coming up, a lot of people started moving in and when they started moving in they overwhelmed the staff or the NEC, the National Elections Commission that was assigned to do different areas. So much so that I think in one or two places they had to extend a day or so so they could cater to all those.

Politicians used their influence to track people to different areas they came from for those people to register there and they took them there so as to boost their chances of winning elections in those places. Some of them were successful in being elected because of that method.

PARKER: Then on registration day what sorts of identity documents were important, how did someone register?

FREEMAN: *The elections law states they must be 18 years of age, they must be a Liberian, a natural-born citizen or a naturalized citizen. If one of your parents, when you're 18, you must have declared your intention to be a Liberian and you were to carry—no I don't think you had to carry any particular document. What happened was that in instances where an observer or political party agent or one of the electoral officers, registration officers realized that there was something questionable about maybe your name or the way you were answering questions and what have you, they were under obligation to ask for you to bring more documentation to verify that you were a bona fide Liberian. A passport or birth certificate basically those two and if you did not have either of the two you were to bring somebody from your community, a well-recognized person from your community who could vouch for you, that you were indeed a Liberian.*

Also in the process was after you went through it you have your photo ID card, they had what they called the exhibition. The exhibition process was the next

process in which people were to come and verify their names and people would come to see whether they had names of people there who should not have been in the voter registry. If that happens, they had a remedy to do. Something I didn't see that took place in the voter registration process was that after you have brought somebody to vouch for you or you have brought some documentation and —the voter registrar or the registration officers were still of the view that you still are not qualified, you had a remedy under the law. The remedy is you must report to the local NEC office in your county or your administrative area. If they render a judgment against you and you are not satisfied, you are to report your complaint—I don't know the number of days, but in a particular number of days to the Board of Commission of the National Elections Commission and they would then look into the case.

If you go there further and you feel that you have been still unjustly treated and it is not fair, your next course of action was to go to the Supreme Court which we consider in Liberia the last arbiter so that they could deal with whatever issue there is and finally rest that chapter.

PARKER: What controls were developed to prevent multiple, false, or erroneous registrations?

FREEMAN: *Several things. From the level of the field each voter's ID card had a picture. So you take a picture and you have a voter ID card. There were instances where people went from one place to another and did another photo registration, did another registration. Then at the NEC office, in the central database, they have a set of very sophisticated database that could track names, that could track pictures. So there were many people in many places whose pictures were so similar, or they were the same persons who had done multiple voter registration. Some of those people were apprehended, arrested and prosecuted.*

It wasn't a large percentage but it happened. So those were the two mechanisms. The taking of the picture and then the central database that could clean up everything and verify. Then people who had similar names or similar faces in terms of the ID card, and we have similar information, those kinds of people were tracked.

PARKER: What steps were taken to prevent selective registration? Supporters of just one party that was powerful in an area?

FREEMAN: *I would say quite frankly there wasn't anything to limit that. Like I told, it got to a situation of people tracking people from central city Monrovia to different places. Obviously it was clear but the thing is it is so difficult to prove that. The man will say because I am a son of this county, not that I have an interest but because my people say they want to vote in this county so I assisted them. There is nothing on the books that can prevent that from happening. So it is difficult to really see that, even if these things happen you can't put a track to it, no.*

PARKER: How is the integrity of the registration list safeguarded after the lists were compiled? What steps were taken to prevent tampering?

FREEMAN: *Largely the guards or the police at the data center have international counterparts, people from UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia), people from IFES, and people from other electoral support bodies and they actually work with them on a database. Mainly UNDP, mainly UNMIL, that through a support*

division and NEC. They work on it together. So it was a counterchecking of data to see that it was intact and no tampering took place.

PARKER: What logistical or operational obstacles were encountered during the conduct of voter registration and how were those overcome?

FREEMAN: *There were serious logistical obstacles. There were places where they had sent us inadequate cameras. There were places where the cameras were available but they could not flash. There were places where the pictures could not be reproduced, they had problems. So that is the reason why IFES brought in somebody from the Ghanaian Elections Commission that was stationed at the logistic base of the UN electoral division. And his work was principally to repair the cameras. Also the roads were largely impassable so there were serious logistical constraints in moving personnel and the materials to the different areas that had been earmarked for voter registration.*

Had it not been for the resounding support of the UNMIL electoral division, through the air support in most of the areas that were completely cut off, it would have been virtually impossible to have done it with the level of success that they did it with. So constraints about materials, also constraints about accessibility.

PARKER: Speaking of the role that UNMIL played in the logistics, I'm wondering what do you think when UNMIL is not here in the future? What do you think are the major challenges that the National Elections Commission or people working on elections will face in the next election?

FREEMAN: *You see I must tell you that a lot has happened since 2005. For the record, the NEC has conducted six by-elections since the election in 2005. With the exception of the first by-election held in February 2006, all of the other by-elections have been principally conducted by the National Elections Commission with minor technical support from partners like UNDP and IFES. So I must tell you, if we were to have elections today these guys are up for it. The challenge now is with UNMIL gone and the roads still impassable, then the problem of accessibility will be a problem. But they are now in the process of working on that and concerted efforts are being made to help ensure that some of the things that were experienced that time, and there is always a periodic improvement in terms of staff ability to perform. Through IFES we have conducted two trainings in what we call BRIDGE, Building Resources in Democracy Governance and Elections. I helped them specifically look at issues of voting operations, elections, election day and all of the logistical requirements. They have been successful as I said in organizing five by-elections since UNMIL electoral division left. They are basically up to the task.*

As I speak to you now during the interview they have already put in place a blueprint for the re-demarcation of constituency and also for a fresh voter registration. We've also realized that there are two kinds of voter registration. You have the periodic and the continuous. Many in the NEC will opt for the continuous where people update, voluntarily, as they reach the age of consent or as people come back home or as people die and are removed from the list. It is such an expensive venture because that requires that the voter registration process in terms of the database is spread out all around. In this instance since it is centralized, there has to be a periodic voter registration. That is what the NEC is currently working on, the modalities for a fresh round of voter registration to cater to all of the new developments that come first with the massive repatriation

of citizens from different parts of the sub-region, even from the United States and places in Europe. Also we find that people have not resettled into the different administrative districts, the towns, the villages and people have died. Even in Liberia, a lot of people from 2005 until now have reached the age of 18 and must also be included. So yes, that is all I can say about that.

PARKER: Perfect. A final question is, elections as you well know can be very expensive. Do you have any recommendations for how to reduce the cost of an election in the future?

FREEMAN: *Yes, several recommendations. First if from my perspective as a Liberian, elections must be owned by the people and to be owned by the people, quite interestingly, that question you're asking is part of an article that I have written that is published somewhere. The article is about the way forward to 2011 elections. Some of the recommendations I am making are, we as a people cannot wait for 2011 before we put up a massive budget for elections. So the thing is can we start planning for elections—say for example if you have an election that will cost between 18 to 20 million, can we start planning now? Through the budgeting process, putting aside some money in an escrow that is allocated to elections. Is there a way we can do it? I think so.*

Another way we can do it, can we, as part of, as Liberians, or the NEC, what about things that we use over and over again. Can we safeguard those things so that every election period we will not buy and buy. One way to do that is to look at the relevant technology. What is available? Not just anything sophisticated but what is available, durable and usable? Those are things that we must procure and be able to keep. The NEC must take a periodic check through their logistics section of what they have available and must be able to brief the commission and also the other components of the government to know what is available.

One of the greatest constraints during elections is in movement of materials, sensitive and non-sensitive. My suggestion is that as we move towards the process of elections we think the onus is on other functionaries in government. For example, second vehicles to the Electoral Commission. Say we go to the Ministry of Public Works. You have 20 fleet of vehicles. Could you, two or three weeks of election, give us five of those so that we use it to deploy men, staff on election day and after the elections? That will be a great saving cost because after the conduct of the big elections the NEC doesn't really need all those vehicles. So you can put in a budget to say you want fifty vehicles when you won't need it after the elections. So can other centers of government also come in with logistical support?

Now why it is true that needs to be studied, the thing is the commission should be independent but quite frankly those are assets of the government, of the people. So it can be used by one segment of the people in the National Elections Commission to do that. The NEC also need a process of talking with the international partners early and not ten months to an elections before a gigantic budget can be put together. Start a process now and put in place a fierce approach to elections operations. If this is an election year in year one, two and three we do this and it will cost this.. Over the time donors will feel more confident and wanting to support that because it is not outrageously high. They have been part of the process leading to that and then they are more inclined to supporting that. For Liberia I must say in the next two or three elections to come

we will still need some degree of international support. But to a far limited degree.

Whether the elections in 2011 will be as it was in 2005 I can't say, but if some of what we are hearing is anything to go by, then this pyramid system of elections they want to have where you have elections for your local government, you have elections for senators and representatives and then you have election for the President and Vice President, if it is anything to go by, then we think it is the best way to go.

It is also to adjust the timing of the elections. If elections are held during the peak of the rainy season when all of the roads are largely impassable, it requires a great deal of huge logistical movement and it becomes cumbersome and expensive. So if elections can be moved from the rainy season to the dry season where the roads are largely passable, it would do a whole lot in helping to reduce substantially the cost of the process.

PARKER:: Let me say thank you so much for this interview.