

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY

UPDATED INPUT FOR SIERRA LEONE ENCYCLOPEDIA 2005

REPORT ON DEMOCRACY 1995-2005

MAY 2006

1.0 Major areas of Focus

Good Governance & Democracy

- Peace building and Reconciliation
- Reintegration of Ex combatants and a follow up on the pupils in their various school
- Internally Displaced Person Refugees and Returnees
- Advocating non violence & conflict prevention and management
- Evaluation of the role of the Commission in the past general and Presidential elections
- Publicizing and Constitution. 'The Constitution at a Glance' meant to make it reader friendly
- Publicizing National Symbols and Patriotism with a lot of education through posters which were developed by the Commission and through radio and television discussion programmes
- Civic education in schools and communities
- Local government and decentralization to canvass the opinions of people and sensitise them to participate in local government
- Materials production on democracy, eg simplified versions of pamphlets and posters on the Constitution
- Pillars of Democracy National Symbols, Public Property ect
- Advocacy attitudinal change for positive mindsets for community and national development
- Accountability and Transparency in both government and private sectors
- Encouraging and collaborating with civil society for transparent, accountable and participatory government
- Promoting gender equality
- Research into election procedures and trends
- Youth Participation in Democracy and Governance

2.0 Human Rights

- Gender and Women" s affairs. Our Legal Aid Advisory Services addresses women's and children's affairs and 90% of cases are related to women and children
- **Youth development and Child Rights protection. We protect** and promote constitutional and other rights such as marital rights, rights of the disabled, equality before the law and legal and counselling for the disadvantaged

- Sensitization of detention officers (prisons and police) on human rights issues by creating a human Rights Committee not only to look into conditions of prisons, police and other detention centres but to address issues relating to women and finally.
- Sensitization of the media and exposing them to public) scrutiny rather than a ways accepting on y their own self-examination

3.0 Programmes

The NCDHR embarked upon programmes of national sensitization in early 1995, using both print and electronic media to create awareness of the principles and objectives of the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone as the fundamental law of the land

Responding to the needs of a society that had become disgruntled with a disloyal army that collaborated with the RUF to cause so much mayhem on the population, the Commission conducted a national consultative conference on civil military relations aimed at restoring confidence and repairing broken relationship existing between the army and civilians particularly in the major towns and rural areas.

The NCDHR continues to provide leadership during turbulence in the country. After the January 6, 1999, infamous invasion of the city of Freetown, by elements of the RUF and portions of the renegade Sierra Leone army the commission played a leadership role by convening a national consultative conference of civil society. This conference was a badly needed opportunity to hang heads in the African tradition with a view to developing pragmatic strategies aimed at ending eight years of rebel war in the country. The three day conference which had its emotional moments also succeeded in providing a working document that was extensively used by all parties to the peace negotiations in Lome, Togo.

In a nation deeply divided by the politics of exclusion, Marginalisation and sustained denial of human rights by previous governments coupled with indiscipline and lack of respect for public property, the commission convened again a national consultative conference on patriotism on patriotism and national development to address these shortcomings. The meeting elicited the views of citizens to chart a way forward for the cultivation of values that are indispensable for rebuilding a battered nation. The information collected from these national and regional conferences was used in producing materials for civic education campaigns to inculcate patriotic values among citizens.

In 2001, after a decade of a brutal, violent and destructive civil conflict whose conduct violated and abused nearly a ll the provisions of international human rights instruments and constitutional rights of the citizens, Sierra Leone was drawn into its most delicate and critical position. This was the transition from war to peace that was fraught with uncertainty and compounded by its coincidence with elections. A ready as provided for in the constitution, the life of

the government and parliament have been extended by another six months, and elections have been scheduled to take place in May, 2002. The NCDHR responded to the sustained call by citizens, as individuals and groups and certain sections of the media by convening a national consultative conference to explicitly define and chart the way forward for peace democracy, national recovery and post conflict Sierra Leone.

This landmark conference certainly minimized intrigues and 'underground' political and other intrigues that were likely promote to instability, since all identifiable groups had the opportunity to express their positions on pertinent issues of national stability. Indeed the conference paved the way for a peaceful, democratic election which accommodated a political parties that were interested in participating in the election.

4.0 Post-war peace-Building

4.1 As a post war strategy, workshops and community meetings have been held to raise and sustain awareness on the importance of democratic principles and practices, peace and respect for human rights as basic ingredients for national recovery. In this regard, a National Consultative Conference was organized in collaboration with civil society on the theme "After Elections What Next". Participants represented a nation wide cross section of community based organizations, non governmental organizations, the media, political parties and other stake holders in the democratic process, especially those who took part in election sensitization and monitoring.

Presentations were made by resource persons from the University, Civil Society Movement, the National Electoral Commission, NCDHR and expert consultants, followed by extensive group work. It culminated in a working document titled, "After Election What Next"? Extracts for Action", which summarized proposals for follow up action to aid and accelerate the process of sustaining democracy and advancing human rights. Although the conference was held in Freetown and Bo, it included representatives from the regions. These outcomes have been disseminated among civil society organizations, and it is intended to implement them in the regions and districts through workshops, seminars and similar participatory sensitization programmes.

4.2 Parliamentary Seminar

As a sequel to the general elections, a national seminar was also held Freetown From 15th to 16th August 2002, with the object of enhancing the participation of parliamentarians in governance. The topics discussed included.

- Mutual responsibilities and obligations of MPs and the Citizens
- Promoting Accountability and Transparency
- Communications skills for enhanced performance
- Public relations as a tool for a successful parliamentary term
- Members of Parliament and Human Rights Challenges in Post Conflict

Sierra Leone

- The role of members of Parliament in promoting Gender equality
- Checks and balances in a democracy: the Doctrine and its derogations in modern Sierra Leone
- The Role of the Opposition in a Democracy
- The Role of MPs in sustaining Peace and Democracy in Post Conflict Sierra Leone.

4.3 Rehabilitation & Reintegration

A project was undertaken in Bo in collaboration with the Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, for the orientation of ex-combatant school going children from the Eastern, Northern and Southern regions. It was designed as a teaching, information and experience sharing exercise and revealed an extensive range and volume of child perceptions of their national environment and its failings with remedies being proposed for every perceived defect in the society. In subsequent related exercises, the children's behaviour has been monitored in their respective schools and the findings were very gratifying.

In an area as sensitive as changing mindsets it is vital that such programmes are replicated in various areas around the country. It is indeed, necessary to revisit the same institutions and individuals in the medium and long terms to assess the durability of these programmes.

4.4 The Electoral Process

In preparation for the General and Presidential elections, the Commission conducted intensive nationwide education programmes on the electoral process. We participated in selecting election jingles designed and printed posters, produced pamphlets and held community level meetings in the chiefdoms and villages to explain the new District Block Voting System, and mobilize citizens to participate, by registering, voting avoiding corrupt practices and demanding manifestoes from the political parties. During the elections, our Commissioners also monitored the activities. It will be recalled that during 2001, the Commission organized regional briefings and a National Consultative Conference on "Peace and Democracy, the Way Forward". This report which I now present, is part of the implementation stage of that Consultative Conference.

Together with the election sensitization and monitoring and the recent Consultative Conference on "After the Elections What Next", the Commission has made what it hopes will be considered a meaningful contribution to the nation's democratic evolution.

5.0 Networking

As believers in networking, the Commission collaborated with various institutions which work in complementarity to achieve similar or identical goals in both the fields of democracy and human rights.

On democracy, significant cooperation developed with the Anti Corruption Commission in which we operate as coalition members

Some other organizations and institutions with whom we have networked include: Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs on gender and child welfare workshop and report preparation for UN Human Right Commission.

National Forum for Human Rights on joint preparation of post conflict human right programme.

IPAM on Human Rights training for senior police officers and induction of new administrative officers for Ministry of Defence.

SLAJ

- Retreat on the role of the press in governance
- Acted as resource personel on Human rights issues in elections reporting
- Workshop on promoting patriotism and advancing democracy

▪ **International Law Group and TRC Secretariat:**

Extensive collaboration within the group as part of the TRC sensitization team leading the radio/TV sensitization exercise nationwide and collaborating in training journalists and other net workers in Bo and Kenema and Moyamba.

▪ **World Conference on Religion and Peace**

Collaborative seminars on democratic values and human rights issues as well as TRC/Special Court orientation courses

▪ **Amnesty International and other Human Rights Groups**

Seminar presentations on various issues

▪ **Sierra Leone Adult Education Association (SLADEA)**

Implementation of civic education programmes particularly on the elections

▪ **Ombudsman**

Cases referrals and collaboration on human rights promotion and protection. Resource person on establishment of the office and human rights networking

▪ **Network Movement for Justice & Democracy & other Civil Society Groups**

Joint inspection of detention centres under NCDHR leadership and report submitted to the Inspector General of Police.

- **Council of churches of Sierra Leone**

Collaboration in disseminating Lome Peace Agreement and Media Sensitisation

6.0 Radio and Television Programme

The Commission launched an electronic media sensitization programme in 1995 to raise citizens awareness on virtually every area of concern to this nation. It consisted of two discussion sessions per week on radio and television and one phone in session on radio.. although fierce competition and lack of funds for air time have reduced our sessions to one, there is every intention of retaining and, if possible increasing the slots.

During the electoral campaign it was necessary not just to sensitize and provide information but also to mobilize and animate the electorate to participate fully and develop confidence in the process. To be successful in this assignment our credibility and impartiality had to be impeccable, especially as Act No 3 of 1996 stipulates "that no person shall be appointed or hold office as a chairman or member of the Commission if he is or becomes a member of a political party". Themes like Patriotism, National Symbols, Cultural Values and Development Peace and Reconciliation, and the DDR programmes had to be recycled to keep them in focus. Although these programmes were initially restricted to the Western Area the opening of radio stations in all the other regions and a television station in Bo augur well for the expansion of the programme. Already, cassettes are periodically sent out and our Commissioners take part in regional programmes as and when necessary. When facilities are available for our regional offices to operate fully however this programme in the regions will bring its influence to bear positively nation wide as a force for the better. The challenges posed to democracy in the immediate post conflict era require us to pay close and urgent attention to questions of transitional justice. Therefore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court, in so far as they address such challenges, received our close attention.

7.0 Civic Education – Formal

A very important project which has been on going but can be climaxed in the short term is the printing and launching of Civic Education text books for primary schools. These are in the final stages of being illustrated, prior to printing, testing and launching. The stumbling block is funding but it is hoped that this will be overcome in the short run. Its success should contribute greatly towards the development of a civic awareness among school children and hopefully in containing and reducing the incidence of youthful violence and other types of anti social behaviour. It should also contribute towards the growth of patriotism in our young people.

8.0 The Legal Aid and Counselling Unit

The Legal Aid and Counselling Unit of the Commission is one of our most significant activities in the human rights field. It provides access to the justice and legal systems for those whose educational, social, financial or other disabilities put them at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, the death and illness of our four prominent legal volunteers threatened to close the facility during the year, but its humanitarian appeal has attracted another young but eminent lawyer, who also offers his services twice weekly.

Contemporary Activities and Developments (2003 - present)

Among the most significant events for democracy and human rights during this period were:-

- a. Preparatory work on the local government Act and its dissemination. The Commission prepared elaborate briefs on the history of local councils from colonial times up to their suspension including the justification for the establishment of the system.
- b. In a series of community meetings nationwide, the populace were made to understand the process. This was particularly useful for the youths who had no previous experience of local government. They were simultaneously being encouraged to be actively involved in the transition and thus to own and participate in the approaching system.
- c. After the passing of the Act another intensive civic education exercise was undertaken similar to the Lome Peace Agreement sensitization exercise to acquaint the citizens with its concepts and implications. Our target group embraced all levels of stakeholders within the communities and special effort was made to include women and youths among our participants.
- d. After the 2002 Presidential and Parliamentary elections there was evidence of election fatigue as we prepared for the Local Council elections in 2004. Skepticism about the value and benefits of an unfamiliar system also inhibited young potential voters to the extent that the registration of voters was proving to be a disaster until the Commission spearheaded a vigorous drive in all the regions and reversed the trend. Participation was substantial the results widely commended and generally peacefully accepted with a resultant boost to our democratic image.
- e. Our post electoral workshop programmes aimed at clarifying the duties of the various actors in local government as well as the civic rights of each group under the Act.
- f. At a special post-electoral consultative meeting involving those who took part in observing or monitoring, organizing and ducting the elections, we identified the success achieved, the errors committed and lessons learned for future guidance. The results were widely distributed throughout civil society with observations on the way forward.

- g. Developed in collaboration with Women's Rights Organisations, a training manual on Violence against Women funded by UNIFEM.
- h. A novel on-going project being undertaken in collaboration with NACSA and the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture is the Democracy, Business and Development. National Summit scheduled for September – December, 2006. It is to be preceded by a series of District and Regional Summits and the entire process aims at establishing a permanent dialogue between the public and private sectors to the benefit of both.

Several topical issues have also been engaging the attention of the Commission over the past years and are scheduled to continue through the current three year cycle (2005-2007).

Political Tolerance – This is a relationship to be carefully cultivated within and among political parties as Presidential parliamentary and Local Council Elections approach.

Changing Mindsets - One of our projects of very high priority, for which international funding is being sought is the production and dissemination of sensitization materials to change the negative mindsets of the citizenry and cultivate patriotism, good citizenship responsibility and self-reliance, as pillars of democracy. It will take the form of community meetings seminars and radio discussions, engaging the populace in sectors, (schools, colleges, musicians, urban slums, etc)

Civic Education for Elections –

Major programmes under this item are:

- the focus on electoral issues
- campaign against electoral violence
- political tolerance
- collaboration with NEC to facilitates peaceful free fair transparent elections

Above all the NCD operates as an oversight commission on all matters impinging on the development and substance of our democracy.

PAST ACTIVITIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Human Rights

Democracy has never been divorced from human rights. On the contrary, democracy is essentially a matter of Human Rights. We will therefore continue to collaborate on human rights issues as they impinge on the democratic process.

In the peculiar Sierra Leone situation, however, the horrendous manifestations of the civil war and its effects on the citizenry have thrown our human rights mandate into sharp focus and have compelled us to undertake a variety of measures of which only the most significant will be mentioned here.

- a. Establishment of legal aid clinic, providing representation, advisory and conciliatory service for citizens who may otherwise be unable to access the judicial system.

Clinics were to be established in each region, but shortage of personnel and the ongoing formation of the Human Rights Commission have forestalled this. The clinic has now been dismantled.

- b. Establishment of Human Rights monitoring committees for the Police, Prisons Women and Children, other matters. This programme was again discontinued in 2001 for lack of funds. Its work involved units investigating complaints and monitoring of progress in the respective areas with recommendations to the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights for redress.
- c. Human Rights training in conjunction with UNDP for Commissioners and Civil Society representatives. A Human Rights Community was established within UNDP to oversee and respond to human rights developments generally. All external human rights agencies were members and so we placed much emphasis on observance of international instruments and reports to the OHCHR.
- d. Publication of a Human Rights Newsletter. It reported developments on various human rights issues providing information and raising the level of consciousness.
- e. Translation of the UNDR into four (4) main local languages. The document was used to raise awareness among mainly rural people of their rights and duties under the Declaration.
- f. Preparation of civil and human rights textbooks for school system. This is yet to be introduced and used for lack of funds.
- g. Publication of pamphlets – Your Rights at the Police Station (now revised)
- h. “Know Your Rights”
- i. Human Rights training for Police and Prison Officers. This has taken place in various forums, separately and together.
- j. Encouraging establishment of reading rooms in schools by awareness raising clubs on human rights issues.
- k. Organised public symposium on:
 - the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
 - the trial of children by the proposed Special Court
 - proposal for an interim government prior to elections
- i. In partnership with Inter-religious Council launched a Citizen Fund for Disarmament when donor funds were delayed
- m. Organised materials production workshop for empowerment of women, followed by National Conference for the Empowerment of Women.

In 2003 the Commission became involved in the attempt to create a new and separate Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone with exclusive responsibility for the national human rights agenda. It was to be entrusted with more extensive power than those conferred on the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights and separated from it.

We participated in the crafting, discussion and advocacy aspects of the Act since the erstwhile National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights was one of the three signatories to manifesto 99, which pre-visualized the new Commission. When the Act was passed in 2004, it stipulated that the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights should revert to its original assignment as National Commission for Democracy (NCD). THE NCD has since maintained only a watching brief on human rights pending the actual formation of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

9.0 Unique Aspects in the Commission

It has to be reiterated that in the first place the NCDHR with its current mandate, is in the vanguard for sustaining democratic principles and practices and fostering peace reconciliation human rights responsibilities and national development. To relax in its efforts will be tantamount to disconnecting the nation from its spiritual life line. We hold this view because we believe that the humanitarian input of whatever magnitude and variety, will be meaningless and unproductive if the intended beneficiaries are not fortified with positive mindsets and constructive attitudes towards nation building. It is therefore vital that the NCDHR be preserved as the nation's psychological repair and maintenance unit, preferably with a strengthened and expanded mandate as earlier indicated.

Taking a still broader perspective, we propose working towards the establishment of a transnational (sub regional) coalition of Democratic which will help to formulate standardized approaches to fundamental problems of governance. The establishment of collaborative best practices in democracy across borders will certainly contribute immensely to the stabilization of the sub region.

Progress from 1996 to the Present (Summary)

The foundations of a democratic culture have been constructed although impediments confronting the creation of a democratic superstructure have persisted.

During the period of the Commission's existence (1996 to present)

- The politics of inclusion has taken hold
- Issues of human rights, democratic pluralism good governance, accountability and transparency are high priority on the national agenda alongside the increasing popularity of women's rights.
- Information is widely available although the communication link between the government and the people is still defective. It is improving.
- The democratic system is now clear to the people although a democratic culture has not yet been firmly established.
- People know their rights but have not fully grasped the significance of civic responsibilities
- Political activity is becoming more orderly and law abiding
- The press has become more vibrant

- The people have become more alert as watchdogs behind the establishment and more visible
- Local government has been established, bringing government to the people
- Participation in governance has increased
- Civil society is more of a role-player in governance although it needs to be more organized
- Peace has been restored and reconciliation is in progress between war perpetrators and war victims

a. Impact on intended Beneficiaries

The National Commission for Democracy (NCD/NCDHR) entered the scene in Sierra Leone during the typically restrictive regime of the NPRC with constitution suspended rule by decree, freedoms regulated by fear of the bullets, the justice system uncertain and civic and political activity under siege. It was also a period of bitter conflict and near collapse of the state.

By raising public awareness on all these issues the Commission was able to focus attention on the glaring gaps impeding the attainment of peace, the development of democracy, promotion of human rights and the advent of national development.

The resultant exposure of the populace to information and new perspectives on human rights and responsibilities, democratic values and principles, or good governance, good citizenship conflict resolution and peace has resulted in an open society.

Interactive critical, and buttressed by a vibrant and irrepressible media, the impact of the democracy and human rights agenda on the populace had been remarkable. Women youth and the disabled have increased their participation in governance.

One unfortunate consequence of this awareness, however, is that freedom has spilled over into license and expresses itself in various types of excesses. At the same time, the progress on the political level has led to preparations for general elections and a very vocal clamour that they should be free, fair and corruption-free.

Challenges and Prospects – The Way Forward

The fundamental challenge in our society today is the persistence of negative mindsets and the lack of patriotism.

The values and norms of war (impatience, belligerence distrust disregard for law and order) have over shadowed those of a democratic culture. This needs to be remedied by more robust and well funded programmes to change attitudes towards self-esteem, self-reliance care and respect for others.

National security (political, military and economic) will be enhanced if a strong feeling of patriotism is cultivated among our citizens. People will be willing to make sacrifices for the nation, defend its cause and advance in prospects and above all, show respect for law and order.

The message of "good citizenship", as a counterpoise to "good governance" is a pre-requisite for peace, national stability and development. Strong political will must therefore be displayed and unequivocal logistic support invested in the fight against negative attitudes. Our minds are not disarmed and until they are, every items of humanitarian input is in danger of destruction.

Therefore, the Commission's main focus now is on maximising "social capital" lubricating the interaction among people and between them and the government.

Our strategies and activities will remain the same but will be intensified as resources permit.

Democracy therefore deserves every encouragement and support, technical, financial and logistic, from both government and non-governmental sources to enable us to serve as catalysts for every other area o national development. A holistic view of the nation cannot ignore the psychological dimension of a nation in convalescence.

Constraints

The Commission needs support from an assured source(s). such support could take the form of providing/updating our logistics to facilitate execution of community outreach programmes. Motor scooters, a mobile information unit, and radio sets for community work; books and other documentation, films, etc for the resource centre funds from radio air-time costs facilitator remuneration, and provision of resource persons constitute some of our basic needs at the moment. Within its limited resources and numerous demands, the governments response is positive but could be slightly improved. We could do with some international funding assistance, however. With minimal support, the Commission can change the negative mind-sets of Sierra Leoneans and thereby transform a war-ravaged country into the peaceful and secure environment which is prerequisite for national development.

Address

National Commission for Democracy
9th Floor, Youyi Building Freetown, Sierra Leone
Tel: 241907/242241; Fax 234991 email: ncdhr2000@yahoo.co.uk