



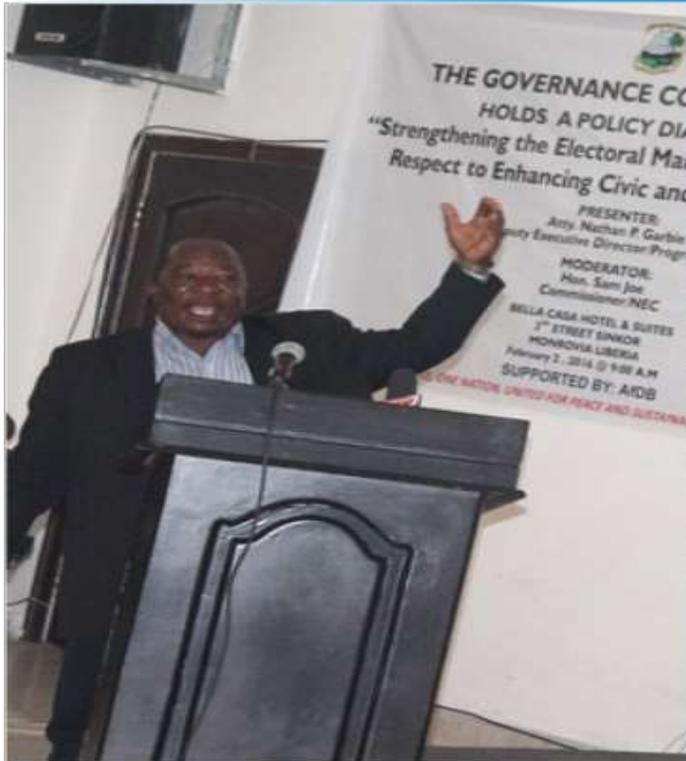
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NEC to work with Partners to Provide Timely Civic and Voter Education

Liberians will in 2017 hold historical presidential and district elections. The presidential election is described as historic because it will witness the incumbent president not being a candidate, and the possibility of the winner of that election coming from the opposition. It will also witness the transitioning from one living president to another, something that has not happened in Liberia since around 1944.



Partial view of participants at the policy dialogue

Political observers fear that this complete change in leadership in Liberia could lead to untold uncertainties which should be avoided particularly at a time when UNMIL would have significantly pulled out its military wing from Liberia. Therefore to ensure the holding of free, fair and credible elections in Liberia come 2017, the Governance Commission has held and continues to hold a series of Policy Dialogues inviting Liberians from all levels of leadership including Cabinet Ministers,

Lawmakers, political Parties, women and youth organizations, opinion leaders and civil society to discuss strategies geared toward strengthening the electoral process before 2017.

On Tuesday February 2, 2016, the Governance Commission held another Policy Dialogue on the topic “Strengthening the electoral management system with respect to enhancing civic and voter education”. The Dialogue was held at the Bella Casa Hotel in Sinkor. Political parties, civil society including youth and women groups’ representatives, government officials including lawmakers attended and actively participated in the discussions which followed the Presentation from the National Elections Commission, NEC. A number of questions have been asked and concerns raised in the public domain as to NEC’s preparations and plans for the 2017 elections. Some of these concerns include NEC’s preparation for voter and civic education, availability of election monitoring mechanisms to assure of fair and credible election results and the prevention of vote rigging, trained NEC staff in the field, among others.



NEC’s Deputy Executive Director for Program **Attorney Nathan Garbie** did a presentation on strengthening the electoral management system with respect to enhancing civic and voter education: a panacea to sustaining Liberia’s democracy”. The Presentation focused on efforts by NEC to hold free, fair, transparent and credible national elections. Such efforts include the creation of the civic and voter education (CVE) Section in 1996 in anticipation of the 1997 elections. NEC saw it fit to create the CVE Section based on the compelling need for voters to make informed and balanced electoral decision(s) while voting. Other objectives of the civic and voter education Section include:

- To plan and organize programs geared toward public awareness for Liberians especially registered voters;
- To increase public participation in elections;
- To motivate Liberians who are of voting age to register and vote in every election;

- To educate electorate on the polling steps and procedures including marking the ballots

ADOPTED STRATEGIES

According to Presenter Nathan Garbie, to ensure the scrupulous implementation of these objectives, the CVE Section with direct supervision from the Department of Programs, has undertaken several strategic programs and projects for the attainment of free, fair and transparent elections in Liberia. Among these are:

1. Robust dissemination of Voter Information through the use of printed materials such as: posters, fliers, banners, billboards, stickers etc;
2. Public education through nation-wide regional consultations for local and traditional leaders, youth and students, women and disabled groups as well as CSOs, FBOs and CBOs, media, peer group among others;
3. Development of a standardized Toolkit as an outcome of a baseline survey to be used in CVE programming;
4. Deployment of Civic & Voter educators, town-criers, gender mobilizers and cultural troupes nation-wide;
5. The hiring of services of civil society organizations (CSOs), faith based organizations (FBOs), and community based organizations (CBOs) to boost the effective delivery of civic & voter education messages; and
6. Conduct special civic & voter education training for specialized groups and other categories of electorate.

ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Successful Voter registration with more than fifty percent of the total population of Liberia registering to vote; in 2005 voter registration was put at 1.4 million and in 2011 at 1.7 million respectively;
2. The 2011 polls were generally peaceful with a high turnout of 71.6 % in the elections;
3. The voting procedures have been largely understood by electorate with appreciable level of invalid votes;
4. Increased technical capacity of civic education service providers, through training and practice on how to deliver CVE contents;
5. Free, fair, transparent and credible elections were achieved in 2005 and today that pace still continues.

CHALLENGES FACED SINCE 2005

1. Difficulties in the conduct of Voter Education for National referendum due to complexity of referendum issues coupled with low level of education of the population;
2. Low turnout of voters in National Referendum, Presidential Election Run-Offs and various By-Elections conducted since 2005;
3. Low capacity of some printing houses to produce quality CVE materials in a timely manner and the insincerity of some CVE service providers to perform assigned tasks in the CVE delivery efforts;
4. Limited infrastructures, including road and communication facilities which have and continue to hinder performance of CVE service providers;
5. Threats and attacks on CVE service providers in political hotbed communities have also affected service delivery;
6. Shifting/trucking of the voting population from one point to another by potential candidates during voter registration process negatively impacted voter turnout;

7. NEC being over-burden with civic duties due to lack of National Civic Education Commission;
8. Low level motivation among the voting populace;
9. Inadequate funding to underwrite critical electoral activities;
10. Certain cultural practices;

CONCLUSION

According to the Presenter Attorney Nathan Garbie, NEC recommends the strengthening of the electoral management system, and enhancing of civic and voter education as a panacea for sustaining our electoral democracy. Attorney Garbie maintained that judgment on the success of the electoral process should be based on:

1. The peacefulness and understanding of reason(s) of and behind the process;
2. The degree of participation & inclusiveness of the process;
3. Transparency and accessibility of the process;
4. The fearless announcement of the expressed will of the people by the election monitoring baseline (EMB) and;
5. The overall confidence of the electorate in the process.

Attorney Garbie concluded by urging all stakeholders and partners including political parties, CSOs, CBOs & FBOs to be committed to performing their roles and functions in the electoral process. Garbie noted that successful election is the collective responsibility of all citizens, and to some extent the international community, adding “we all need to play our roles well”.

In opening remarks, Dr. Amos Sawyer urged political parties in Liberia to contribute to efforts aimed at assuring peaceful credible elections come 2017. He noted that since 2003, efforts to enhance unity among Liberians as contributed to by everyone including security protection and the future we have perceived for ourselves will all go down the drain with one wrong move in the 2017 elections if its results became overly controversial or considered not credible.

The 2017 elections are historic in that Liberia will witness an incumbent president that will not be a candidate in the elections. “Liberia has not witnessed the retirement of a president since 1944. Such transitions could give birth to untold uncertainties.” Dr. Sawyer noted that the only way to address such uncertainties is to perform in accordance to well-known rules and levels of efficiencies. He urged Dialogue participants to begin to think about ways in which we can help the National Elections Commission (NEC) prepare particularly with the view of voter education and broader civic education to ensure a greater level of efficiency within the electoral body and system.

Judging from past experiences, people tend to speculate and question election results when they lack



adequate information about the electoral process. Sawyer pointed out that “people respond to events on the basis of their perception so we want to ensure that we have an understanding and do our work well so that the Liberian electorate would be fully knowledgeable and feel an important part of the electoral process.”

Grand Bassa County **Senator Jonathan Kaipay** pledge the Legislature’s support to NEC to ensure that the Commission meets its constitutional responsibility to holding free, fair, transparent and credible elections in 2017. The President of the National Council of Civil Society Organizations **Frances Greaves** also pledge the Council’s and membership support to NEC and the electoral process.

South African and Indian Ambassadors Pledge Support to GC

South African Ambassador Masilo Mabeta and Indian Ambassador Dinesh Bhatia have pledged their Countries support to the Governance Commission. In two separate visits to the Commission, on February 15, 2016, Ambassador Mabeta expressed his government’s interest in human capacity building training programs, and promised to collaborate with the Governance Commission, GC, in this area of focus. The Ambassador however asked a series of questions as to the mandate, functions, and programs of GC, and how these benefit the people of Liberia. He also asked about major challenges of GC, pondering over the kind of relationship existing between the Commission and other government ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs).



Dr. Sawyer (left) with Amb. Masilo Mabeta

Responding Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the Governance Commission, explained that GC has a mandate to craft policy recommendations and strategy implementations as well as monitoring and evaluation of governance related issues. In short, describing GC as the institutionalized think tank of government. Dr. Sawyer also mentioned that GC falls under the Executive branch of government, collaborates with other MACs and together identify national challenges, and put together necessary mechanism(s) and/or make recommendations to address the particular national problem. Dr. Sawyer pointed out that this process sometimes results into a “Bill” and later a “Draft Act” that is submitted by the President to the Legislature through the Governance Committee.

A presentation as to achievements, challenges and future plans of GC was made, and other national issues including Liberia’s reconciliation roadmap, local governance, inclusive service delivery, decentralization, and development programs were also discussed.

Similar discussions were later held with Indian Ambassador Dinesh Bhatia on the same day (February 15) when he paid a courtesy visit at the Commission. Ambassador Bhatia disclosed scholarship opportunities provided by his Government to enhance human capacity building, and urged the Commission to take advantage of said opportunities. Ambassador Bhatia was also interested in GC’s work, source of funding, consultants, and other national programs and concerns.



Dr. Sawyer (left) with Amb. Dinesh Bhatia

Responding Dr. Sawyer said the Liberian government funds the Commission’s payroll and some operations, adding that said support is dwindling therefore the need for increased donor funding and the building of further partnerships. GC is an autonomous government agency with some of its work funded by donors. Major donors include the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the African Development Bank (ADB – but the Bank will not provide support

to Liberia this year), and OSIWA and SIDA “pull funds”. Consultants hired by the Commission are under specific project contracts and expected to transfer knowledge.

A presentation on GC similar to that presented to that for Ambassador Mabeta was made after which Ambassador Bhatia noted that GC and Indian institutions could collaborate and share ideas to support each other. He said India could surely provide and underwrite courses that could benefit Liberia’s capacity building programs.

Sawyer leads ECOWAS Mission to observe Niger's Election

The Chairman of the Governance Commission and former Liberian Interim President Prof. Amos Sawyer has successfully led an ECOWAS Electoral Observation Mission to the Nigerien 2016 Presidential and Legislative Elections. In a preliminary statement of the Mission, Prof. Sawyer declared that the elections



were conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere and that the Nigerien people demonstrated high level of patience and civic responsibility during the electoral process despite delays in the opening of polls. The statement also noted that “the counting process and the validation of

ballot papers in the polling stations took place in a transparent and credible manner and in the presence of delegates of political parties and election observers”.

On Election Day (February 21) Prof. Sawyer observed the opening, conduct, closing and counting of votes at several polling stations around the capital, Niamey. Prof. Sawyer was accompanied by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Her Excellency Sallamatu Hussaini-Suleiman, and the Director of Political Affairs at ECOWAS, Dr. Aderemi Ajibewa.

Ahead of the election, Prof Sawyer held meetings with major Nigerian stakeholders and political actors to assess the situation and to assure the political actors and the Nigerien people of ECOWAS’ commitment to supporting their processes of democratization and state - building. He noted that ECOWAS has led several missions to the country since 2015 to support national institutions, and to promote peaceful political dialogues ahead of the 2016 elections. During the meetings, he emboldened Nigerien political actors to conduct themselves peacefully, and ensure that their conducts during the electoral period are within the framework of the laws.

Key institutions and personalities met by Prof. Sawyer ahead of the election were the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Constitutional Court, the High Authority on Communication, The President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Interior,

leaders of opposition political parties, alliances and coalitions, other observer groups including the African Union, the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union and the United Nations.

The ECOWAS Election Observation Mission to Niger led by Prof. Sawyer was made up of 130 observers drawn from the ECOWAS Council of the Wise, Ambassadors accredited to the ECOWAS Commission, members of the ECOWAS Parliament, and the ECOWAS Court of Justice. The Mission also included experts from Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Electoral Management Bodies of ECOWAS Member States as well as representatives of Civil Society Organizations and the Media. Prof. Sawyer was supported by a technical team from the ECOWAS Commission in performing his duties as Head of Mission.

GC, UNDP and USAID-GEMS discuss Opportunities for Empowerment in Liberia

The Governance Commission (GC), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and USAID-GEMS have been holding discussions on strengthening of the decentralization process. The Decentralization/Deconcentration national initiative is expected to assure easier accessibility to basic social services in rural communities in Liberia. Such services include but not limited to birth certificates, drivers and marriage licenses, health care, business registration among others.

At the February 15, 2016 meeting held at GC, it was agreed that a business window be created and attached to the County Service Centers in the various Counties to provide macro/micro credit loans to Liberians interested in establishing small businesses. The UNDP is committed to laying the groundwork for other Missions in terms of technology.



GC, USAID-GEMS staff in meeting

GC commended UNDP for being **the most resilient partner, very helpful in pushing and supporting the decentralization policy framework, its related programs and the local government draft Act.** Governance Commission Chairman Dr. Amos Sawyer noted that “we would not have been where

we are without UNDP support. UNDP has always been willing to help.”

The establishment of the County Service Centers has been described as a hectic exercise, and coordination done in a zigzag fashion. To date, just one County Service Center has been established in Buchanan Grand Bassa County. That Center has been very helpful in providing services to the Liberian people. The Center reports of an increase in registering of small businesses, and that people continue to visit the Center hoping to benefit from additional services not yet offered by the Center.

For decentralization to be in full force, the Local government draft Act will need to be passed into law. Meanwhile opportunities/services, under phase one of decentralization (the deconcentration phase) are provided incrementally. Pieces are being put together depending on available opportunities and resources. The next three County Service Centers expected to be

established soon include those in Nimba, Bong, and Margibi. This will be followed by that of Lofa then Bomi Counties.

The Governance Commission will work with President Sirleaf's office to ensure that by the end of her term, government would have established County Service Centers in all fifteen counties. At the recent meeting with UNDP and USAID-GEMS, Dr. Sawyer assured that GC will work with the President's office to ensure that Centers are strengthened and maintained, and staff salaries paid. The Commission will also assist in building synergies to ensure effective service centers, and recommend how we can build capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation to improve service delivery.



GC and UNDP staff at one of their consultation meeting

Head of UNDP-Liberia office Antonio Vigilante pointed out that establishing business networks (that are connected to the Centers) assures of job creations, adding "providing support to these informal entrepreneurships is a form to addressing unemployment in Liberia." The meeting also discussed encouraging government to help small businesses

establish or develop new skills to help new employments.

GC, UNDP and USAID-GEMS believe that available government infrastructures in rural areas could encourage donors to move in and support the business centers and by extension the needs of local communities. The meeting discussed assigning money bags to County Service Centers to be used as revolving fund to facilitate macro loans to purchase "equipment to be leased" to small businesses such as tailoring shops, barber shops/beauty salons, etc. that will in turn provide funding to said businesses. The centers could also serve as business incubators for networks to share resources such as machines/equipment to support agricultural businesses; establish Cooperatives, provide technical assistance that adds values – assessing what is feasible and/or legal.

Local authorities on the other hand are expected to provide support such as free space/buildings, internet services, computer and literacy training of any kind to enhance the skills of small businesses and ensure accountability, and local governance participation. Such support facilitates a change in relationship between the people and their leaders, allow youth stay in their communities, and ties in with inclusiveness also emphasized by decentralization.

To ensure long term sustainability plan for County Service center, county development fund, and collection of service fees can be used to cover operational funds for the Centers. The creation of (business) "centers of interests" to be connected to the County Service Centers could have democratic implications and benefits, and serve as a rallying point for town-hall meetings.

GC Honors Its Strategic Plan Consultant Don Wheeler

The Governance Commission (GC) recently honored the Consultant on its Strategic Plan for the next five years (2016-2021). Mr. Don Wheeler was contracted under a USAID-GEMS/GC partnership agreement. His contract recently ended and as a mark of appreciation for a job well done, GC held a little “gowning ceremony” in Wheeler’s honor.



Dr. Sawyer & GC staff with Consultant Mr. Don Wheeler

Members of GC’s Board of Commissioners headed by Dr. Amos Sawyer graced the ceremony and congratulated Don Wheeler for a successful completion of his contract. **Commissioner Elizabeth Mulbah** told Don that GC will remember him for years to come for preparing the Strategic Plan which she described as “a very important document” intended to guide GC for the next five years. **Madam Mulbah is Vice Chair of GC** and heads the Civic Engagement and National Visioning Mandate Area (**CENV**). The Monitoring and Evaluation, Research and Publication Mandate Area (**MERP**) headed by **Commissioner Othello Gongar** housed the office of Don and had worked more closely with him. Dr. Gongar said they enjoyed working with Don and that the gowning ceremony will surely remind him about his time working with the GC family. Dr. Gongar assured Don that GC appreciates his work and assured of the Strategic Plan’s implementation.

For her part, **Commissioner Ruth Jappah Samukai** – with oversight responsibility over National Integrity Systems (**NIS**) noted that GC truly appreciates the work of Mr. Don Wheeler, and for being so patient with us during his interactions with all five Mandate Areas and Administration. Cllr. Jappah Samukai said she looks forward to receiving a copy of the final SP product. GC’s **Executive Director Steve Manley** also expressed thanks and appreciation to Don Wheeler for his work and patience.

Dr. Amos Sawyer, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of GC joined his colleagues in thanking and appreciating Don for a marvelous job done, and for his patience as had been exhibited during his time at GC. He was sure that the gowning ceremony will bring back fond memories to Don about his stay at GC. The gathering was a bit sentimental. Responding, **Mr. Don Wheeler** was pleasantly surprised at the gesture of GC and expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation for the honor bestowed on him. Don disclosed that he had earlier confided in his boss how much he would miss the Governance Commission when his contract was over. Upon wearing the “traditional Liberian (male) gown” Don exclaimed *“oh it is a perfect fit. It is going to look great when I return to the United States. I’ll tell everyone that I was in Liberia.”*

GC’s previous Strategic Plan lasted three years and expired in 2015.