



REPORT ON THE ELECTIONS, CONFLICT
PREVENTION AND YOUTH VIOLENCE IN
THE MANO RIVER UNION:
STAKEHOLDERS DIALOGUE



Bintumani Conference Center, Bintumani Hotel

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- **Presentation on the patterns of Electoral Violence in Africa**
- **Reports. Presentations on Group Exercise**
- **Pictures of Conference**

1.0: Background and Introduction to elections Violence in the Mano River Union

The Mano River Union was founded by three West African Heads of States (President Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, President Siaka P. Stevens of Sierra Leone and President William Tolbert) with a focus to promote unity and fraternal ties among Member States. Later, Cote d'Ivoire was added as a member of the Mano River Union with the same objective.

In spite of this, political violence, armed conflicts, widespread political violence and social instability have greatly hit Mano River Union countries for the past two decades. That has created a lot of unrest, instability, loss of lives and property and displaced individuals which consequently affected the social cohesion of people in the different countries of the MRU.

Even though relative peace is currently seen in all four countries, there still remain some visible elements of insecurity which may trigger conflict if not well managed. For instance, in Sierra Leone, recent incidents of violence between supporters of the two traditional major political parties suggest that unless political tensions cool down before the November polls, the country runs the risk of blowing up into violence hence the need for all related bodies to make conscious efforts to reduce the risk factor by responding adequately to early warning signs.¹ At the centre of this violence the youth have featured quite prominently as perpetrators with little consideration or attention given to the master minds of the said violence. Sierra Leone is signatory to several regional and sub regional treaties binding states obligation and role in conducting elections across the continent and the present events subjects their sincerity and commitment to these treaties to scrutiny.² Several initiatives are ongoing in a bid to continue the interaction and advocacy around non violence in the coming elections with a broader view of engaging the youth in a more productive participation in the electoral process as sources of political advancement and sustainable development rather than threat to political governance. Against this background, the need for expanding the debate through sharing experiences and learning from other regions as a way of influencing policymakers, youth organizations and other

¹ Over the last six months there has been quite a series of violence that has erupted between ruling All Peoples Congress (APC), and the opposition Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in several district resulting in loss of life and property.

² See the African charter on Elections, Democracy and Good Governance

stakeholders in the development of a socially inclusive youth policies, hence the stakeholders dialogue on Elections, Youth Violence and Conflict Prevention.³

The conference brought together over one hundred participants drawn from Civil Society in Sierra Leone and the Mano River Union Liberia, but also taking keen interest in learning from the experiences from Kenya and Ghana. The expertise, rich experiences and lessons learnt and best practices that participants they brought to the space made for lively but critical in examining alternatives for promoting political tolerance, peace coexistence and good governance in sierra Leone and the region taking into consideration the urgency, importance and seriousness of the issue under discussion.

Opening Ceremony

The conference started with an opening ceremony that was graced by dignitaries from the government, international community and other key non state actor groups working in elections and youth issues in Sierra Leone. Statements that articulate the issues of elections, Youth Violence and Conflict Prevention were delivered by several stakeholder representatives such as the National Youth Commissioner, UNESCO, Trusafrica, the UN Deputy Head of Mission, Safety and Security Component of CSEP, CCYA and CGG. It is worth noting that in all the presentations pointed to the same key issues of youth violence in elections right across the region. Some of the key highlights of their statements were as follows:

- The need for critical reflections on the challenges youth face and the environment around which they have been nurtured and how that impacts their lives and livelihood: As the western area commission pointed out “it is not just enough to preach the message of say no to violence”. Therefore it is incumbent on government to ensure that youth channel their energies into a more productive exercise that would enhance their capacity to constructively dialogue with their leaders, rise above party politics, and make the National Youth Commission, a reality that can only be achieved by good policies and programmes.
- The need for the Necessary conditions and facilities to be put in place for elections (fair play, decency, morality and conformity to the laws). This can only be achieved when the state can

³ This conference was coordinated and organized by Campaign for Good Governance, Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities with financial support from Trustafrica and UNESCO.

respond and take step to address the gaps within the structures and institutional gaps, adopt functional legal frameworks, avoid the use of ex combatants as a shield to ensure hold to power at all cost.

The presentation on “**Patterns of Electoral Violence in Africa**” as well as the Key Note address delivered by Dr. Jimmy Kandehe and Mr. Francis Munu - Inspector-General of the Sierra Leone Police-, formed the high point of the opening session. His presentation touched on key areas of political mismanagement that are clear warning for electoral violence in Africa that has continued to plague African democracy like a cankerworm. Among the many issues he presented, the issues that spoke to the heart of all participants were the issues of

- The presence of instigators of violence who are most of the time political elites.
- Ethno-regional polarization that has created deep-seated division among Sierra Leoneans especially from the north and the south east.
- Reluctance of the incumbent to give up power (citing the 1967 elections in Sierra Leone, 2010 Elections in Cote d’Ivoire, and the issue of power sharing in Kenya and Zimbabwe). However, he mentioned the positive example of giving up power citing the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone and the 2012 elections in Senegal.
- The role of the media being quite key in either promoting peace or enhancing violence: the media have been known to taking sides and propagating hate speech or denying opponents access to visibility

To combat elections violence in the region it is important to take cognisance of the following:

- The need for a “*Democratic Bargain*” in which citizens give up violence to participate in the electioneering process.
- The establishment of a moderation committee, which would arbitrate the electioneering processes (case study of Sierra Leone in 1996 and 2002 with the Revolutionary United Front party).
- Democratic emergence and consolidation with a view to reducing mass poverty and violence in the different societies. (S ee attached presentation).

The Inspector-General of the Sierra Leone reiterated police commitment that the Sierra Leone power to take all necessary measures within its powers to provide the much needed education which would positively influence the mentalities of the citizens as a means of combating the problem of election violence.

Presentation on “*Causes of Electoral Violence and possible mitigation strategies: Lessons and Best Practices*”

The focus of this presentation was to learn from the experiences of countries that have gone through similar crisis while also use some of their best practices as a platform for responding to early warning signs of violence or combating violence in elections in Sierra Leone. The presenters were (Mathias Hounkpe from OSIWA, Innocent Badasu from Legion Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy Unit of Ghana and Aaron Weah-Weah from Liberia)

It is interesting to note that Sierra Leone shares similar challenges as other countries in the MRU and Ghana. For example, the issues of ethno regional divide along political parties lines happened to be a big concern in Ghana as well the issues of the winner takes all situation and the problems associated with the media running across the sub-region. However significant among the various strategies presented to address the menace of elections violence and threats of violence, outstanding strategies were utilized by Ghana, Liberia and Guinea:

In Ghana leaders also played a big role by conceding defeat even before the results were announced and as such it reduced the risk of violence erupting. This is also similar to the 2007 presidential elections that posed so much threat of violence if not for the early conceding of the losing candidate.

The church played quite a big role: A mission was sent to Kenya to understand their conflict of 2007 and to learn lessons. This served as an eye opener and a warning for Ghanaians. The message was peace was spread in a thought provoking way. The youth were almost

conscientized to embrace peace and protect their own future and that of Ghana's rather than fight to keep politicians in power who are only interested in amassing wealth for themselves.

Again in Ghana, like Sierra Leone, the power of communal behavior also played a big role: because of inter marriages and the socialization around which citizens had been nurtured every Ghanaian becomes a relative of the other.

In Liberia, an elections coordinating commission was set up to address all issues arising from the elections. They were responsible for investigating all complaints relating to elections and also censored all messages to all stakeholders before they are publicized. A similar mechanism existing the body of the Political Party registration Commission but it has not been given the powers it needs to act.

In Guinea, there was a reasonable contribution to maintain effective security as was seen in the creation of "*Special Forces*" during their electioneering processes as well as establishing the Inter Party Advisory Committee.

Youth need to be consulted more so that they would be aware of what they should do and how they should comport themselves before, during and after the electioneering process. One of the lessons that have been learnt even in Sierra Leone is that this should be a two-pronged approach that will also take into consideration the politicians themselves

Session Two: "*Preventing Youth Violence and promoting political participation: the 2012 Elections in Sierra Leone*"

This presentation focused on the institutional and programmatic strategies for integrating youths as a productive resource in electoral process and as agents for promoting peace and security in Sierra Leone. The presentations were delivered by (Abdallah Sesay from the All Political Youth Association, Ishmael Earl Sankoh Conteh and Christopher Jones from National Electoral Commission).

This presentation was quite important because it brought to light the practicalities associated with the youth question in Mano River Union. In the light of this the issue remains to be that youth have always been the victims of the violence that they themselves perpetrate. However, there have been some positive efforts to minimize youth violence through the creation of the All Political Party Youth Association, even though its effectiveness and absence of political influence is subject to further interrogation. Key among the issues presented

- Nationwide advocacy for active youth representation and participation.
- The need for continuous dialogue, civic education, political tolerance, genuine and effective security enforcement among all stakeholders as a means of promoting free, fair, credible and transparent elections.
- Strategies to be put in place which include: mass sensitization rallies, the actualization of the 10% quota of youth representation, the creation of the dialogue forum to discuss national issues, the creation of a realistic youth agenda by political parties, having proper structures and the commencement of the Youth Empowerment Scheme.
- Utilization of renowned perpetrators of violence such as ex combatants as pioneers and champions of election non violence campaigns
- The need for government to invest in mid-level skilled labour by creating technical centres and also ensuring that the opportunities for accessing jobs are created once youth graduate from these centres.
- Political parties need to establish a proper youth structure that will also build capacities and support youth initiatives within the party. In Sierra Leone presently most of the political party offices are barely equipped and so these offices have become hideouts for youths to engage in idle and unproductive exercises like draft playing and smoking and drinking.

Presentation on “*Sub Regional Institutional Systems and Structures for addressing Electoral Violence*” by Mr. Nana Busia from UNIPSL (the lone panelist) was the hallmark of the day. This presentation brought participants alive after a long day’s discussion. The international community has been known to play a great role in either preventing conflict in the region or halting conflict when it arises, however there have been huge questions around the manner in

which these interventions are conducted and how interventions have dealt with the foundation or root causes of conflict. In most countries the root problems are still evident and even worse for other countries.

He mentioned two reasons for violence in Sub Saharan Africa:

- The Constitutional systems that are not sensitive to the concept of power in African States (citing activities of the 1960s and 1990s).
- The unfair and non-transparent nature of elections on the continent, requiring the need for treaties and norms, which would serve as a means of addressing problems identified from elections.

Most important among the many norms and standards that have been introduced is the African Charter on Elections, Democracy and Good Governance which made provision for promoting and holding free and fair elections, prohibition of unconstitutional governments, requesting state media to give access to all political parties, providing the code of conduct for all political parties and informing the AU of election dates in order for the organization to send monitors, the need for a six-month notification before amending laws relating to elections, the respect for electoral boards and voters' register and the involvement of civil society organizations in the entire electoral process.

In addition, the charter also poses sanctions for any breach by member states in cases of *Coup d'état*, mercenary intervention (as was seen in Seychelles), armed dissidents and rebel invasions and the reluctance of a government to relinquish power after free, fair and transparent elections as was seen in Cote D'voire. In the case of ECOWAS, similar regulatory norms and standards also exist as a way of check mating the excesses of government within the sub region as was seen in the case of Sierra Leone, Togo, Liberia and recently Mali.

The second day's session was just as interesting and reflective as the first. Reflections of the first day pointed at three key points which were the role of the media as a fundamental catalyst for violence and peace in electoral process, transparency and accountability, and the need for the elections management body to exhibit a high level of credibility that would enhance trust among

political parties and the entire citizenry. This is very key in minimizing post-election violence and ensuring the creation and establishment of effective policies and programmes for youth empowerment and productiveness. As a summary, democracy itself is key for the promotion of good governance and sustainable development and “the poor needs it more.”

Panel Presentation on “*Women/Gender and Electoral Violence: Lessons learned from the sub-region*”

The debate on gender issues within democratic processes has gained increased momentum in recent global debates, the need for quality representation and participation of women in electoral processes cannot be over-emphasized. However, in many instances women have been neglected in such processes of peace campaigns and political representation within political parties and the society at large. Women have been mostly relegated to passivity while the men take centre stage in all process, yet in elections violence they are the major targets for sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

This panel sought to dialogue around these above issues drawing specific experiences from Guinea by Hawa Camara Barry, Cote D’Ivoire by Rita Sangono, Sierra Leone by Dr. Nana Pratt and Liberia by Dan Sari. Among the several issues presented, the most significant worth adopting were the following: It is worth noting that women’s challenges are the same everywhere though there can be issues specific to each society. When there’s conflict the tendency for women to suffer abuse is quite high and in most cases there are limited mechanisms for redress.

In Guinea, a significant strategy that was used to cool down the violence was the role of the wives of political leaders mobilizing women all over the country and across political parties to condemn the acts of their spouses. This was very unique and it is a best practice worth adopting in the region because in most violent situations, perpetrators’ wives and girlfriends remain silent. This is a pointer to the various roles women play and the extent of power they wield. The question is how can these roles be translated to productive strategies for preventing conflict in the region?

In Cote D'Ivoire, the international community, especially France and the sub-regional bodies, were very instrumental and women were supported to mobilize a demonstration for non violence against women. Networking became a very strong tool.

In Liberia, the fact that women ensured that they elect a female president is a huge show of commitment for gender equality and a guarantee for the protection of women's rights.

In Sierra Leone, efforts have been made to enhance the speedy enactment of the minimum 30% quota for women's representation in political elective and appointed positions. Additionally, there is attention to women's participation, trainings and sensitizations, civic education, education on voting techniques, the importance of women's participation, observation, transparency, respect for electoral codes, advocacy, monitoring and vigilance in maintaining order.

Also there has been a greater call for the application of UNSC 1325 and 1880 as a way of integrating women into the peace process and, like many other countries, Sierra Leone has developed its national action plan, but the implementation remains a huge challenge.

Live media broadcast on the panel presentation on *“Youth, Violence and Policing the 2012 Presidential and Local Government Elections”*

This debate formed the high point of the entire conference. This session was introduced to expand the debate to include the views of Sierra Leoneans as a whole. The panel was an hour phone in discussion, which gave citizens outside the conference room the opportunity to participate in the issues under review. The panelists were Assistant Inspector-General Al-Sheik Bangura from the Sierra Leone Police, Dr. Jimmy Kandeh, Miss. Saramba Kandeh from Legal Assistance for Women Yearning for Equal Rights and Social Justice (LAWYERS), Mr. Haron N'dubi from Kenya, Mr. Alphonso Manley from the Centre for the Advancement of Salone Youth and Mr. Francis Kailie from the Office of National Security Sierra Leone (ONS).

The debate spoke to the issues of strategies for policing the November 2012 elections, experiences and lessons from Kenya, strategies for a productive youth involvement in the process and the challenges of young women in the process.

According to the police and the office of national security, there has been a security assessment survey that revealed that there are potential threats of violence in the elections, hence there is a greater need to intensify security plans for an effective policing of the elections. Some of the strategies that have been put in place to secure the nation are as follows:

-An integrated national security strategy that would bring on board all security apparatus;

-Identify potential high risk areas and intensify deployment of security personnel and invoking MAC.P;

The police blame the violence on the legacies of the war that has exposed many youth to violence and the fact that the DDR programme was weak. However, the police came under grave interrogation and bombardment from citizens. They were accused of gross display of unprofessionalism and partiality. However, it was also pointed out that police ineffectiveness must also be blamed on state failure and, as such, the higher ranks should take responsibility for the ills of their junior ranks. To quote Dr. Kandeh “if the police cannot manage a simple traffic ticket how can we expect them to police a three in one election effectively”?

According to the youth representative, youths are challenged with deprivation and marginalization, hence it is easy for them to fall into the hands of power thirsty politicians who use them as pawns to achieve their selfish aims. However, the question remains that there are many other poor and deprived youth who have not made themselves vulnerable to the temptations of violence, yet these same deprived youth have remained focus and successful in life, contributing positively to national democracy.

The young women question pointed at the importance of young women in championing non violence campaigns since they are the most affected during elections violence.

Experience from Kenya points to the fact that there should be a mutual trust between all relevant players in the electoral process. Sharing the story of Kenya, he stated that because the president had bypassed due process and appointed his friends as commissioners, the very credibility of the outcome of the elections had been undermined, therefore conflict was inevitable in Kenya.

One of the outcomes of the conference was to develop realistic and concrete strategies for further engagement relating to elections violence in the region and a communiqué that will clearly spell out participant's commitment to promoting non-violence in elections in the region. The group exercise spoke to five key areas: dealing with political instigators, procedural rules for conducting elections, the role of media in provoking violence, trust building and women's issues in electoral processes.

Comments and reflections from participants

Following the first presentations, Key contributions from participants were the following:

- There was need for further clarification on the role of traditional leaders and operations of IPAC (Inter Party Advisory Committee), the Transition Bill
- Participants wanted to understand how the Women's Situation Room in Liberia has contributed to enhancing a healthy environment for women's participation in the electoral process, as the initiative has also been newly introduced in Sierra Leone.
- The role of Civil Society Organizations in minimizing the threat of post elections violence in all three countries.
- Specific to Ghana, the role played by investors (citing the oil discovery in Ghana), was also seen as very instrumental to the issue of a peaceful electoral process.
- The use of slogans and hate speech and how that affected the electoral process in Liberia.

Some of the striking questions, comments and suggestions posed in response to the presentation on Youth violence in the November 2012 elections were as follows:

There's a need to understand the gender dynamics of violence. A participant commented that youth is comprised of males and females, but then it is quite difficult to find a female youth engaging in violence, despite the same exuberance and zeal for their political parties.

The question was raised of why can youth did not collect the funds given to them by politicians and not perpetrate violence became a very important issue that needs to be seriously reflected on and further understood.

The question was raised of why the youth did not take advantage of the women's campaign for the 30% quota representation to integrate their 10% quota representation, as that would have been a very positive alignment

APPYA's role in bringing the regional divide and also dealing with the 'colour' problem that the politics have used to bring enmity among opponents was also an issue of concern for participants.

In response to the women's presentation, participants felt that the Guinean strategy was one worth emulating.

Other participants were concerned that even though women are demanding greater representation in electoral processes, they might not have the capacity required to effectively perform in these processes or the tenacity to survive the challenges that come with it.

Participants were also concerned about the perception men have of women and the perception women have about themselves. This is seen as a big obstacle to women's active participation in political processes, bearing in mind the existence of traditional stereotypes and structures of inequalities that have been built over time.

There was need for a greater advocacy to be mounted to oblige leaders to domesticate and implement international human rights instruments that promote and protect women's rights.

Other participants wanted to know whether there has been any programme that focuses on fund raising for female candidates since financial issues are part of the obstacles to increasing women's political representation.

For the live public debate concerns and comments from the public came through telephone conversation and text messaging. Some of the key comments from the public pointed at police inadequacies and their lack of capacity to handle the security of the elections, a perception that the police continued to deny. Participants were of the opinion that even the language used by

police to describe youth depicts hatred for youth, terminologies such as drug addicts, idlers and ex combatants.

The continued presence of heavily armed policemen in polling stations is an issue for concern as many women are scared away from the process by this.

There's also a lack of trust among the police and citizens which the police should strive to regain, otherwise their credibility would continually questioned by Sierra Leoneans.

The contrary view in favour of the police pointed out that issues relating to police inadequacies must be blamed on political interference by politicians denying the police the ability to perform their role effectively. Also some participants felt that citizens and CSOs should work with police to help cushion their inadequacies, rather than condemn them.

Concluding Comments and Recommendations

The conference was a big success. The interaction and discussion around youth violence in elections was sustained throughout the conference. The reception and the high level of participation from the public gave the discussions the added value it needed. However, despite these exciting discussions, there's a greater need to move the discussion to action by translating the recommendations into concrete realities. In light of this, the following recommendation is proposed:

- There's need for a sustained campaign on the importance of non-violence in the electoral process, especially in educating youth on their role in the process;
- There's need for greater networking and stronger collaboration around the region;
- There's need for a stronger CSO-led initiative around a credible, fair and transparent electoral process exhibited by all relevant stakeholders in the process so as to avoid unnecessary suspicions and lack of confidence in the systems;
- There's need for the establishment of an institutionalized redress mechanism that would address all electoral grievances in a just and fair manner;

- There's need for a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling problems during electioneering processes (special mention to the Sierra Leone case);
- There's need to identify early warning signs and fair representation in the recruitment of elections officers;
- There's need to consider the physically challenged and other marginalized groups of people;
- There's need for greater support for youth empowerment and the engagement of youth in constructive dialogue with state actors on how the youth issues can be integrated into mainstream national development agendas; and
- There's need for greater support to CSOs for a more organized and results-oriented empowerment programme and capacity building, especially the less privileged groups.

Follow up/ Next steps

Activity	Location	Status
Three Radio Discussion programmes on the outcomes of the conference	Freetown, Makeni, Kenema and Bo	In progress
Development of radio jingle in Krio and the local languages capturing the messages of non violence	Freetown	Completed
Airing of Jingles	Freetown, Makeni, Kenema and Bo	In progress
Development of a video documentary on the conference and the broader issue of elections and youth violence in the Mano river Union	Freetown	In progress