

“From Electoral Registers to Fundamental National Identity Schemes. The Sierra Leone Experience”

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1. Outline

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- Electoral Background
- Voter Registration (VR) and National Identity Registration (NIR) Systems
- Collaboration between Registration Systems
- Other National Registration Systems
- Proposed National Civil Registration System
- Operational Civil Registration Plan
- Challenges
- Conclusion

2. Electoral Background

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- Presidential election
- Ordinary Member of Parliament elections (112 constituencies)
- Paramount Chieftaincy Member of Parliament elections (12 districts)
- Local Council elections (19 councils across 394 wards)
- Tenure of Office is five years
- Tenure of Office is five years
- Tenure of Office is five years
- Tenure of Office is four years

2. Electoral Background (cont'd)

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- The Voter Register is used for the conduct of the above mentioned elections.
- Before 2012 elections (presidential, parliamentary and council), voter registration was non-biometric.
- Biometric voter registration was used for the first time in 2012, mainly to generate a credible and permanent register.
- The biometric voter registration captured 2.692 million eligible voters at district, constituency, ward and voting center levels.

3. Voter Registration (VR) and National Identity Registration (NIR) Systems

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- Current VR system is biometric, since 2012.
- The 2012 VR system captured 2.692 million voters, 18 years or older.
- The scope of the VR exercise covered the entire country.
- The bio-data captured by the VR is for voting purpose.
- Current NIR system is also biometric, since 2009.
- In 2012 about 300,000 registrants/residents had been captured by the NIR system, 6 years or older.
- The scope of the NIR exercise is limited to the office of the National Registration Secretariat (NRS) in the capital, Freetown.
- The bio-data captured by the NIR is for national identity purpose.

3. Voter Registration (VR) and National Identity Registration (NIR) Systems (cont'd)

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- Up to date, the VR has not been updated.
- Up to date, the NIR is about 440,800 registrants in total, with additions only.

4. Collaboration between Registration Systems

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- In April 2010, the first MoU was signed between the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the National Registration Secretariat (NRS).
- Main objective is to have an integrated registration database by June 2016.
- NEC is to have access to the integrated database for the purpose of updating the voter register.
- After the conduct of the 2012 elections, the initial MoU was revised in April 2013 to provide more specific details.
- NEC is to make available its almost 2.7 million voter registration data for integration into the NRS database.
- NRS is to use the integrated database to produce a uniform ID card for voting and national identity purposes

4. Collaboration between Registration Systems

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- NEC is to make available infrastructural facilities, biometric kits and technical assistance to the NRS for field registration operations.
- However, technical challenges, amongst others, have impeded the integration of the registration systems.
- Other challenges are financial, logistical and organizational capacity of the NRS
- Up to date, the integrated data centers have been set up in NEC and NRS.
- These challenges mainly include:
 - The quality of voter registration data captured by the NEC
 - Low quality photos
 - Low quality fingerprints
 - Spelling errors

5. Other National Registration Systems

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- Births and Deaths Department – generates an official register of births and deaths reported.
- National Social Security and Insurance Trust – registers employees for social security/pension purposes.
- Statistics Sierra Leone – compiles vital statistics by a census count and analyses of population and households
- Office of Administrator and Registrar General – registers civil matters including marriages and divorces

6. Proposed National Civil Registration System

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- In 2013, a government/cabinet paper endorsed the setting up of a National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) that will generate an integrated national civil register from which future voter registers can be extracted and updated.
- In 2015, a bill entitled “National Civil Registration Bill” was produced by the National Registration Secretariat (NRS).
- The bill has been discussed by stakeholders but is yet to be passed into an Act by Parliament.
- As a result the NCRA is yet to be established.

6. Proposed National Civil Registration System (cont'd)

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- The establishment of the NCRA will integrate the functions currently delivered by:
 - National Registration Secretariat (NRS)
 - Births and Deaths Department
 - Administrator and Registrar General
- NCRA will be tasked to maintain and update a civil register of all inhabitants (nationals and foreigners) in Sierra Leone.
- The civil registration will be continuous and will assign a unique national identity number to each registrant.

6. Proposed National Civil Registration System (cont'd)

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- The civil registration will produce a multi-purpose identity card that has an electronic chip, formatted to comply with international standards.
- In 2014, about 1.9 million pre-printed identity cards with electronic chips were procured (and still in stock) by the UNDP using donor funds.

7. Operational Civil Registration Plan

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- Legal process on-going to enact the “National Civil Registration Bill”.
- The National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) will be established and made operational.
- There is a shift away from having an integrated registration database using existing data from the voter register and the national identity register.
- Civil registration is to be done afresh comprehensively, and for the purpose of voter register, registration is to be done at the lowest local level, i.e. the voting center level.

8. Challenges

- **Aligning the civil registration timeline to the electoral calendar:**
 - Boundary delimitation – 2016
 - Voter registration – 1st half of 2017
 - Multi-tier elections – by February 2018
- **Significant budget gap for a comprehensive civil registration yet to be closed by the Government and Donors.**
- **Organizational capacity of the proposed National Civil Registration Authority:**
 - ✦ Centralized
 - ✦ Staffing
 - ✦ Logistics
- **Compliance with international ID standards. ECOWAS has issued its standards for ID card format after 1.9 million pre-formatted ID cards had already been bought in 2014.**
- **Stakeholder perception**

9. Conclusion

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- Implement a comprehensive civil registration from birth upwards.
- Prioritize a limited civil registration nationwide in 2016 that will cover registrants who are 16 years or older as voter registration extraction is to commence by January 2017.
- NEC to formulate a Plan B to update the 2012 Voter Register in the event the civil register is not ready by 2017.
- Whichever option goes through, implementing a credible national civil registration system is considered a sustainable strategy in the face of combating rising costs of conducting recurring elections.

THE END

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THANK YOU