

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL:

Documenting Women's Experiences in the 2018
Elections in Sierra Leone

A close-up, profile view of a woman looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a patterned headwrap with red circular motifs and a matching patterned top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a blue sky and some structures.

Trócaire

Ramatulay Bah
Photo: Stephen Douglas

On the cover: Fatmata Kanu Mayayah
in Lungi, Port Loko District
Photo: Florie De Jager Meezenbroek /
Trócaire





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Trócaire, the Overseas Development Agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland, is committed to the promotion of a just and peaceful world where people's dignity is ensured and rights are respected.

Trócaire has been supporting this mission in Sierra Leone since the 1990s, and it established an office in Freetown in 2008. Since that time, Trócaire has contributed to promoting women's political, economic, and social empowerment, all while strengthening local civil society. Through its local implementing partners, Trócaire supports women across political parties who are interested in becoming leaders. Success is not only measured in terms of the number of seats that women secure, but also in terms of the number of women who take the risk of vying for office.

Trócaire, with funding from Irish Aid and Ford Foundation, worked through its implementing partners to support women aspirants and candidates running for office in Western Area Rural, Kambia, Port Loko, and Bombali Districts during the 2018 elections. Within its operational districts, Trócaire's programming supported 27 of these successfully elected leaders, including 3 Members of Parliament, 2 Mayors, and 22 Local Councillors. Interestingly, the number of women elected for the various local councils in Trócaire's operational areas was slightly higher compared to other areas of the country, although across the nation only 22 out of the 133 elected councillors (16.5%) are women.

During the elections, there was a palpable lack of will among male politicians to address the low number of nominations of women candidates. The reasons for continued low levels of female representation are a combination of traditional beliefs and practices, societal pressures, and systemic barriers in the political and legal systems. While there are some provisions in Sierra Leone's laws and international commitments that promote equality and non-discrimination, women found it difficult finding acceptance as candidates.

The purpose of this document is to capture the lived experiences of women aspirants, candidates, and elected leaders to generate greater understanding of the types of challenges they faced during the 2018 electioneering process. Based on these experiences, Trócaire and its partners hope to influence changes in the electoral system so that it responds more effectively to women's needs.

On behalf of Trócaire, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the women candidates, elected officials, and their families, all of whom contributed to the development of this publication. Their openness, honesty, and bravery are laudable, and we hope these qualities will inspire even more women to run for office in the future.

Sincerely,

Michael Solis
Country Director
Trócaire Sierra Leone

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Glossary

APC	All People's Congress
ABC-D	Association for the well Being of Rural Communities and Development
CGG	Campaign for Good Governance
CDHR	Centre for Democracy and Human Rights
CDP	Citizens Democratic Party
C4C	Coalition for Change Party
CARL	Community Action to Restore Lives
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU EOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IMC	Independent Media Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NEC	National Electoral Commission
NGC	National Grand Coalition
NMJD	Network Movement for Justice and Development
PCMP	Paramount Chief Members of Parliament
PPRC	Political Parties Registration Commission
RUF	Revolutionary United Front Party
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
WARD	Western Area Rural District
WOFHRAD	Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women's equal representation and participation in politics and public life is not simply desirable for fully-functioning democratic systems; it is fundamental. Democracy cannot exist if half of the population is not wholly and equally engaged in decision-making.

General elections were held in Sierra Leone on the 7th March 2018 to elect the President, Parliament, and local councils. Run-off elections were held on the 31st of March 2018, with the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) winning the elections with 51.8 percent of the total valid vote cast across Sierra Leone. The incumbent All People's Congress (APC) received 48.2 percent of votes.

Trócaire, through its implementing partners, supported women aspirants and candidates in Western Area Rural, Kambia, Port Loko, and Bombali Districts to run for political office, with the goal of securing more elected positions for women. Women candidates and leaders were offered training and were mentored on election

laws, campaigning, public speaking skills, and the development of political platforms.

Nationwide, 18 women were elected as Members of Parliament (12.3 percent of the total), 2 women were elected as Mayors (10 percent) and 1 as District Council Chair (7 percent), while 73 women were elected out of 489 local councillors (15 percent) across Sierra Leone. Within its operational districts, Trócaire's programming supported 24 of these successfully elected leaders.

Following the campaign period and the elections, Trócaire and its implementing partners assessed the experiences of women aspirants, candidates, and elected leaders to understand the types of challenges they faced during the 2018 electioneering process. Case studies were developed that illustrate some of the challenges and successes these women faced. One of the major challenges faced by women aspirants and candidates was the monetisation of politics, which calls for candidates to spend

extraordinary amounts of money to buy votes to be elected. Financial constraints limited the involvement of women candidates including high nomination fees, payments to local organisations and traditional leaders, and logistical costs of transportation and promotional items.

Societal pressures on women candidates were a significant challenge and included gender-based harassment, intimidation, and discrimination despite ongoing discussions about quotas and encouraging women to participate. Politics in Sierra Leone remain largely a male-dominated domain.

Partly because of the traditional role of women in Sierra Leone, some women candidates lack communication skills, education, exposure, access to information, and political capital to be able to wage a competitive bid for elected office.

There is a consistent and persistent call for "more women – better politics" in Sierra Leone. Women candidates, constituencies, and political parties have

a long road ahead when it comes to advancing women in politics. Political development can be realised with more attention given to female candidates, including enhanced training, leadership curriculum geared to women in tertiary institutions, political party inclusion in decision-making positions, gender-sensitive security responses from police and electoral management bodies and, of course, more access to campaign funding.

The experiences of 8 women candidates and 56 female aspirants and candidates have been gathered to generate this document, which contains learnings on women's experiences in the 2018 elections.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive elections, where all those eligible have the opportunity to vote and/or be voted for, are central to democracy. Ensuring that women and men can and do participate without unfair barriers is a core component of an inclusive election and a strong democracy.

When women participate in elections – as candidates, voters, electoral administrators, or party supporters – they can express their own needs and interests. Political processes are more inclusive when women can actively participate, and democracy is strengthened. Further, since women are a minority in Sierra Leonean politics, their decisions can better reflect the views and concerns of a vast portion of a traditionally underrepresented electorate.

The main goal of this document is to formally capture the experiences of women candidates, aspirants, and elected leaders who participated in the 2018 electioneering process. In addition to identifying and documenting the challenges women faced, this report recommends suggested actions to help alleviate

some of the challenges faced by women in politics in Sierra Leone.

2018 General Elections

General elections in Sierra Leone were held on the 7th of March 2018 for President, Parliament and local councils. Sixteen presidential candidates ran, but none of them won the 55 percent of valid votes required for a first-round victory. Therefore, a run-off election was held on the 31st of March 2018 between the two leading candidates from the two largest and oldest parties: Samura Kamara of the incumbent All People's Congress (APC) and Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). After a runoff election, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won with 51.8 percent of the vote.

The elections resulted in the second democratic transition of executive power in Sierra Leone's 57 years of independence. Power has alternated between SLPP and APC (as well as periods of military rule) since independence in 1961: SLPP was in power from 1996 to 2007, and APC was in power from 2007 to

2018.

A total of 132 MPs were also elected on the 7th of March from among 795 candidates, with 755 candidates fielded by 17 parties and 40 independent candidates. Also elected were 7 city council mayors, 15 district council chairpersons, and 489 local councillors.

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) had a register of 3,178,663 voters, which represented 89.6 percent of the adult population as estimated from the 2015 census data. Of the registered voters, women made up 52 percent of the eligible voters registered in 2017.

Women and Elections in Sierra Leone

As of May 2018, Sierra Leone was ranked 144 out of 192 in the world for the lowest percentages of women in national parliament.

National level

The number of female parliamentary candidates in the 2018 elections was 100 out of 795 (12.6 percent), an increase from 65 female parliamentary candidates

out of 602 (11 percent) in the 2012 elections. While the total number of elected female MPs slightly increased to 18, taking into account the increase in the overall size of the parliament, this election marked no progress in the percentage of female MPs at 12.3 percent.

Local level

There were 73 women elected out of the 489 local councillors (15 percent). There was a palpable lack of will among male politicians to address the reasons for low female nominations.

Presidential election

None of the major parties had a woman as a presidential candidate or running mate. There were two female presidential candidates; however, they only gained 0.5 percent and 0.2 percent of votes respectively in the first round of voting. There were four female running mates in a field of 16.

Chieftdom level

Two of the 14 Paramount Chief Members of Parliament (PCMP) are female chiefs. Women are excluded from the role of chief in the North of the country. Despite this, the proportion of female PCMPs (at 14 percent) is slightly higher than the number of MPs elected using the universal franchise. Paramount Chiefs are

elected by a small group of delegates who vote for members of “royal” families.

Previous elections

In 2012, women made up only 13 percent (16 members) of the outgoing 2007-2012 Parliament. The number fell to 15 following the 2012 parliamentary elections.

In the 2012 general elections, for the directly elected 112 seats of the House of the Representatives, 602 candidates were nominated, 32 of which were independent, many of whom were not awarded a party symbol either by APC or SLPP. Only two parties, APC and SLPP, nominated parliamentary candidates in each constituency. For the local council elections, 1,624 candidates competed for the 475 councillor seats including 6 mayoral and 13 district council chairperson seats.

In 2012, 65 women were nominated for parliamentary elections, which represented 11 percent of candidates, identical to the figure in 2007. APC fielded 11 percent of female candidates, SLPP nominated 8 percent and percentages for the other parties ranged from a high of 34 percent for the Citizens Democratic Party (CDP) to 1.8 percent for the Revolutionary United

Front Party (RUFPP). Women comprised 11 percent of independent candidates. For local elections, 342 women were nominated for local council in Sierra Leone, representing 21 % of candidates. There was no female candidate for the office of President, while four of the nine running mates for vice-president were female.

All attempts to introduce a quota system to increase the number of female MPs in 2012 and 2018 elections have, so far, been rejected by parliamentarians, despite widespread calls from civil society organisations.

According to the European Union Observer Mission Report (EU EOM) of June 2018, women were clearly disadvantaged in the 2018 elections. There are some provisions in Sierra Leone’s laws and international commitments have been made towards the equality of women. However, in practice women found it difficult to be accepted as candidates at all elected levels, and the number of female candidates in these elections remained low. The causes for the unequal representation of women are a combination of cultural and societal pressures, systemic barriers in the political and legal structure, and reasons specific to this election, such as the banning of dual citizens,

which disproportionately affected female candidates. According to the Carter Center Report on the 2012 elections, the principal barriers to female participation in the elections were an absence of political will to promote women, long-standing societal attitudes, and the lack of financial resources on the part of female aspirants. Failure to enact a gender quota law revealed that incumbent politicians were unwilling to implement affirmative action.

Methodology

The data collection methods employed for this report included desk review, focus group discussions, and interviews. All findings (including qualitatively analysed observations from the focus group discussions and formal individual case studies) were compiled to capture the experiences of the women during the 2018 electioneering process.

The project began with a desk review of election results, electoral information, case studies, election monitoring reports, and research. Both nationally and internationally published literature were reviewed.

A focus group discussion was held in early June 2018 with Trócaire and a subset of its implementing partners in Makeni. During this session,

a number of women aspirants and candidates were identified to provide more detailed interviews.

Focus group discussions with 56 women aspirants and candidates were held over June and early July 2018 in each of Trócaire's four operational districts: Western Area Rural District (WARD), Kambia, Port Loko, and Bombali. This helped generate qualitative information regarding the women's experiences in the 2018 electioneering process.

Experiences were identified at the aspirant, candidate, and elected leader levels. Ten female politicians from various political parties agreed to meet and respond to questions relating to pre, during, and post-election campaign trail experiences. The candidates were selected for individual interviews based on experiences, political party, election outcomes, location, and representative backgrounds. Through key informant interviews, these experiences were developed into eight profiled case studies.

Key Informant Interviews – demographic information

ASPIRANTS AND CANDIDATES	MARRIED	AGES	CHILDREN	EDUCATION ¹
Rebecca N. Koroma	Yes	46-55	2	College
Fatamata Koroma	Yes	36-45	4	College
Alimatu Humma Kamara	Yes	36-45	4	College
Fatamata Alpha Kamara	Yes	36-45	3	JSS 3
Ramatulai Bah	Yes	26-35	2	College
Fatama Bangura	Yes	26-35	3	High School
Elizabeth John Sesay	Yes	18-25	1	High School
Matilda Kadiatu Kamara	Yes	36-45	1	College
Onita Mariatu Koroma	Yes	36-45	2	College

1. Junior Secondary School Class 3 (JSS 3).

Focus Group Discussions

Women aspirants, candidates and Trócaire partners

Districts/ Trócaire Partners	Number of People
Bombali	14
Kambia	14
Port Loko	10
Western Area Rural	18
Trócaire Partners	12



Operational districts

Western Rural Area, Bombali, Port Loko, Kambia

Based on the focus group discussions, individual interviews

TRÓCAIRE'S PARTNERS

Trócaire, through its implementing partners, supported women aspirants and candidates to run for political office, with the goal of securing elected positions for women in the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone.

Association for the well Being of Rural Communities and Development (ABC-D) Kambia and Port Loko

ABC-D specialises in the protection of human rights, the promotion of grassroots participation in decision making, women's empowerment, and girls' access to education. ABC-D has experience in conflict resolution, guidance, counselling, and youth reintegration in Kambia and Port Loko districts, as well as the mobilisation and organisation of women's groups. ABC-D was involved in the 2007 and 2012 voter education programmes in the north as a member of the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP), Sierra Leone Chapter.

Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) National

CGG works to advocate for good governance in

Sierra Leone. CGG was established in 1996 by leaders of pro-democracy movements to protest against military rule with a view to increasing citizen participation in governance to build a more informed civil populace and democratic state. CGG engages in research and publication; evidence-based advocacy and campaigns; public policy input and analysis; capacity building and mentoring of women leaders; national and international networking and coalition building; and monitoring government institutions, agencies, and processes.

Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR) Bombali, Port Loko, Kambia

CDHR is recognised for enhancing human rights with a focus on women's leadership and gender-based violence across Northern Province in Sierra Leone. CDHR has been active in Northern Sierra Leone since 2002 and has carried out election observation since 2002 across five districts.

Community Action to Restore Lives (CARL) Port Loko

CARL Facilitates Community development initiatives, a Trócaire partner since January 2016, aims to facilitate community development initiatives by women's empowerment, women's leadership, livelihoods support and education programmes, with a focus on youth and families of vulnerable or disadvantaged children. CARL has expertise in gender training and sensitisation and monitoring of cases of violence against women and girls, including the facilitation of legal protection for survivors. CARL also operates leadership schools for women to strengthen their agency and promote their leadership at multiple levels.

Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) Bombali

Established in 1988 in eastern Sierra Leone, NMJD is a national human rights-oriented civil society development and advocacy organisation. NMJD engages government on policy reform matters and works with grassroots communities in Sierra Leone. NMJD focuses

on empowering people, as well as strengthening its capacity to build a free, just, and democratic Sierra Leone where there is respect for human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all. Some of NMJD's critical thematic areas include: women's political and economic empowerment, youth livelihoods and skill development, accountable and responsible natural resource governance, strengthening accountability for health and education services delivery, and building and strengthening civil society networks/ coalitions for public interest activism. NMJD operates in 6 of the 16 administrative districts in Sierra Leone.

Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (WOFHRAD) Bombali

WOFHRAD is a non-governmental and non-profit making organisation founded in 2006 by a group of young women in Makeni, the provincial headquarter town of the northern region in Sierra Leone. The main focus of WOFHRAD is to promote and protect women's human rights, girls' education, women's advancement, women and youth participation in politics, and democratic principles and good governance.

Support Provided by Trócaire Partners to Women Candidates

Trócaire funded local implementing partners to strengthen and increase the capacity of women candidates/leaders to assume appointed and elected positions.

Women aspirants and candidates received support from Trócaire's implementing partners prior to the elections held on the 7th March 2018. The support to candidates formed part of a larger programme that supports poor and vulnerable women and women leaders to participate in formal or informal decision-making structures and to take action at community, district, and national level to advance the rights and needs of women and girls.

Training sessions

The local implementing partners offered between 1 to 3 training sessions for candidates.

All of the 56 women candidates consulted in the study said they appreciated the training and found the content generally useful in their campaigns. The training sessions were held between January and March 2018.

"The training was good and timely and it was good to be with other candidates going through what I was

going through," said one participant in the focus group with candidates in Makeni.

Public speaking and confidence building were the two areas that women candidates mentioned as important during the training sessions.

More than half the women candidates consulted mentioned "how to dress" and "how to behave on the campaign trail" as very useful information they received during the trainings.

All of the candidates spoke about the importance of networking and "friendship building" during the training sessions.

Phone calls

Some implementing partners gave ongoing support through phone calls to candidates to discuss any challenges they were facing, encourage them, and offer advice.

Money

All of the implementing partners paid candidates to attend training sessions and meetings. This "transport" or "sitting allowance" helped the candidates support their campaigns. All the candidates in every focus group discussion noted their need for financial

support. In Makeni, one candidate said, "There never seems to be enough money and everyone expects us to pay for things. But, we don't have money."

One of the implementing partners, CARL, gave women aspirants they supported from across multiple political parties cash to help run their campaigns. At a meeting of these local level candidates, Le. 500,000 was distributed to approximately 10 women candidates.

Promotional materials

The implementing partners, through Trócaire funding, provided limited supplies of t-shirts to some candidates. The t-shirts supported the idea of "voting for women" but were not customised to individual candidates. Some candidates used the t-shirts to print their own photos on the fronts and used the slogan, "More women in politics, on the back of the shirts.

Within its operational districts, Trócaire's programming supported 24 of the successfully elected leaders.

Behavioural and attitudinal change

The partners worked not only with women, but also with other stakeholders, including traditional and religious leaders and political parties, to create a more inclusive and equitable enabling environment for women's participation. Partners utilised radio as a means to spread positive messaging around women's participation and non-violence during the elections. One partner, ABC-D, carried out a series of sessions with the family members of women candidates to support their understanding of gender concepts and women's empowerment, and to develop strategies for supporting the candidates throughout the campaign process. This included exploring what types of things male family members could do to support the women candidates, such as assuming greater responsibility for domestic tasks in the home and supporting women's freedom of movement.

CHALLENGES

Faced by women candidates during 2018 electioneering process

Acknowledging the problems is one of the first steps towards addressing the imbalances, discriminatory issues, barriers, and difficulties faced by women candidates. All of the political parties recognise the social, economic, and political challenges that women aspirants and candidates faced prior to, during, and after the 2018 elections.

Four of the political parties issued manifestos prior to the elections that outlined challenges and developmental goals/policies of the parties. Two of the party manifestos specifically mentioned the challenges faced by women in Sierra Leone.

From the National Grand Coalition (NGC) campaign manifesto

Achievement of the sought after gender equity remains a major challenge in Sierra Leone. The forward movement of women in the country is being held back by not only deep-seated discrimination from traditional customs and laws, but also by modern economic and social barriers as well as by violence which

must be overcome in order to achieve gender equality.

From the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) campaign manifesto

Women face major challenges in their communities, in accessing justice, social, and economic opportunities and seeking overall advancement. Specifically, the challenges of women include (a) gender-based violence, (b) barriers to women's economic empowerment, especially in terms of access to markets, training, finance, infrastructure, technology, education, counselling, and entrepreneurship development, (c) exploitative or hazardous forms of the livelihood of poor, unskilled women and girls, especially commercial sex workers, (d) inadequate sensitisation and education on gender and development issues, and (e) low political participation as a result of the socio-cultural, educational, legal, and policy environment and economic factors.

Money

Elections are costly affairs for aspiring politicians, both men and women. Money is key to understanding how candidates campaign for public office. It influences the behaviour of voters who ultimately decide whether politicians win or stay in office. The ability to spend the most money is, by and large, a critical factor in successfully winning a seat in elected office.

If the cost of politics rises to unaffordable levels, the danger is that politics becomes the domain of the elite and wealthy, and that the motivation and incentives of elected councillors or MPs move from serving the public to recovering their own investment. The level of 'monetisation of politics' has worsened to the extent that well-qualified prospective candidates are sometimes alienated on the basis of cost.

The lack of campaign finances and money plague women candidates far more than their male counterparts. According to the EU Observer

Mission to Sierra Leone report of 2018, "The high nomination fees, combined with unequal financial positions among parties were a barrier to individual candidates, particularly female aspirants. High, non-refundable, nomination fees act as a deterrent to the economically disadvantaged, which includes most women."

All of the women candidates interviewed complained about not having enough money to effectively run their campaigns. When queried as to what they needed money for, candidates said they needed to pay the local chiefs, town chief, youth chair, and women's chair in order to access the communities to campaign. Interest groups mentioned during candidate focus groups included elders or seniors, youth groups, and chairpersons from various organisations (market women, bike riders, etc.). To call a community meeting, a candidate must give money to the local chiefs, traditional authorities, or specific group leaders such as youth or women's wings of political parties who then call the community to a meeting. This was referred to as "rent a crowd" in one of the focus group discussions.

During the pre-election stage, the focus is on gaining popularity in the community or contesting

area. This is usually done through donations to organisations, party or candidate supporters, traditional leaders, community development organisations, and youth associations. In some instances, money must be given to party officials for recognition and the party symbol.

Candidates admitted having to pay for votes, whether this is in the form of "respect" or "borra" or through the provision of "transport", rice, or food. One candidate mentioned giving money to community people as she went door-to-door as a sign of respect and to pay for their time.

All of the women said money is expected from them by everyone. There seems to be no such thing as a political volunteer – anyone and everyone involved in a campaign needs to be paid in either cash, food, or transport.

For funders/NGOs, a fine line exists between supporting women candidates and "interfering" in the democratic election process. Funders are cautioned against creating an unfair advantage to specific candidates and campaigns, even in the face of an existing disadvantageous political environment.

Managing Expectations

All of the candidates consulted talked about voter expectations before, during, and after the elections. One candidate said, "The problem is, everybody thinks because I'm running for political office that I must have money. And, if I supposedly have money then I must share it... or give it out in order to get votes."

Another candidate spoke about how people expected her to give to schools, students, churches, and community groups through "envelopes." "It's just expected these days that I have to give to everyone. I try to manage but I don't have the money... or access to money... they think I do."

The expectations of community groups and members continued to focus on money, food, or favours from candidates and elected officials.

All but one of the candidates interviewed received emotional and moral support from close family members. When asked why this support was offered, candidates noted how family members talked about the personal opportunities that may arise if a candidate wins or is recognised by a strong political party.

Increasingly, politics is seen as a means to self-

aggrandisement or financial gain despite the initial costs or “investments.” Candidates and supporters continue to perceive politics as a way to self-promotion and riches.

Harassment, intimidation, violence

The European Observer Mission, sent to Sierra Leone to observe the 2018 elections, defines violence against women in elections as any random or conspiratorial act to discourage, suppress, or prevent women from exercising their electoral rights as voters, candidates, party supporters, election workers, journalists, or public officials.

EU EOM observers noted that women were disproportionately verbally, and in some cases, physically attacked during the 2018 electioneering process, often with reference being made to their gender. Men in nearly all parties often held a patronising attitude towards women as a group, stating “they are not ready” and using the poor educational system and economic disadvantages as a justification for their prejudice.

All of the candidates interviewed spoke about intimidation and discrimination during the campaign. Some of this

intimidation had to do with “Party” and some was due specifically to being women candidates. Most of the women candidates were harassed through abusive language and gender-based, verbal attacks. A focus group participant described the intimidation as, “... demeaning and sometimes frightening. When I went to a market area some people would shout ‘not in this area’ and I wouldn’t be able to shop.”

Some women spoke about trying to campaign and other parties overwhelming their activities or “not allowing” them to speak. This occurred in traditional strongholds of the APC where market women or men at a car park would not allow SLPP campaigning. Heckling and rude behaviours occurred when an SLPP candidate wanted to talk or “stump” to a small crowd of people.

Four of the women candidates referred to specific instances of violence including verbal and physical threats, spreading negative rumours, and even the spreading feces on doorways. According to one of the candidates: “I knew it was our (party’s) scheduled day to campaign but I was afraid to come out because another party was holding a ‘campaign meeting’ in my community. I knew they would bother me if I came out.”

All candidates, at various times during the campaign period, referred to “feeling afraid” or “nervous” about their campaign activities. All candidates feared for their safety at different times during the campaign.

Logistics/Transportation

All of the candidates used “door-to-door” visits as a way of popularising their campaigns. This door-to-door campaigning was primarily done in their communities but extended, on occasion, to neighbouring villages and outlying areas.

All the women candidates used bikes, walked, and occasionally had use of a vehicle belonging to an MP candidate or husband. The challenge of transportation is assumed to affect women more so than men, as traditionally women have less access to vehicles than men.

All of the candidates referred to having difficulty accessing smaller villages and getting out beyond their own communities to campaign. Most of the candidates noted the costs involved in renting motorbikes and the cost of fuel for their own transportation.

Home management and childcare

All of the candidates consulted in this study had children and households to run. Balancing a campaign with household responsibilities was a challenge. In some cases, extended family took care of children and helped in the home. In other cases, the children accompanied the candidates on the campaign trail. "I had no choice sometimes. My husband was at work and I took my children with me," said one candidate. Another candidate talked about how she had to adjust her family's schedule to do a radio discussion programme. Once she was at the radio station until 10:00 p.m. while her son was waiting for her to return home.

Nine out of the ten interviewed candidates' husbands were supportive and sometimes campaigned with their wives. Most often mentioned, however, was the support the women candidates received from their husbands at home. "My husband took a more active role in the house while I was campaigning," said one candidate. Three of the candidate's husbands were reluctant, at first, but very quickly got on board with their wives' campaigns.

One of the husbands arranged a vehicle for his

politician wife to move to different communities in her constituency. Most of the husbands provided some form of financial assistance and assumed greater responsibilities within the home. "The moral support with the money from my husband helped me keep going during the campaign. He couldn't openly support me because of his job but he was there and would do what he could," said a candidate in Makeni.

Political party support or lack thereof

Each of the candidates repeatedly mentioned how little their political party supported their campaigns, financially or otherwise. Some of the parties provided minimal financial support to the candidates. APC, SLPP, UP, and NGC provided up to Le. 10 million (approximately 1,136 €), some promotional materials featuring the party leader, and some rice to distribute.

Following the nomination process and perhaps an initial meeting, most candidates were left to fend for themselves. Only one candidate saw her party's manifesto during the campaign. None of the women interviewed were involved in the development of the party manifestos.

Ninety percent of the women candidates

interviewed felt alone and apart from their political parties during and after the campaigns. "My party did nothing for me," said a candidate in Makeni. "After my nomination in Freetown, no one called, even to inform me about the results."

Community support or lack thereof

While most candidates said their communities were generally supportive, they still faced difficulties. All of the 56 women candidates talked about challenges in their neighbourhoods and communities. Much of the concern had to do with "expectations" from people. But, there was significant concern about the public perception of politicians. Many candidates felt stigmatised by the negative perception that all politicians are corrupt, lying, fake, and insincere.

Candidates during the focus group discussions spoke about the self-centeredness of neighbours and communities. One candidate from Makeni said, "My community was happy I was running because then they would benefit from contracts or projects." There was a feeling among candidates that even though they gave people money, talked to them, visited with them, and informed them about the elections and

party manifestos, many people would vote along historic party or ethnic lines regardless.

Promotional materials

Implementing partners and international funders provided some generic “vote for women” campaign materials including posters, t-shirts, hats, etc. But, all of the candidates complained about the lack of money to develop personalised campaign materials. The candidates spoke about the importance of promoting themselves although they all admitted they thought they did benefit from the generic messaging.

ELIZABETH JOHN SESAY

BOMBALI



Elizabeth John Sesay is a 25-year-old university student who wants to address issues facing young women such as lack of education, basic services and teenage pregnancy. She faced significant challenges during her campaign including intimidation and harassment and failed to get a seat.

Elizabeth is a vibrant, confident young woman. She lives close to her family home and mother in Makeni in the shadow of the Makeni rock. She is a determined, vocal advocate and is well-known in her community.

The 2018 elections were her third attempt at entering political office at the Council level. She ran in the 2012 general elections, a by-election in 2017, and again in 2018, all under the United

Ran for: Council
Party: United Democratic Party (UDM)
Ward: 37
Constituency: 121
Town/Village: Makeni
District: Bombali
Result: Not Elected

Democratic Movement (UDM) party.

"There are no girls from my community who have gone on to university."

Elizabeth is a college student and she ran for office primarily because she wanted to improve education for girls. She is motivated by her personal experiences. She married young into an arranged marriage, had a child and dropped out of school.

She noted, "There are no girls from my community who have gone on to university." She wanted to address issues around teen pregnancy and attitudes among young people. Elizabeth also noted the lack of quality healthcare, potable water and feeder roads

in her neighbourhood as challenges that she wanted to address as a Councillor.

"My mother had to leave Makeni due to threats"

Elizabeth faced intimidation from "very strong party supporters in my locality." She says she was "threatened by some people for belonging to another party. My landlord also gave me a notice to leave his property I was renting. People called me all sorts of names and I had to hide for several weeks. My mother had to leave Makeni due to threats and harassment. I could not even hold rallies due to the fear of intimidation."

She added, "I came across a lot of criticism for my gender and my age. Many despised me and thought I didn't have what it takes to represent them." On the other hand, she added, "Some community members were very supportive."

Preparing for the election

As a candidate, Elizabeth attended training sessions from Trócaire partner WOFHRAD and the 50/50 group, ActionAid and others. She said the public speaking and code of conduct training

were very helpful to her campaign as, "I learned how to get my message across, how to interact with people while campaigning, lobbying skills and how to engage/talk to particular audiences."

Campaign finances was a challenge. While the UDM party paid her nomination fees and gave her a small amount for food they did not provide any other financial support. Elizabeth said, "I got some money from friends, my boyfriend and an APC former flag-bearer candidate... all together maybe Le. 10 million (approx. € 1,136)." She said she could have used more money to campaign. "Because I'm a young person, the youth groups looked to me for support and I needed money to offer them."

Staying positive despite losing the election

Elizabeth lost the election in her Ward. Following the announcement of results after the general election, she said, "The political landscape after the elections was a bit tense as APC

lost. But, my party leaders declared for APC (during the runoff) and they were paid money. We, the candidates, did not receive any of that money."

Despite this setback, Elizabeth is staying positive and planning for her future. She said, "Next elections I will go in as an independent candidate. I will campaign hard for attitudinal change because corruption is high and accepted as norm in our society."

She said, "I admire the Mayor of Makeni (Sunkari Kamara) and Christiana Thorpe because they made a change in their communities and the country. I want to make changes too."

"I could not even hold rallies due to the fear of intimidation."

MATILDA KADIATU KAMARA

BOMBALI



Matilda Kadiatu Kamara is a single mother of one who suffers from polio and uses a wheelchair to get around. She runs a school for underprivileged students, and ran for election to support her polio community. She faced intimidation in her campaign and was unsuccessful in getting elected.

Matilda is a driven, strong, energetic, and passionate advocate who lives in small community of people with disabilities, Magbenteh, on the outskirts of Makeni.

The 2018 election was her first foray into politics. She ran for a seat in Parliament under the Unity Party (UP) umbrella, the only party who fielded a woman candidate for President.

Ran for: Member of Parliament (MP)
Party: Unity Party (UP)
Ward: 106
Constituency: 032
Town/Village: Makarie, Magbenteh
District: Bombali
Result: Not Elected

The UP leadership was very supportive of Matilda and would call regularly for updates and to offer encouragement. The leader of the UP repaired a vehicle for Matilda to use during the campaign and periodically would send money as campaign support.

Supporting her polio community

She noted, "I ran for political office to bring opportunities to help and support my polio community." She explained to voters and to her party that "being disabled is no barrier to my ability to deliver as MP." In her campaign she says "above all, I was honest and didn't make wild promises."

Matilda runs a school in her community and is passionate about education. She is a student of Ernest Bai Koroma University and is studying education and teaching. She said, "I started a school because I want to help the less privileged children. And, I went into politics to help others in my community especially around healthcare and basic living standards."

Matilda's community is a close-knit group of people who generally supported her bid for Parliament. "My close associates and friends were very supportive. My pastor [and church members] also was supportive of my bid and they encouraged me. They even helped me to campaign. My community was so happy and stood behind me. I got plenty of votes in my community. I came third in the votes."

"I suffered a lot of taunting from neighbours."

While generally supportive, Matilda also faced challenges in her community. She said, "Some men had issues with me because they felt I would become pompous and egotistic after I got

elected as a woman.”

She also noted how her disability influenced her campaign. “I suffered a lot of taunting from neighbours. People had a lot of questions and some were rude. It had a negative impact and demoralising effect on my self-esteem. I started thinking a lot about my disability. I felt extremely vulnerable and stigmatised and saw my disability as a very serious barrier to my future.”

Matilda noted how many places were inaccessible to her in a wheelchair. “One radio station came to meet me because I couldn’t get to them,” she said.

Campaigning with vigour

Matilda quickly bounced back and continued to campaign with vigour. She said she valued the training sessions from Trócaire through their local partner NMJD and the 50/50 group. She specifically benefited from confidence-building exercises, public speaking role-plays, advice on how to dress, and discussions around the electoral code of conduct.

She said, “I want to be trained on how to change people’s perceptions and behaviour towards

people with disabilities... especially those vying for political office. I think we need to develop campaign messages of tolerance.”

“I faced a lot of stigmatisation from another party. At some point, I was afraid and I had to sit in the back of the car. Those supporters attacked me for putting Unity Party posters on my car. They insulted me and asked me to step down because they felt only one party should dominate in this area. Another party also asked me to do the same thing. I refused to be intimidated.”

Matilda also said her campaign posters and flyers, on the walls of her community and in neighbouring areas, were torn and defaced.

Remaining steadfast

Matilda lost the election to the APC candidate but is not discouraged. She said she was bolstered by her party leader, Femi Cole, who called immediately after election results were announced. Matilda said, “The political climate after the election was peaceful... We still interact with other candidates. I also received a lot of encouragement from community people to remain steadfast in my political career.”

“I ran for political office to bring opportunities to help and support my polio community.”

ONITA MARIATU KOROMA

PORT LOKO



Onita Mariatu Koroma is a nurse who campaigned on healthcare, water and corruption. She was successfully elected to her Council. She has faced challenges within her own party and with gender discrimination since becoming elected.

Onita is an articulate, strategic, and energetic woman who now represents her Ward, under the APC, on the newly created Port Loko City Council.

She is a nurse and the 2018 election was her first experience as a candidate although not her first experience with politics. Her mother, who lives in an

Ran for: Council
(new area – Port Loko
City Council)
Party: All People's
Congress (APC)
Ward: 233
Constituency: 075
Town/Village: Maforki
District: Port Loko
Result: Elected

adjoining compound just outside Port Loko, was the area's Councillor and MP from 2004 to 2008.

For Onita, health and quality healthcare was a central reason for her getting into politics and core to her campaign. "I also campaigned for water, against corruption, and the need for a change," she added. "My campaign message was also centred around integrity – an inherent trait among women. Women are less corrupt compared to men."

Growing in confidence

Onita attended three training sessions from Trócaire and its local partner Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), World Vision, and the 50/50 Group. She said she benefitted from the sessions on public speaking and campaign messaging and specifically enjoyed the camaraderie with the other women candidates.

She felt more training on fundraising and financial management would be helpful to candidates. She added, "My role model is Nelson Mandela... because he fought to bring equality and freedom to his people. I also admire China's Mao for ensuring equality."

As her mother is a former politician, Onita said, "She was worried about highly placed, corrupt people in politics... in particular, in our party. I had to convince her about my capability to stand up against the party if things are not right. I know people get punished for that but I have a job to go back to as a nurse, if things get too difficult."

"My mother advised me to run as an independent

"Women are less corrupt compared to men."

candidate," Onita said. "But, I couldn't do that because in Port Loko, the APC are the dominant party and I would be wasting my time if I chose to go in as an independent candidate."

Financing the campaign

Onita said the candidates for APC received Le. 3 million (€ 341) and several bags of rice to distribute from the party. She said her partner also provided money for her campaign. She also borrowed money from an "osusu" group at her workplace. She estimates she spent, with her own contributions from her salary as a nurse, approximately Le. 20 million (€ 2,273).

Further, Onita expressed a common concern among candidates. "People always come around asking for money. They expect you to give them money during the campaign and after the campaign. They still have no idea that we councillors have no money."

She told voters, "I don't have to give them money and they should move away

from that mentality. I told them I would go out to advocate for development funding. I told them it's dangerous to make too many unnecessary demands from politicians because when they go back they would have to make up for the loss."

Challenges within her party

Party politics took a small toll on Onita. She described how her party initially intimidated her. She said, "Assessment teams from the party... a certain group of people came and requested money from me in return for the party symbol. My refusal provoked some negative reactions from them."

She added, "It's so discouraging for us first-time politicians. Many people in the party don't want to listen to your ideas. It's really stressful." She also noted the lack of emotional or moral support from the party. She said no one called her after the election to congratulate, and she would have appreciated a call from

the party's leadership.

Joining the City Council

After successfully navigating her Council election, Onita joined the City Council. At the first meeting of the newly elected Council, Onita expressed an interest to become the Deputy Chair. According to Onita, "They didn't conduct the business of getting a deputy fairly." Onita felt intimidated by the male members of Council and was pressured from within the Council and from the District Chair.

She said, "They knew I am a no-nonsense person and this affected me. They campaigned against me and even asked the female councillors to vote against me." She noted, "We were used as pawns by our male counterparts and the women became divided." In the end, Onita was not selected to be the Deputy Chair but retains her seat on the Council.



ISATA SESAY

KAMBIA



Isata Sesay is a beloved teacher, mother of three, wife, and a popular, successful businesswoman in her community. She was successfully elected to her Council, after receiving financial support and technical training.

Isata is a determined, mature, and hard-working woman who entered politics under a new party, the National Grand Coalition (NGC). She is a first-time politician and now represents her constituency on the Kambia local Council.

Isata said, "Women need to be in front. I want to be part of governance and give back to society. I ran because I feel women should participate fully in politics and decision-making." She added, "Things [in

Ran for: Council
Party: National Grand Coalition (NGC)
Ward: 203
Constituency: 060
Town/Village: Thuiray, Magbema
District: Kambia
Result: Elected

Sierra Leone] are changing and women should stand to be counted."

As a teacher, Isata is fully aware of the challenges faced by young people, especially girls. Part of her platform during the campaign was to talk to voters about education, teen pregnancy, and health.

She said, "Girl child education is important because when you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Teenage pregnancy is also an issue for me because I see far too many young women get pregnant, leave school, and struggle for their basic survival."

Financing her campaign

Isata is also a pragmatic realist. She said about the campaign, "It was not easy. My opponents in other parties were wealthy. But I campaigned vigorously." She was also willing to run for office at her own risk, and borrowed money from a bank to finance her campaign. Her family was also supportive and gave her approximately Le. 2 million (€ 227).

She also realised that campaigning was a very time-consuming activity. She approached her head teacher and requested a six-week, paid leave of absence. This allowed her to campaign door-to-door and visit smaller areas outside Kambia.

Campaigning

The newly-formed NGC was supportive of Isata's campaign and provided 100 campaign t-shirts, 25 branded hats and Le. 3 million (€ 341). The promotional materials were branded with the party leaders, Kandeh Yumkella and Andrew Keili, and Isata also photocopied 1,000 posters with her photograph and slogan, "United we

stand; We stand united.”

For Isata, the 2018 election campaign was a valuable learning experience. She said, “I am a new candidate. I learned so many things. I learned about the systemic marginalisation of women in politics. I learned about the Local Government Act and the laws in the Public Elections Act.”

She noted how valuable the various training sessions were and attended as many offerings as possible. She specifically mentioned the Trócaire group training through ABC-Development and CGG, as well as 50/50 Group, as valuable to her campaign. She also noted, “I learned skills like public speaking. I developed confidence in interacting with people. I learned how to be bold and talk to the media. The training also helped to market me and give us a platform to express ourselves freely especially through public rallies.”

Isata’s Catholic church community was also supportive and encouraging. Her pastor prayed for her and talked about her several times during the campaign. Isata’s networks through her school, religious community, women’s groups, business contacts, and social activities were valuable assets during the campaign and election.

She noted, “The youth groups were particularly instrumental [to the campaign]. My core campaign team included three male and three females who worked hard and were effective.”

Getting her message out

The media training was useful for Isata as she appeared on several local radio discussion programs funded by various women’s groups. “With my use of the media,” she said, “I relied mostly on the 50/50 jingle, which calls for more women in politics. I didn’t have to pay for the radio programmes.”

Isata also participated in a “women’s march”, which she said was an important activity that helped raise her profile and encourage men to vote for women.

Isata specifically noted the value of networks and connections with people. The trainings offered connections with other women candidates and organisations.

She said, “People are the key to elections and reaching out to groups, neighbours, and individuals is very important. People wanted change and I offered a different way of doing things.”

**“Women
need to be in
front.”**

FATMATA ALPHA KAMARA

KAMBIA



**Ran for: Council
Party: Coalition for
Change (C4C)
Ward: 200
Constituency: 060
Town/Village:
Magbema, Rokupr
District: Kambia
Result: Not Elected**

Fatmata Alpha Kamara is a mother of three who ran for election in her Council. She struggled with her family commitments while campaigning as she was still breastfeeding her youngest child. Harrassment and campaign finances were also a challenge, and as a result she was unsuccessful in getting elected.

Fatmata is a vibrant, thoughtful, soft-spoken, and dedicated mother with three young children, ranging from 14 months to 14 years of age.

With support and encouragement from her husband, a teacher, and her family, she ran for local council under the umbrella of a new party, the Coalition

for Change (C4C), headed by the former Vice President of Sierra Leone. The 2018 campaign and elections were her first foray into politics.

Fatmata noted, "It was a risk but I felt confident because I had support around the community." She thinks that getting involved in politics is a good way to "help reduce illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, and other ills affecting our society. Teenage pregnancy is a very serious problem here and all those young mothers in my community were school-going children."

Fatmata took a long-term view of the elections and politics. She said, "I opted for this political office to have a voice and lead towards a better life for

myself and my people... I believe 'enough is enough'. I am going to advocate as a politician to help improve education and eradicate poverty."

Family issues

Family issues were both a blessing and a challenge for Fatmata during the campaign. "It was a tough period for my children," she said. "I would leave them sometimes to return very late at night. I am a breastfeeding mother and sometimes my breasts got heavy and ached for hours while being away from my child."

Her husband, Alpha, became the stay-at-home father for long periods during the campaign. He added, "I was here to help. I would leave my school and come to take care of the baby."

Caring for her family, particularly her young son, prevented Fatmata from attending some of the meetings and training sessions held in her area. She said, "I attended one or two trainings ...in Port Loko and Kambia. But,

being a mother that is still breastfeeding a baby, it was extremely difficult to attend the training sessions."

She noted, however, that the training sessions gave her confidence to speak on the radio and to stand before a small crowd and talk. "Learning about local council, public speaking, and politics was very positive for me."

"I was a victim of some rumours about me and other men."

The C4C Party paid Fatmata's nomination fees and gave her Le. 70,000 (€ 8) for transportation to allow her to get into Freetown and go through the nomination process at the National Electoral Commission (NEC) office. But, she said, "I didn't receive any other money from my party." She noted, "I only received money from my husband's salary and I had to endure a lot of hardships because I didn't have money."

Money was not the only challenge Fatmata faced. She said, "I was a victim of some rumours about me and other men. Some people talked to my husband about me, but he didn't believe them and trusted me."



She also described how she was intimidated and “pushed” by a political opponent. “An opponent of mine was antagonistic. One of my supporters was wrongly accused of stealing a phone from a supporter of my opponent. This incident led to some intimidation as I was asked to pay for the stolen phone. My opponent was richer and and tried to intimidate me and my husband.”

a lot from the experience and might consider running for a political position again. She said, “I campaigned on a platform where I was part of the community and my personal experience would help me help others. I explained that I am better suited than these politicians to help solve the problems being faced.”

More women – better politics

The media was supportive of women candidates in Kambia, and Fatmata appeared on the radio three times. She said, “The radio discussion programs were good and helped get my name known around a wider area.” She said she relied on some jingles about voting for more women and cited, “more women – better politics” as a slogan that was very effective.

Fatmata also noted the contributions her Imam made from her mosque. Fatmata is a Muslim woman, living in a Muslim community. She said, “My Imam prayed for me and helped in my campaign. I sometimes wore a hijab, out of respect and my religion, when I went door-to-door. Being a Muslim helped connect me with my community.” Fatmata said she learned

**“It was a
tough period
for my
children.”**

FATMATA KAMARA

KAMBIA



Aspirant for Local Council
Party: All People's Congress (APC)
Ward:
Constituency: 069
Town/Village: Robat, Makama
District: Port Loko
Result: Not elected

date for the symbol because some 'big gun' in the APC favoured another candidate."

Fatmata Kamara is an out-spoken, confident, and seasoned advocate and politician. A former elected councillor, she was blocked from running in the election by a male rival in her own party.

Fatmata ran successfully for Council in 2012 under the All People's Congress (APC) and was a sitting Councillor from 2012 to 2017. She has been a member of the APC for over 20 years.

However, prior to the election campaign of 2018, Fatmata was asked to step aside from her position by the by a high-ranking official of her party. She was then denied the party symbol. She said, "I learned I wasn't the party's favourite candi-

"I won the primaries but they removed my name on their way to Freetown. The party set up assessment committees to determine the popularity of candidates, but the party hierarchy discriminated against me and denied me the opportunity of serving my people for a second term."

"The male candidate was chosen over me"

She said, "In 2012, the process of selecting candidates was fair. In 2018, the party imposed candidates on the people. I wasn't given the symbol because I said something against a top party executive in the district. It all turned out that the male candidate was chosen over me."

Campaigning for her party

Fatmata went on to actively campaign for the selected APC candidate at the request of a party leader. She said, "I did it for the sake of the party. I can't sit by and see my party losing because of the decision of an individual." According to Fatmata, because of her high profile in the community, she was able to boost the selected APC candidate to victory.

She said she wasn't discouraged by the party or the election results. "I know my people still love me and I have other ways of helping. I have established several networks with NGOs. I initiated a savings fund (an informal 'Osusu') for the community to respond to individual problems."

Fatmata maintains a high-profile position within her community as a teacher, advocate, and community activist. She is confident about running for local council again, perhaps in the next election or by-election. She said, "I want to continue with the development work I started previously as a substantive stakeholder on Council."

ALIMATU KAMARA

WESTERN AREA RURAL



**Ran for: Local Council
Party: All People's
Congress (APC)
Ward: 379
Constituency: 107
Town/Village: Koya
Rural, Newton
District: Western Area
Rural
Result: Elected**

Alimatu Kamara is a direct, organised, warm, and passionate first-time politician and newly elected local councillor. She is a Head Teacher at a Muslim school. She organised a positive, structured campaign that was clear, simple, and direct.

Alimatu says she decided to run for councillor "because my people called upon me to do so." As a Head Teacher at a Muslim school, Alimatu is used to the responsibility and authority required for politics. She said, "Women hardly put themselves forward for any political offices in my community. Hence as a woman our participation was of prime importance to me."

As a teacher and pillar of her community, Alimatu has first-hand experience with

the challenges and hardships faced by her constituents. She said, "The quality of education in this area is very low. We have far more boys in class than girls, for example. My campaign platform was based on community needs, women's empowerment, girls' education and other vices like teenage pregnancy."

Alimatu's school is a community hub for children and parents. She noted, "Sitting with the community people, I learned about their problems like the lack of water, lack of vocational skills training, lack of light, and so on. I think I can make a difference and improve the community."

A political family

Interestingly, Alimatu comes from a political family.

Her husband is a strong supporter of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) while she decided to vie for the All People's Congress (APC), the incumbent party at the time. She said her husband's brother is the local APC Member of Parliament and they live in one of the strongholds of the APC, which guided her decision to run under the APC umbrella. She said, "I have also been very active in the APC party and I have been the constituency Youth Chairlady for 15 years."

She added, "My family was generally happy for my decision to run for office... My husband was concerned about my job, which is very important to me. But, when I explained that I would keep my job, he came around and supported my decision."

Fraught with challenges

The 2018 elections were, at times, fraught with challenges, according to Alimatu. She noted the negative influence of party politics and issues that did not have to do with service to the people. She cited, "President Koroma's involvement in the selection process was not okay for me. It brought about disenchantment among

many party supporters and that was why we lost the elections. And, the political landscape during and after the election was tense and people were divided.”

Alimatu also noted the level of intimidation from opposition supporters. She said she felt somewhat afraid, especially at night, but took precautions and was careful. She said, “There were times I was discriminated against but that is just part of our male dominated society.”

Alimatu’s campaign, she said, was clear, simple and direct. She developed a team of core campaigners who were organised into areas and sectors. “I had about 10 on my campaign team, which was a mix of men and women, young and elderly and they went door-to-door and talked to people.”

In preparation for the campaign, Alimatu attended two training sessions from a Trócaire-supported partner, CARL. She said public speaking and confidence building were the two highlights of the training. Further, she mentioned learning about dress codes, local government operations, and politics in general.

Alimatu is thinking about her future as a politician and wants to become more involved with the party hierarchy. She said, “I want to run for a position to the parent body in the next APC

convention. I think I can influence the party to include more women and become a stronger party.”

“I think I can influence the party to include more women and become a stronger party.”

REBECCA KAMARA

BOMBALI



Rebecca Kamara is an articulate, experienced, insightful, and active politician. She ran for election in an area that typically votes for the opposing party. Rebecca experienced intimidation, harassment, and even threats to her life during her campaign.

Rebecca ran for local council in 2007, in a by-election in 2018, and faced voters again in 2018. She ran for local council under the umbrella of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in an area of the country that typically votes for the All People's Congress (APC). She is a long-time SLPP supporter, originally from the south, and has been a party member since 1996.

She was under no illusion and realised she faced an

**Ran for: Council
Party: Sierra Leone
People's Party (SLPP)
Ward: 123
Constituency: 038
Town/Village: Shebora
District: Bombali
Result: Not Elected**

uphill struggle. But, she said, "I knew it would be difficult but I kept telling voters that a mixed party Council would be better for one and all. Everyone in the community would be better served if we have more than one party represented on Council."

Didn't pay off this time

Her unique campaign strategy didn't pay off this time around but she remains positive about her party and about the future. "The SLPP won the presidency but lost Parliament to the APC. So, the governance of this country is divided and mixed. Hopefully, we will see some unity and some development."

"I ran in this election to help the people of my community," she said.

"We need water, roads and markets and I was sure I could help them develop themselves. I also ran because, as a teacher, I see the quality of education and want to do something about that." Rebecca also runs a nursery school for nearly 100 young learners.

Rebecca noted the increase in attention for women candidates in this election and appreciated the training provided by Trócaire and others. She said, "I learned a lot about campaigning and becoming known. I also learned a little about the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) and some of the laws that govern elections."

Violence and intimidation

"The level of violence and intimidation during this campaign was not surprising, but it was surprising to me personally," she said. Rebecca experienced intimidation, harassment, and even threats to her life. During the campaign, a colleague threatened to stab her because of her party affiliation. Rebecca reported the matter to the school administration who intervened and mediated a

resolution to the argument.

She said, "I felt afraid almost throughout the elections. Party politics was very difficult and very divided." She also noted the gender-based verbal attacks and harassment. When she was asked about the role of the police, she responded, "I don't trust the police to do what they're supposed to do. In this area, they are not neutral and I have no confidence in them."

At one point during the election campaign, Rebecca's front door to her house was smeared with feces, apparently by a supporter from a different party. The attack was publicised widely in the media but very quickly politicised. There were accusations and counter-accusations thrown about and the matter was eventually dismissed. The issue was reported to the police who responded by first asking for money to investigate and then took pictures of her doorway.

She said the police were not helpful. At one point, soldiers were called to her compound and the military personnel questioned neighbours and the surrounding community. She said, "This seemed to calm the situation but only because it went beyond the local police and made it into the media." No charges

were ever made in the attack.

"I'd seen enough to be very afraid."

Feeling afraid for her safety, Rebecca left her house and moved to stay with relatives in the south. She said, "The day of the election, I left the area because I couldn't trust the authorities and I'd seen enough to be very afraid."

She said she'd seen beatings, harassment, and all kinds of threats – mainly politically based but also because she was a woman. She also received a letter pinned to her compound entrance that said her house would be burned if she continued with the SLPP.

Rebecca waged a strong campaign and spent approximately Le. 15 million (€ 1,705) of her own money. She said, "We didn't get support from the party but everyone knew where I stood. The party put up posters and banners with the pictures of the presidential candidate and the vice."

Despite the challenges, threats, and hassles of this election campaign, Rebecca is not deterred. She said, "I will continue to be an advocate and strong party supporter. I might even vie for a local position within the party." Rebecca is ambitious and eventually wants to run

for a seat in Parliament.

**"I ran in
this election
to help the
people of my
community."**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training design, content, targeting, and duration

It is clear that candidates and aspirants are in need of additional and enhanced training sessions with more in-depth political content and localised, specialised curricula. Training of this level requires multiple sessions over a longer period of time.

It is recommended that a clearly written and illustrated Campaign Manual/Workbook be developed and distributed to candidates as part of the training sessions. The Workbook would include campaign planner pages, maps, contact lists, fundraising tips, etc.

Alongside a "Campaign Manual/Workbook," copies of the Sierra Leone Constitution and local laws governing elections should be distributed to candidates. A training curriculum should be designed to communicate and teach the fundamentals of these documents.

All of the candidates talked about the importance of "confidence" and "public speaking." It is

recommended that further training sessions maintain and build on these modules. Other modules in this curriculum should include speech writing and how to develop talking points for campaign speeches.

Training content should include financial awareness, record-keeping, accounting, and fundraising. Most of the candidates were not aware of nor were they able to account for monies used during the campaign period.

Training sessions could include orientation sessions and information workshops for spouses and/or family members who are supportive of a candidate's run for office. These information sessions would be geared to emotional and moral support in the candidate's homes and communities.

Most of the candidates were bolstered by one or two key supporters, who were referred to as "campaign managers." These supporters included extended family and sometimes neighbours. Information sessions and training should be offered to those significant people who are charged with "running a

campaign." These sessions would be joint sessions with candidates and their "managers."

Many candidates do not have e-mail accounts and are unfamiliar with the Internet and e-communications. Candidates, during training sessions, should be coached on setting up and using e-mail accounts to communicate with their political parties, supporters, and financiers.

The training curriculum should include sessions on how to use social media, including WhatsApp and Facebook, to build networks, promote ideologies and platforms, and secure support for candidates. Social media can be a powerful tool in a politician's arsenal of campaign activities.

Most of the candidates had very little experience with Council or Parliament's proceedings. It is recommended that training sessions involve familiarisation fieldtrips to council meetings and parliamentary sessions prior to a candidate deciding to run for office. These sessions could involve "mentor" women

politicians with experience in campaigning and governance procedures.

It is recommended that training sessions involve political parties and seek input into curriculum and content. Party policies/ manifestos should be discussed and explained to candidates.

The trainings could include basic literacy and reading skills for some candidates but should include matching weaker readers with stronger readers. Adult and learner focused materials, specific to politics and elections, should be included as handouts and learning resources.

Running for a political office in Sierra Leone often creates a false understanding of a candidate's financial and political strength. All of the candidates spoke about "community expectations" when it came to giving out money, food, or incentives. Training sessions should include strategies for dealing with these often inaccurate public perceptions of political candidates. Training sessions should include how to manage expectations and what to say when people ask for or expect money for votes.

It is recommended that local police be invited to training sessions to discuss

neutrality, safety issues, and security challenges.

Implementing Partners

Implementing partners receive funding, based on proposals, from international agencies to carry out project-based support to women candidates.

It is recommended that partners should design and conduct more training sessions with aspirants and candidates and enhance the training sessions with a more detailed and specific curriculum. Additional training materials could include:

- Detailed maps of candidate's areas,
- Laws governing political parties, elections, and governance.

Partners should ensure that training sessions and training venues consider the needs of working mothers, and they should aim to create a child-friendly environment or provide for a child-care arrangement.

Specific individualised promotional items and elections materials proved a significant advantage to three of the women candidates in the 2018 elections. It is recommended that partners help candidates to design, pay for, and disseminate

promotional items such as hats, fans, t-shirts, and posters.

Elections are not "one off" events but are part of a larger political cycle. It is recommended that partners increase the level of civic education in day-to-day operations/programs geared to potential women candidates and leaders. Alongside these activities, it is recommended that partners begin to institute the following:

- Networks of women through WhatsApp or meetings. Electronic communications networks via social media and websites.
- Mentoring programs with senior or experienced women politicians.
- Regular contact with potential women's leaders.

National campaigns to "vote for more women", including marches, and promotional items were effective during the 2018 election campaign. These national advocacy campaigns should continue and possibly be expanded. An example of the national campaign activities was the Women's March, which helped in awareness raising and voter education.

As part of the identification and preparations for potential candidates,

partners should conduct research into the actual costs of running for political offices. Women should have a very clear understanding of what it takes to run a campaign and run in an election.

During key informant interviews with candidates, it was noted the average amount spent on their campaigns was approximately Le. 15 – 20 million (€ 1,700 – 2,300).

Political parties

There is still a view held by many men, and some women, that politics is not a fit place for “ladies.” Women are marginalised within political parties in “women’s sections/ wings,” which gives them only nominal consultative roles, while excluding them from the mainstream of the party. Very few women are included in decision-making roles within parties.

It is important for political parties to ensure their internal processes and practices are gender-sensitive. This includes making a clear commitment to gender equality through a gender policy or by including gender-sensitive elements in party strategic plans, ensuring that women are represented throughout the entire organisation, including leadership roles.

It is recommended that political parties pay more attention to the selection of candidates from MPs to local councillors. Political parties need be more critical in their analysis of potential aspirants and award party symbols based on merit and potential.

It is recommended that political parties start a national dialogue among political parties, electoral institutions, and civil society to deliberate on the impact of money on politics and the expectations citizens and politicians have in terms of its regulation.

Political party policies/ manifestos were developed by four of the sixteen parties for the 2018 elections. These manifestos form the basis of campaigns and help set the direction for a party, if elected. Parties should seek the input of women candidates and supporters during the policy development stage. These important documents should be discussed and explained to candidates prior to election campaigns.

Party manifestos should be given to each party candidate prior to the election campaigns. Additionally, political parties should offer orientation sessions to their selected/ elected candidates well in advance of any campaign.

Political campaigns involve spending money and fundraising. And, according to the PPRC each party executive must submit audited financial statements following an election. But, none of the women candidates consulted were able to keep track of income or expenditures during their campaign. Political parties should rigorously enforce existing political party finance legislation via the PPRC.

Further efforts, through both formal and informal channels, should be undertaken to increase the transparency of election spending, including requiring candidates and parties to be more open about the costs they incur.

Political parties should engage candidates and voters about the negative implications of making direct financial demands on their candidates, MPs, and councillors.

Campaigns and elections require financial contributions. Political parties should conduct research into the costs of running for office in Sierra Leone at the local council and MP levels and provide financial support, particularly to women candidates.

Political parties should continue to engage with the

media to enhance coverage of women candidates and women's issues during a campaign. One of the most influential activities during the election campaign was the leadership, youth, and women's debates. It is recommended that political parties continue participating in open, public debates that are broadcast and covered by the media.

It also is recommended that consideration be given to legislating an affirmative action quota system enforcing 30 percent women in positions of authority into the electoral process system, political parties, and electoral management bodies.

Electoral Management Bodies

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) is composed of a Chief Electoral Commissioner (Chair) and four Electoral Commissioners, appointed by the president after consultation with the leaders of all registered political parties and approved by the parliament.

The tenure of office of the commissioners is five years, and the current Chair, Mohamed N'fa Alie Conteh, was sworn in February 2015. NEC decisions are taken by a simple majority of votes with the necessary

quorum of three members. The commissioners, besides their assigned functional roles, are responsible for one province of the country each (West, North, East, and South). Since the 2017 administration reform added a new province, the commissioner originally covering the North province is responsible for both the North and North-West regions.

All candidates have to pay a nomination fee prescribed by the NEC and approved by the parliament. A parliamentary bill to reduce the prohibitively high non-refundable nomination fees was rejected by MPs, despite criticism of the high fees by political parties and a recommendation to reduce them by the EU EOM in 2012. This problem was somewhat alleviated by negotiations with the government initiated by the PPRC, which led to the state covering up to 70 percent of the cost. The still high fees, combined with unequal financial positions among parties, among individual candidates, and between genders considerably tilted the playing field in favour of larger parties, wealthy candidates, and men.

It is recommended that the NEC revisit nomination fees and lower fees to parties and candidates running for local council and parliament.

Political parties stationed observers at polling stations and individual candidates often stationed their own supporters at local polling stations. The expense of these observers was covered by political parties or individual candidates. The party observers relayed information back to party campaign offices and tallying centres. But, at the local level, candidates were not officially notified about poll results. NEC should issue official letters and documentation to each candidate in each Ward, Region, and constituency immediately following the announcement of election results.

It is recommended that NEC and other electoral management bodies collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data. This will aid in further research and targeted support.

Security Sector

All of the women candidates cited their mistrust and negative perception of local police personnel. The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) came under significant pressure from local and national authorities despite the rhetoric about remaining neutral and efficient. The police should remain neutral and carry out their duties to the letter of the law.

The SLP should institute a “hotline” for candidates to call if there are any security concerns. All concerns and situations, from verbal harassment to physical threats, should be investigated and pursued by sufficiently trained personnel.

It is recommended that local police be involved with candidates prior to and during election campaigns. It is important that candidates have a connection to specific police personnel at the local level.

Media and Civil Society

The media play a significant role during and after an election campaign period. It is recommended that the media continue to implement and obey all Independent Media Commission (IMC) political reporting guidelines for responsible journalism.

This includes:

- Ensuring a level playing field at the local level by including women in discussion programs and political call-in shows,
- Continuing to offer “free” air time to women candidates,
- Covering all women candidate events and activities as news items, and
- Paying specific attention to national issues and

women’s voices.

The national debates, organised by the media, for party leadership, women, and youth, should continue with full participation of political parties and candidates.

Conclusion

The inquiries and findings of this report are meant to document and summarise some of the experiences of women who participated in the 2018 elections in Sierra Leone. The women in this report received support and training from local organisations with funds from international partners. It is a select group but representative of women across the country.

In hindsight, all of the women said they learned a lot from the process. For the most part, the candidates said they had positive experiences while also suffering discrimination, intimidation, and hardships. All but one of the candidates interviewed said they would run for political office again, which is a good indication of their strength and determination to see more women in politics.

Ultimately, this report will serve to guide the selection, training, and support to women candidates in Sierra Leone’s next election. It is also hoped that this report

will help women candidates, implementing partners, and funders in other countries to enhance the role of women in politics and governance.

Fatmata Alpha Kamara with her husband.

Photo: Stephen Douglas



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