



MEDIA REFORM COORDINATING GROUP- SIERRA LEONE (MRCG-SL)

MEDIA AND ELECTIONS

COVERAGE AND REPORTAGE ON ID CARDS DISTRIBUTION AND NOMINATION FOR THE 2023 ELECTIONS



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ABOUT MRCG

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) continued the monitoring of the electoral processes leading to the June 2023 elections in Sierra Leone. It could be recalled that, during the voter registration phases, the MRCG did a comprehensive report of how the media covered the registration exercise; the challenges faced, and proffered recommendations for Election Management Bodies to work with journalists and media houses so that real time information could be communicated to the public.

The Electoral Commission Sierra Leone (ECSL) continued implementing activities according to its schedule. In the months of April and May, ECSL commenced the distribution of voter ID cards to voters across the country and the nomination of candidates for the various elections. As per the first published timeline of the electoral activities for external stakeholders, the distribution was supposed to have commenced from 17 to 26 March 2023. However, in a press release dated 13 March 2023, the ECSL rescheduled the distribution to commence from 7 to 16 April 2023.

The media continued to monitor and report on the electoral activities, including the distribution of voter ID cards and nomination of candidates for the Paramount Chiefs Member of Parliament Election (PCMP). The ECSL in a press release dated 7 April 2023 announced the collection of voters ID cards in all 3, 630 registration centers across the country. The process which lasted for a period of 10 days, had successes and challenges which the media reported on.

In a press release dated 17 April, 2023, the ECSL announced that 2,613,655 voters across the country had collected their voters ID which represented 77% of the total number of registered voters. The release also mentioned that a total of 5, 205 ID cards were without photos or photo less registrants, 502 cards were mismatched and 9,061 were misplaced.

According to the ECSL timeline, the period 30 March to 1 April 2023 was slated for the nomination of PCMP in all 14 districts. In a press release dated 17 April 2023, ECSL announced the declaration of uncontested PCMP duly elected as PCMP in Sierra Leone. Among the fourteen (14) districts, seven (7) districts had uncontested PCs; Kailahun, Kono, Tonkolili, Karene, Port Loko, Bo and Moyamba. The ECSL on 20 May 2023, as per election timeline conducted the PCMP election for the other seven (7) districts. However, as at the time of producing this report results for the other 7 districts were yet to be announced.

The nomination of candidates for the various elections for councillors, members of parliament (MP), mayoral candidates, and presidential candidates commenced on the 19 April to the 9 May 2023. For each of the said elections, ECSL requested the various political parties to submit list of their approved candidates that they had internally agreed on.

This report presents the role played by the media in the distribution of voters ID cards and nomination process of PCMP, councillors, members of parliament (MP), mayoral candidates, and presidential candidates; it highlights impacts and challenges of the two electoral activities and presents recommendations to the necessary authorities.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The MRCG monitored two radio stations, one TV station and newspapers that are published on a daily basis. From the findings, all of the media houses discussed or reported issues related to the electoral process of card distribution and nomination process for over a period of one month.

The MRCG from 7 April to 17 May 2023 monitored the SLBC Radio and TV, Radio Democracy, and newspapers publications that had discussions or publications on issues with regards to the electoral activities monitored.

SLBC

SLBC radio during their morning program ‘Morning Coffee’ on 12, 17, 19 and 20 April 2023 hosted officials from ECSL who spoke about the voter ID cards distribution and responded to concerns from the public regarding the quality of the ID cards and the distribution process. From a vox pop that was done by the said radio station from the public, there were mixed feelings regarding the public opinion with regards the quality of the cards. However, ECSL officials during their media engagements allayed the fears of the public over the quality and tried to persuade them to focus on the special security features of the said ID cards.

Also for the nomination process of the various elections, the SLBC in their ‘Morning Coffee’ programs on the 2, 3, 8 and 9 of May hosted senior officers of ECSL and PPRC to discuss issues relating to the nomination process. Their discussions were around the process of nominations, the role of the eligible political parties in the nomination, the management of the process and the challenges faced by ECSL in conducting the nominations, the experience of political parties during the nomination process and the observation of the nomination process by PPRC among others.

The table below shows the programs monitored

| Radio Station | Guests | Designation | Institution | Date | Summary Discussion |
|----------------------------|---|--|------------------|--------------------------|---|
| SLBC: Morning Coffee | William Ado Davies | Executive Secretary | ECSL | 4 th April | The distribution process of the voters ID cards. |
| SLBC: Morning Coffee | Momoh Kanneh | Director of Electoral Education | ECSL | 12 April | The distribution of voters ID cards by ECSL. |
| SLBC: Morning Coffee | Christopher Jones Lucian Momoh | Assistant Communication Officer Director of Training and External Relations | ECSL PPRC | 19 April 19 April | The closing of the distribution of voters ID cards by ECSL and ECSL preparedness for the elections. Guidelines set up by PPRC for political parties for the elections. |

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| SLBC Radio: Morning Coffee | Mohamed Turay Imran Sillah | Director of Operation ECSL A member in the Strategic Communications Unit | EC-SL Ministry of Information & Communication | 2 May 2023 | Explanation of political parties nomination processes and the challenges of ECSL. Explanation of how SLPP nomination would look like. |
| SLBC Radio | Abdulai Bangura | Chairman of PPRC | PPRC | 3 May 2023 | The observation of the nomination process by PPRC |
| SLBC Radio | Albert Massaqui Nabieu Musa Kamara Abdulai Barrie Abdulai Saccoh | Director of External Relations ECSL Presidential candidate National Secretary General Presidential candidate | ECSL PLP party NDA RUFPP | 8 May 2023 | The number of presidential nomination processes that are going on: presidential political parties that have gone through the nomination process. The experience of political parties during the nomination process. The experience of NDA during the nomination process The experience of RUFPP on the nomination and their preparedness for the elections. |
| SLBC Radio | Dr. Jonathan Sandy | Presidential candidate | NURP | 9 May 2023 | Experience of NURP during the nomination process. |

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|--|-------------|---------------------------------------|-----|--|---|
| | Victor King | National Chairman for CDP party | CDP | | What does the nomination party mean to CDP part as they have gone through the nomination process. |
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SLBC TV

In their quest to update citizens on the ongoing electoral process, the SLBC TV during their programs (Good Morning Sierra Leone and the Podium) also hosted guests from ECSL, political parties, PPRC and CSOs to discuss issues around the nomination process. Key issues highlighted in their discussions were; update on the nomination process, to explain the eligibility of political parties to be part of the nomination process, and concerns raised by some political parties that were not part of the nomination process.

| No. | Media | Guest | Designation | institution | Date | Summary discussion |
|-----|---------|--------------------------------------|---|-------------|---------------|---|
| 3. | SLBC TV | Momoh Kanneh | Director of Electoral Education | ECSL | 12 April 2023 | Update on voter's registration card collection. Encouraged voters to collect their cards. Concerns over black and white photos of the card. |
| 4. | SLBC TV | Christopher Jones | Assistant Director of Communication | ECSL | 19 April 2023 | Update on voter's card collected. Issues such photo-less, mismatch etc. surrounding the voter's iD Card Those who are yet to collect their card can do so on the 24 April |
| 5. | SLBC TV | Raymond George and Christopher Jones | Director and Deputy Director of Media and Communication | ECSL | 21 April | Updates on Nomination process |

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|----|---------|------------------|--------------------------------|------|-------|--|
| 6. | SLBC TV | Mohamed Turay | Head of Operations | ECSL | 2 May | Explained political parties nomination processes |
| 7. | SLBC | Albert Massaquoi | Director of External Relations | | 8 May | EC-SL update on political party nominations |

Radio Democracy

In one of their flagship programs, the *Gud Morning Salone* programs, the station on 12, 17, 19 and 21 April 2023 hosted guests from ECSL and representatives of political parties to discuss issues around the voter ID distribution, nomination and other electoral processes.

| No | Media | Guests | Designation | Institution | Date | Summary Discussion |
|----|------------------------------------|---------------------|---|-------------|------------|---|
| | Radio D | Mohamed Konneh | Chair | ECSL | 12 April | Concern over black and white voter's ID. Voters ID are for temporal use. Mismatched names and missing photos will be addressed. |
| | Radio D | Raymond George | Director of Media and Communication | ECSL | 17 April | The closing of the distribution of the voters registration ID cards and update on ECSL preparedness for the elections. Total number of card distributed and those yet to be distributed which will be available at the district office on the 24 April unto 15 May 2023. The issue of concern over the ID card and why the photos were in black and white and also ECSL engagement with producers of the cards. |
| | Radio D | Femi Claudius Cole | Founder and Leader | Unity Party | 21 April | ECSL not including their UP in the political parties nomination list which affected their chance of contesting the coming elections. |
| 1. | Radio Democracy Gud Morning Salone | Jusufu Henry Swaray | Director of Data Management & Voters Roll | ECSL | 2 May 2023 | The Nomination process and what ECSL has put in place to ensure there is free and fair election. |

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| Radio D:Gud Mornin g Salone | Victor King Seray Kabbah | National Chairman for CDP party Mayoral Independent Candidate | CDP Independent Candidate | 9 May 2023 | What does the nomination party mean to CDP part as they have gone through the nomination process An explanation of the nomination process as mayoral candidate, her plans for the election and reason for being an independent candidate. |
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The Print Media (Newspaper Publication)

The print media was monitored on a daily basis by monitors of the MRCG and took note of headlines and sources that are related to the electoral processes. Like the broadcast media, the print media on a daily basis published concerns over the process of card distribution, the quality of the cards, low turnout of voters to collect cards, the nomination process, work of EMBs and cries of political parties. The table below presents details of various newspaper headlines.

| DATE | NAME OF NEWSPAPER | HEADLINE | SOURCES |
|------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| 12-04-2023 | Awoko | “We contracted for coloured voter ID but not black & white photos from the vendor”-ECSL Chair states | Mohamed K Konneh ECSL Chairman |
| | Awareness Times | As ECSL unveils special security features of temporal Voter Identity Cards... June 24 th 2023 Elections to be Fraud-Resilient Womens Forum SL Appeals to Women to Collect Their Voter Registration Cards | Mohamed K Konneh Sallay Adams President of Womens Forum SL |
| | Prime Times Newspaper | Over poor quality of voters ID cards ... Pres Bio Vexed | |
| | AYV NEWS | 1,500,112 Voter ID Cards collected in first 4 | Mohamed |

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| | days nationwide Womens Forum appeals to women to collect voter cards | Konneh ECSL chairman Sallay Adams ps of Women Forum Network |
| The Satellite | Womens Forum Appeals to Women to collect voter id cards | Sallay Adams ps of Women Forum Network |
| Fritong Post | ECSL concludes nominations for PCMP election | ECSL |
| C4D MEDIA | Voters heavily Frowns at ...ECSL Cheap, Disposable & Substandard Voters ID card | ECSL |
| The Good Morning Trumpet | Women's Forum Appeals to Women to collect Voter Cards | Sallay Adams ps of Women Forum Network |
| Voice of Salone | Time is Running Out; ECSL Must Address Voter Concerns over Subpar Voter ID Cards | Basita Michael |
| Africa 24 | Deceitfulness ...ECSL Shady | Mohamed konneh ECSL Chairman Africanist Press |
| The Sierra Update | Time is running out ;ECSL must address voter concerns over sub-par voter ID cards | Opinion |
| Awareness Times | PPRC Issues Updates on Activities | PPRC |

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| | New Age news paper | Voter ID cards Saga...More Than 80% Black &White | Mohamed Konneh ECSL Chairman |
| 14-04-2023 | Concord Times | ECSL frowns at low quality voter ids, vows to engage contractors | Mohamed K Konneh – ECSL Chairman |
| | Voice of Salone | PPRC issues out political rallies guidelines | PPRC |
| | The Solutionist | ECSL Boss Breaks Silence over the voters id cards | Mohamed Konneh |
| | Daily Scope | ECSL;Over two thousand voter cards came without photos | ECSL |
| | The Owl newspaper | 2023 voters id card is a scam | APC party |
| 17-04-2023 | The Exclusive | Awarding symbols... APC Votes Today June 24 Elections PPRC Campaign guidelines | APC Secretariat – Lansana Dumbuya PPRC |
| | Africa 24 | Voter Cards Chop 88.4Bn | |
| | The Satellite | For Award of Smbols to Aspirants ...APC's internal polls today | APC party |
| 18-04-2023 | Night Watch | June 24 th Elections... Nomination starts tomorrow | Albert Massaquoi- Director of External Outreach ECSL |
| | Awareness Times | As ECSL Gives Update yesterday ... 77% voter cards collected ;seven Unopposed MPs | ECSL |
| | Premier News | Hundred of Thosands of voters to collect ID cards | ECSL chairman Mohamed Konneh |
| | AYV News | “Provisionally, 2,613,655 voter ID cards collected in 10 days” ECSL updates the public just concluded voter ID cards distribution | ECSL |

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|---------------|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| | Awoko | | 2.6 Million Voter ID cards collected | Mohamed Konne –EC-SL Chairman |
| 19 April 2023 | The Exclusive Newspaper | | Local Council Nomination Starts Today | Director of External Outreach- Albert Massaquoi |
| 20 April 2023 | The Satellite Newspaper | | As political parties award symbols...ECSL sets Nomination Dates | ECSL- Mohamed Konneh |
| 24 April 2023 | Awareness Times Newspaper | | As Renip, ADP, UDM, PLP, RUFPP, PMDC, CDP, PDP, NDA, NGC, APC, and SLPP get cleared to contest in 2023 Elections...C4C, NDP, UNPP & Claudius Cole's UP Fail Requirements | ECSL |
| 25 April 2023 | Modern Series Newspaper | | Unity party and three other parties may not contest the June 2023 elections | ECSL |
| 26 April 2023 | The Satellite Newspaper | | As the battle lines are drawn... ECSL confirms 13 Political parties for June 24 elections | ECSL |
| | The Exclusive Newspaper | | June 24 Elections 12 political parties okayed-SLPP, NGC, NURP, PLP, PMDC, ADP, CDP, NDA, ReNip, RUFPP, UDM, C4C, NDP, UNPP & UP out | PPRC, ECSL |
| 28 April 2023 | The Satellite Newspaper | | Mohamed Gento Kamara, Eugene Ayo-Cole set for Nomination Today | |
| | The Exclusive Newspaper | | For disallowing Unity Party to contest... Femi Claudius-Cole to take PPRC to Court | Femi Claudius Cole |
| | | | | |
| 2 May 2023 | The Owl Newspaper | | As ECSL Approved his nomination...Dr. Samura Kamara our next President | |
| | Awareness Times Newspaper | | After Samura Kamara and Chericoco filed their nomination papers yesterday...H.E. Maada Bio & Juldeh Jalloh to be nominated | ECSL |
| | For di People Newspaper | | Please consider before accepting APC Nominees | |
| | AYV News | | 2023: SLPP Nominates President Bio as | SLPP Secretary |

MAY 2023

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| | | Presidential candidate at EC-SL Today | General-Umaru Napoleon Koroma |
| 3 May 2023 | Global Times Newspaper | 5 more years...President Bio sails through nomination...calls for peaceful elections | President Julius Maada Bio |
| | Concord Times Newspaper | 2023 Presidential Elections: President Bio, Samura Kamara nominatyed | ECSL Boss-Mohamed .K. Konneh |
| | The Exclusive Newspaper | As APC Presidential & Running mate candidates nominated...*ECSL Boss assures free & fair elections Samura Kamara wants freedom to operate | ECSL and APC |
| | Awareness Times Newspaper | President Bio completes nomination [process as candidate for the SLPP | |
| | Public Review Newspaper | ECSL approves Samura Kamara & Pres. Bio | ECSL |
| | Politico Newspaper | ECSL Okays Bio, Samura | ECSL, APC and SLPP |
| | News 24 | After the ECSL nomination process yesterday how President Bio will win the June election | |
| 4 May 2023 | Night-watch Newspaper | Bio nominated for the third time... what the future holds for SLPP? | |
| | The Exclusive Newspaper | As SLPP Presidential & Running mate candidates nominated...*ECSL Boss gives hope to Sierra Leoneans *Maada Bio promises peaceful elections | ECSL and SLPP |
| | New Citizen Newspaper | DR. Samura Kamara sails through Presidential nomination process | |
| 8 May b2023 | Concord Times Newspaper | 2023: Four other political parties sail through Presidential nomination | ECSL Boss-Mohamed .K. Konneh |
| | The Satellite Newspaper | Ahead of tomorrow's nomination...SLPP unveils Parliamentary list today | |
| | Unity Newspaper | President Bio completes nomination process | ECSL Boss- |

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| | | | Mohamed .k.Konneh |
| 9 May 2023 | The Satellite Newspaper | As party activities intensify...SLPP completes nominations today | ECSL |
| 10 May 2023 | Awareness Times Newspaper | As he is nominated as PMDC's Presidential candidate... Charles Margai Bounces back into limelight | PMDC Preidential aspirant- Charles Margai |
| | AYV News | PMDC Nominates Charles Margai as Provisional Presidential candidate | |

3. RECOMMENDATION/EXPECTATIONS

- The MRCG continues to call on the ECSL, PPRC and other electoral bodies to allow journalists to have the opportunity to cover the remaining electoral process peacefully.
- The MRCG and other media actors continue to call on journalists to report on the election in accordance with the guidelines set to report on electoral process.
- Journalists to ensure that their safety.
- Journalists to take note of all the media trainings they have attended with regards to elections reporting.

4. CONCLUSION

This report has presented the role played by both the electronic and print media during the ID cards distribution and nomination processes of the various elections. The MRCG hopes to continue to see a cordial relationship between the media, ECSL and other electoral bodies. Many journalists have been capacitated on the covering and reporting of the electoral process, hence the MRCG and its constituent bodies continue to call on journalists to work within the professional forms of reporting and take care of their safety and security.