



# Fostering Peaceful, Credible and Inclusive Elections in Sierra Leone 2022-2023 Project



Government of Iceland



## PROJECT TITLE

# Fostering Peaceful, Credible and Inclusive Elections in Sierra Leone 2022-2023 Project

## PROJECT DONOR PARTNERS



Government of Iceland



## PROJECT IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



**SEND**  
**SIERRA LEONE**  
Working to promote good governance and  
equality of men and women in Sierra Leone



## PROJECT LOCATION

- Kailahun District
- Kenema District
- Kono District

## PROJECT BUDGET

\$100,000

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# Project Context

High risk of violence in the upcoming 2023 general elections threatens to disrupt the two decades of peace Sierra Leone has experienced since the end of the 11-year long civil war.

Sierra Leone faces a number of challenges that threaten the country's stability and peace. Despite being ranked as the 50th most peaceful country out of 163 nations in the Global Peace Index for 2022, there are growing concerns that Sierra Leone may be at risk of losing the democratic gains made since the end of the civil conflict in 2002. Politically motivated violence is on the rise, with the 2018 elections being a particular flashpoint. Additionally, there is a weak peace structure characterized by absent or poorly resourced actors, limited data collection, misinformation, and hate speech. The underrepresentation of women and youth in decision-making structures, high levels of unemployment, and widespread poverty also contribute to the country's vulnerability.

The economic situation in Sierra Leone is dire, with limited opportunities for its citizens to access livelihoods and finance.

The rapid expansion of the informal and transport sectors of the economy, as well as illicit activity, have further exacerbated the situation. Women and youth lack access to finance and financial literacy, with only 20% of the population banked. The failure to close the gender and youth gap in terms of economic opportunities and financial inclusion undermines lifetime productivity, earnings potential, and ability to escape poverty.

Sierra Leone's social and cultural norms are embedded in a deeply patriarchal culture in which gender inequalities are constantly reproduced and reinforced. The negative cultural perceptions of women and youth's ability to lead and contribute to decision-making have limited their access to representation and governance opportunities. Recent outbreaks of violence indicate the weakened social contract between the state and its citizens, especially youth and women. There is a general lack of trust in governmental institutions, limited efficiency of decentralization, and weak accountability mechanisms for the delivery and fair distribution of public goods and services.



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The recent protests in August 2022, which resulted in the death of at least 21 protestors and six police officers, indicate that the situation in Sierra Leone could destabilize rapidly. The protests were fueled by growing frustration with the rising cost of living and inflation. Social media platforms proved instrumental in organizing the protest and sharing information and updates related to protests, police, and government activities. Alleged government disruption of internet and phone services amid the protests further underlines the integral role that information and its flow control will have in the upcoming 2023 elections and its aftermath.



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## Drivers of Conflict



### Political Tension & Intimidation

The build-up of political tension between the All-People's Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) is causing concern for the 2023 elections in Sierra Leone. Respondents believe that the current political climate, characterized by hate speech, shrinking political and civil society space, incitement of communities against each other by politicians, and frustration among the youth towards the police, is driving the violence. The police are also expecting violence in the lead-up to and aftermath of the elections, particularly in locations marked as opposition strongholds due to growing frustration with the current government.



### Growing Tension between Youth & State Authorities

The frustration of young people with the government, state authorities, and the security sector has been growing and has resulted in instances of violence. The police force has been the target of much of this frustration, and recent demonstrations in August 2022 in Freetown, Makeni, and Karene turned violent, leading to loss of life and damage to police and private property. The police and security sector's response during these demonstrations has further increased the mistrust and animosity between them and the public.



### Increased Cost of living and inflation

The deteriorating economic conditions in Sierra Leone are causing an increase in anti-government sentiment, with concerns about the rising cost of essential commodities and the difficulty in finding employment. Teachers, doctors, and nurses have gone on strike to demand better pay and living conditions, which has further increased tensions. There is a fear that protests and strikes could become violent, taking advantage of the growing frustration among the population.



### Hate Speech and Misinformation

The misuse of social media and hate speech are posing a threat to social cohesion in Sierra Leone, creating tension and risking peace and democracy in the country. This could lead to violence and conflict on a larger scale. Hate speech, which covers many expressions that incite or promote violence, discrimination, and hatred against an individual or group, is seen as a form of extreme intolerance that contributes to hate crimes. The misuse of social media to spread hate speech is inciting tribal and political violence, according to focus group respondents and key informants.

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## Drivers of Conflict



### Marginalization and Violence Against Women & Girls

Women in Sierra Leone have historically faced discrimination and are underrepresented in political and socio-economic decision-making structures. Gender inequalities are prevalent, with women lacking access to education and experiencing extreme poverty. Women who aspire to political positions face significant barriers, including physical and sexual abuse and intimidation. Women's rights are frequently violated, with limited access to resources and opportunities. Recent protests by women's groups in July 2022 resulted in the arrest of dozens of women, including a prominent female opposition leader, amid allegations of police abuse. These challenges have a negative impact on sustainable peace building and development, as they disempower and marginalize half of the country's population.



### Land rights and Inter-Communal Violence

There are issues related to land ownership in Sierra Leone that are contributing to potential conflicts. These include land grabbing, contested ownership, and disinheritance. Politicians are believed to be using their power and influence to grab land, with some suggesting that this is being done to repopulate certain areas for political gain ahead of the 2023 elections.



### 2023 Elections

The current level of political polarization along ethnic lines, the widespread harmful use of social media, and alleged intimidation by the ruling party all contribute to a perception that the election's outcome might not be fair and credible. In that context, the concern is that the election results will not be accepted by the losing party, which will then lead to violence. Respondents also noted that violence would occur naturally, due to provocation between political parties, compounded by the fact that the police and media are perceived as not being neutral. It also noted that the vote-counting process is another flash point for conflict.

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## Main Promoters of Conflict

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### Political Actors

The recent conflict analysis conducted by SEND (2022) indicates that political actors and agents have the potential to initiate violence using vulnerable and at-risk youth, cliques, and gangs, including Okada riders.

Respondents perceive that politicians and political actors mobilize youth for violence.

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### Marginalized Youth

Marginalized and at-risk youth in Sierra Leone are often linked to poor or anti-social behavior, involvement in violence against state actors, instances of SGBV, and vulnerability to being mobilized for political violence. Okada riders, who have a historical link to ex-combatants, are particularly vulnerable to being co-opted into violence.

Past incidents of violence in Sierra Leone have involved youth and Okada riders directly, either as instigators of violence or victims of police brutality and violence in response to protests. The reputation of Okada riders for anti-social behavior and involvement in violence makes it difficult for them to overcome their negative image.

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### Security Forces

According to a recent conflict analysis by SEND, there is an expectation that police and security forces will perpetrate violence, particularly in opposition strongholds, where there is a perceived strategic replacement of senior police and security personnel with individuals aligned with the ruling party.

Respondents in focus group discussions expressed a growing mistrust of the police and security forces, particularly in these areas.

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### Social Media and Influencers

The role of social media and its influencers in instigating and organizing politically motivated violence is expected. Misinformation, hate speech, and fake news are being spread through social media, and it is challenging to trace the source of such content, especially when

it is shared through mass-communication platforms like WhatsApp. This level of anonymity has encouraged the widespread sharing of such content, and there is a risk that freedom of expression will be jeopardized, and cyber security legislation will be abused to target opposition members.

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## Theory of Change

Disseminate awareness materials to enhance voters' understanding of the new electoral system and election day procedures

Promote community understanding of the electoral procedures and legal provisions, especially the new Proportional Representation electoral system governing the conduct of the upcoming elections

Mobilize action for protecting women, girls and PWDs from violence during and after elections

Support the ECSL to convey uniform public awareness messages stressing the importance of the peaceful and inclusive conduct of the 2023 elections in Sierra Leone

Transform norms and practices to promote community support for first-time voters, women and PWD's participation in the electoral process



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## Theory of Change

The project's theory of change is built on the assumption that if communities and target groups understand the electoral procedures and legal provisions, they will have more significant access to information and utilize the opportunities available to participate in a peaceful, fair, and transparent electoral process.

The TOC also assumes that transforming social and cultural norms and practices promotes support for first-time voters, women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) to participate in the electoral process. Empowering and mobilizing women, girls, and PWDs to participate in the electoral process and providing them with increased capacity to work towards their social, economic, and political ability safely will help them effectively work individually and collectively to influence relevant stakeholders at all levels to tackle instability and violence and to participate effectively in the electoral processes as candidates and voters.

The TOC further assumes that strategies to engage powerholders and call them to account through training of election management bodies (EMBs) and other stakeholders, and support to citizen-led advocacy initiatives, will further strengthen civil society and empower women and EMBs, enhancing communities' peace infrastructure, and ultimately contributing to positive peace in Sierra Leone.

To achieve the goals of the TOC, the project aims to address multiple interconnected barriers that prevent citizens from participating effectively in democratic governance and peacebuilding efforts. These barriers include the underrepresentation of women and youth in decision-making structures, high levels of unemployment, misinformation, and weak civil society, all of which contribute to overall structural vulnerability in Sierra Leone. Young men, in particular, are at risk of being coerced into political violence due to unemployment, and the lack of viable economic opportunities for youth has also increased criminality.

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### Overall Goal

To support the election management bodies (EMBs) and various national institutions in preparation for peaceful and credible 2023 elections and to expand the space for the most significant engagement of electoral stakeholders in the electoral process and raising electoral awareness and creating conditions for promoting information integrity in the electoral process in Kailahun, Kenema and Kono Districts

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### Specific Objective

Assist the Electoral Commission in promoting awareness of first-time voters, women and youth groups and persons with disabilities on the new electoral system, the rights, and responsibilities of voters in the electoral process and electoral procedures to prevent and mitigation of politically motivated violence

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## Target Beneficiaries

Two thousand eight hundred (2,800) women, and 2,800 men, including 250 people with disability (PWD), will have increased access to information concerning elections and the GEWE Act, 2022. They will therefore be better equipped to participate in the electoral processes effectively

One hundred (100) aspiring women candidates will have increased skills, understanding and opportunity to take up leadership and decision-making opportunities within their communities through dedicated capacity building, confidence building, leadership training and accompaniment

Two hundred and fifty (250) members of PWDs groups in the three districts will have increased understanding and access to information concerning the electoral laws and the GEWE Act 2022. They will also have an increased capacity to utilise the laws to ensure peaceful elections and increase the participation of women and PWDs.

·Five hundred (500) young women network leaders will have strengthened their capacity to actively promote peaceful elections and political tolerance while providing outreach education to community members.

Five hundred (500) CBOs and women's networks members will have increased capacity and accompanied to raise awareness and conduct data-driven advocacy campaigns promoting gender equality, inclusive decision-making and peaceful elections. They will also be supported in movement building and working with political parties to ensure the implementation of the GEWE Act, 2022.

Three hundred (300) political actors, including councillors and members of parliament, will have increased understanding and access to information concerning the electoral laws and the GEWE Act of 2022. They will also have increased capacity to utilise the rules to ensure peaceful elections and increase the participation of women and PWDs

Three hundred (300) members of election management bodies across the three districts, local Authorities, and MDA staff will have increased capacity and knowledge of the electoral laws and the GEWE Act, 2022. They will also have an increased ability to utilise the laws to ensure peaceful elections and also to increase the participation of women and PWDs

·The 45 targeted chiefdoms will benefit from mass sensitization actions within the rural areas of the Kailahun, Kenema, and Kono districts.

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## Target Beneficiaries

Sixteen (16) local university students will directly benefit from tailored internship and work experience opportunities with SEND Sierra Leone to support the mass sensitization activities, participate in radio programmes and work with young women towards advocacy on peaceful electoral outcomes.

Thirty (30) SEND Sierra Leone staff will directly benefit from the knowledge, skills and practical experience from SEND TOT on the elections and the GEWE act to deliver the impactful project

The final beneficiaries of the action will be an estimated 50,000 residents in targeted districts within Kailahun, Kenema and Kono districts, benefiting from an increased understanding of the electoral processes and effective participation in peaceful and democratic elections.

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## Target Districts

The project will be implemented in three districts in Sierra Leone, namely Kailahun, Kenema and Kono. These districts have been selected based on SEND's conflict analysis and further strengthened as historical areas of operation for SEND. The targeted districts are noteworthy for previous incidents of politically motivated violence and high levels of inequality. Research suggests that Kailahun, Kenema, and Kono Districts are some of the top three districts "with a higher likelihood of political violence." All targeted districts experienced violence in the 2018 elections.



## Key Intervention Activities

**Outcome 1: Communities, particularly women and youth and first-time voters, are engaged in diverse awareness creation, increasing their understanding of electoral laws, processes and procedures**



Production and distribution of IEC materials on electoral laws, systems and procedures



Training of journalists and media institutions on the Electoral Laws and the GEWE Act, 2022



Organize TOTs in the target districts for 90 SEND staff, young women leaders, PWD leaders and political leaders on the election laws and the GEWE Act, 2022



Organize the Election Batta Radio Programs on Nyapui Radio



Mass Sensitization on electoral laws and procedure, electoral violence, and GEWE Act, 2022



Dialogue meetings with political parties, PPRC, and ECSL on the PR system and the GEWE Act 2022



Monthly press conferences at district and national to provide electoral education



Awareness-raising with women and other stakeholders on the GEWE Act, PPRC Act and Public election Act of 2022 and PWD Act of 2011



## Key Intervention Activities

### Outcome 2: Citizens have improved access to accurate information and are better equipped to exercise their civic rights and responsibilities



Identify and train Peacebuilding Ambassadors using the “Seeds of Peace” methodology



Formation of 15 youth Community Theatre Groups.



Establish District-level Peacebuilding Ambassador Coordination Groups



Production of Informative Drama Series (both audio and animated visual content) to be aired on the radio and social media platforms



Accompany Peacebuilding Ambassadors to create linkages with existing coordination bodies, like Local Authorities (District Council), Civil Society Networks, Election-specific forums and groups, and Security forums, like DISECT



Support and accompany religious leaders and faith networks, like the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone, to integrate peace messaging into religious gatherings



Production of visual and audio IEC materials in local languages on peacebuilding and non-violence during and after elections.



Facilitate community conversations and awareness raising through “Ataya Base” discussions, competitions, and community theatre performances



Youth-led production of jingles, songs, and music videos with famous artists and Okada rider groups (Artists for Peace)



Hosting of “Football for Peace” matches in targeted districts and major cities to bring people together and share messages of peace, conflict mitigation, reconciliation, and protection mainstreaming



Gender transformative training



Organize peaceful processions to share vital electoral messages



Organise training for target groups on using social media platforms, message dissemination, verifying and identifying fake or inciting messages and the ethics of sharing/forwarding messages on social media platforms.



Facilitate a multi-stakeholder forum for electoral dialogue

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