



National Electoral Commission (NEC)

REVISED DISABILITY POLICY¹

November 2018

All citizens of Sierra Leone have the right to vote and participate in elections. This right is guaranteed by the 1991 Constitution, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2011 and the Public Elections Act 2012. Further protection is found in the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Yet, there are still situations where persons with disabilities (PWD) are faced with obstacles that hinder them from exercising this fundamental right.

For several years the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has worked to improve access to electoral processes for PWD in Sierra Leone and to implement its obligations under the 2011 Persons with Disabilities Act. In 2013 a stand-alone unit was established to spearhead NEC's work in this area. In 2015 NEC promulgated its first Disability Policy. In the run up to the 2018 national elections, NEC, UNDP and the new National Commission for Persons with Disability (NCPD) conducted a national assessment of access to electoral arrangements for PWD. NEC implemented a programme of work to improve the access of all PWD to NEC facilities and information around the 2018 elections.

NEC follows the concept of '**disability**' as set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention does not define the term

¹ NEC made a first Disability Policy in 2015. This policy is based on a review and revision of that Policy.

disability but states 'disability is an evolving concept' (Article 1), and that persons with disability include "... those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

NEC considers the concept of '**access**' to include not just access for people with disabilities but also access for those such as the aged who also may experience mobility and sensory changes and difficulties. In addition, some short-term impairments (e.g., being on crutches as a result of a recent injury) may also require access efforts.

The NEC agrees to make three commitments to the disabled community.

NEC is committed to:

- 1. Ensuring increased employment opportunities for People with Disabilities for both permanent and temporary positions;**
- 2. Expanding NEC's efforts to improve access to NEC services for People with Disabilities, including through access screening all NEC policies and procedures.**
- 3. Promoting the right for disability inclusion and maintaining collaborative linkages with Disabled Persons' Organisations throughout the electoral cycle**

PURPOSE

The prime purpose of this Policy is to help operationalise NEC's commitments. These commitments aim to eliminate all and any barriers to persons with disabilities exercising their full right to participate in the electoral life of Sierra Leone.

The policy will enable the NEC to be pro-active in embedding the improvements made at the 2012 and 2018 Elections into a longer-term inclusion mainstreaming framework, through which NEC will identify and reduce barriers that persons with disabilities may encounter when seeking to participate in future elections. The policy includes time-bound actions that NEC will take between 2019 and 2024. This period covers the last year of the electoral cycle 2015-2019 and the entire electoral cycle 2020-2024.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective is to improve the accessibility of PWD to the country's political life, specifically their participation in the electoral process as voters, as candidates, as observers, and as employees of NEC.

LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Gender and Disability Unit of NEC is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that this policy is implemented by other NEC Departments and stakeholders. The unit will continue to collaborate with a broad-based Advisory Committee composed of representatives of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to advise the NEC of the specific needs of persons with disabilities in the election process. Officials of NEC will see that they actively engage with DPOs in the course of their work, and mainstream inclusion where possible in all departments of the NEC.

POLICY ACTIONS

A: NEC is committed to ensuring increased employment opportunities for People with Disabilities for both permanent and temporary positions.

To operationalise this commitment, in the period 2019-2024, NEC will

1. Ensure NEC staff are trained in the development of inclusive job descriptions and recruitment processes;
2. Increase attention to collecting data on how many PWD apply for and are successful in obtaining NEC positions and inclusion of this data in NEC reports;
3. Ensure new NEC facilities (including short term election facilities) are fully accessible for all Sierra Leoneans and including access enhancements in any renovation of existing NEC facilities;
4. Provide adaptive technology or assistance for any staff member that requires it to perform their tasks;
5. Advocate for resources to reinstate the Assistant Voter Education and Training Officer programme funded by SNEC in 2018.

B: NEC is committed to expanding NEC access efforts and screening all NEC policies and procedures to improve access to NEC services for People with Disabilities

To operationalise this commitment, in the period 2019-2024, NEC will

1. Secure core-budget resources to continue with the use of the Tactile Ballot Guide and pre-election education on its use.
2. Require the development of voter education and information materials in accessible formats or with access modifications.
3. Publish of a new checklist for assessing the accessibility of polling centres and polling stations, as well as publishing the results of the assessment;
4. Continue to seek resources to make temporary or permanent modifications to polling centres and polling stations to enhance accessibility.
5. Review NEC polling procedures and training materials, in conjunction with DPOs, to identify access improvements that are permissible within current law as well as those that require legal amendment.

C: NEC is committed to acting as a champion for disability inclusion and maintaining close contact with Disabled Persons' Organisations throughout the electoral cycle

To operationalise this commitment, in the period 2019-2024, NEC will

1. Maintain and expand the existing NEC Access Consultation Group on Electoral Issues, and consult this group on all NEC activities and plans;
2. Continue to gather data on the involvement and participation of PWD in all election processes in Sierra Leone, and to disaggregate this data by sex, and by category of PWD. Efforts will also be made to gather data on non-participation of PWD and the reason for non-participation;
3. Champion the findings of the NEC-UNDP access assessment with other electoral management bodies, government and civil society. Encourage domestic observer organisations and International Electoral Observation Missions to include PWD as long-term and short-term observers.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The execution of this policy will be monitored and evaluated by the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department in collaboration with the Human Resource, Gender and Disability Unit. The Policy will be reviewed on a five-year basis to align with the parliamentary and presidential electoral cycle.

RELATED POLICIES AND REFERENCES

1. NEC Disability Policy (NECDiP) *'Ensuring The Right To Elections Participation for Persons with Disabilities'* 2015
2. NEC-UNDP *An Assessment of Access to the Electoral Process for Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone'* 2017.
3. Election Observation Missions Reports from The Carter Center, The European Union, The Commonwealth, and National Elections Watch at <http://necsl.org/eor.aspx>
4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271569467_Disability_and_political_participation_in_Ghana_an_alternative_perspective [accessed Aug 2018]