



# National Electoral Commission (NEC)



## GENDER POLICY

**November 2018**

Gender equality is mutually and equally beneficial to both men and women. Gender roles and assumptions often lead to the denial, restriction and elimination of basic human rights of both genders. Women's electoral and political participation is widely recognized as a pre-existing condition for the realization of full democracy.

All citizens of Sierra Leone have the right to vote and participate in elections. The notion of equality of men and women in governance and decision making is enshrined in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, National Policy on the Advancement of Women and National Gender Mainstreaming policy (2000).

Demonstrating the national commitment, and to ensure the advancement of women, the Government of Sierra Leone signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. This right is also guaranteed in the Public Elections Act 2012.

Based on its mandate, the NEC recognises inclusion as a key component of good governance and has worked to ensure equal access to electoral processes for women on the same terms as men. In 2013 a stand-alone Gender and Disability Unit was established to spearhead NEC's work in this area. While a policy was developed in 2014, it was used by the NEC to include gender components in the work, but it was never formally adopted. Following the 2018 gender assessment of Sierra Leone's electoral arrangements, NEC has developed a 2018 Gender policy which builds on the 2014 draft and expands it in the light of the findings of the assessment.

## **Definitions:**

**Gender** according to the World Health Organization refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women.<sup>1</sup> While some gender roles may be similar across cultures, others will differ depending on the political, social and economic characteristics of a particular society. Therefore, roles attributed to women in one community, might be attributed to men in another. The terms masculine and feminine are often used to describe gender roles. For example: cooking in the home might be described, as a feminine task while repairing a vehicle is considered masculine.

**Sex** refers to biological features that distinguish between men and women. Attributes related to sex do not vary between societies globally, unlike gender roles which do vary across societies and countries.

**Discrimination** is the preclusion of rights and freedom based on the grounds of gender, race, colour, language, religion, belief, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity, philosophical and political opinion, social status, marital status, nursing, pregnancy, health status, disability, age and other such factors targeting women as being excluded.

**Gender equality** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Addressing gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration. In promoting gender equality, it is acknowledged that they are not a homogenous group, and that matters of class, race, economic status, age etc. are important factors in their experience. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women.<sup>2</sup>

**Gender Mainstreaming** is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. Gender mainstreaming is a means to an end, the goal being to achieve gender equality<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.searo.who.int/topics/gender/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Report of the UN Economic and Social Council for 1997  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF>

The NEC agrees to make the following commitments in the advancement of women's participation in elections

NEC is committed to:

- A. Ensuring increased employment opportunities for women for both permanent and temporary positions.
- B. Expanding NEC's efforts to improve access to NEC services for women, including gender mainstreaming in all NEC policies, procedures and activities.
- C. Promoting the right for women's inclusion and maintaining collaborative linkages with organisations particularly those working directly on gender issues throughout the electoral cycle.
- D. Ensuring equal opportunities in development and empowerment of women employees.
- E. Ensuring that during the discharge of their duties, NEC will continue to provide a safe and secure working environment for Commissioners and Staff.

## **PURPOSE**

The prime purposes of this Policy are:

- Operationalise NEC's commitments in promoting gender equality in both institutional and program levels.
- Identify and reduce and or all forms of barriers to women's participating in all areas of NEC's operations and services.
- Increase the number of women employees in the Commission
- Enable NEC to be pro-active in embedding the improvements made at the 2012 and 2018 Elections into a longer-term inclusion mainstreaming framework

## **OBJECTIVE**

The main objective is to improve the participation of women in the country's electoral and political life, specifically their participation in the electoral process as voters, candidates, observers and employees (permanent and temporary) 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 the NEC and stakeholders. The Unit will continue to collaborate and actively engage with Civil Society Organisations, Community Based Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Disabled Persons Organisations, the Media, Ministries Departments and Agencies, International Non-Governmental Organisations, Regional and International Organisations in the course of their work, and mainstream gender where possible in all departments of the NEC.

## **POLICY ACTIONS**

### **A: NEC is committed to ensuring increased employment opportunities for women for both permanent and temporary positions.**

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

1. Consider the use of location-based recruitment for vacant permanent positions rather than the current practice of location transfers.
2. Ensure that all adverts for recruitment state clearly that women are encouraged to apply, thereby encouraging them to participate.
3. Set a quota for the number of women for in all field positions in all subsequent elections and ensure that these benchmarks are met.
4. Ensure the realization of this policy relating to recruitment and ensure staff compliance with such policy with effective monitoring by the Gender and Disability Unit and Research Documentation and Monitoring Department.
5. NEC staff are trained in the development of job descriptions and recruitment processes which are gender friendly.
6. Ensure fair representation of women in its staffing and offer both male and female staff the opportunity for upward mobility/promotion
7. Increase attention to collecting data on how many women apply for and are successful in obtaining NEC permanent positions, key temporary electoral positions and inclusion of this data in NEC reports.
8. Ensure a gender-equal working environment.

### **B: Expanding NEC's efforts to improve access to NEC services for women, including thorough gender screening in all NEC's policies, procedures and electoral activities.**

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

1. Commit to the collection, analysis, dissemination and publication on NEC website of sex-disaggregated data on all NEC electoral activities undertaken including but not limited to- Voter Registration, Nomination, candidates, observers, voter turnout etc

2. Commit to the collection of all other electoral data in a sex-disaggregated manner.
3. Require the development of voter education and information materials that specifically target women and that are delivered through channels appropriate to women.
4. Review NEC polling procedures and training materials, in conjunction with women's CSOs and other organizations, to identify improvements to women's access that are permissible within current law as well as those that require legal amendment.
5. Seek partners with national and international organisations to deliver these commitments.
6. All Departments within NEC be involved in the implementation of the Gender Policy.

**C: NEC is committed to promoting the right for women's inclusion and maintaining collaborative linkages with women's organisations throughout the electoral cycle**

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

1. Stand ready to provide technical advice on proposals to enact special measures for women's representation in elected positions.
2. Champion the findings of the NEC-UNDP gender assessment with other electoral management bodies, government and civil society.
3. Encourage domestic observer organisations and International Electoral Observation Missions to increase their proportion of women as long-term and short-term observers.
4. Network with women organisations in the empowerment of their members on electoral processes and provide the necessary voter education materials to enable them to embark in the voter education programs.

**D Ensuring equal opportunities in development and empowerment of Staff.**

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

1. Mandate a required level of representation of women in training and development activities, including international opportunities.
2. Make resources available for effective staff development and retention strategies.

**E Ensuring during the discharge of their duties, continue to provide a safe and secure working environment for Commissioners and Staff.**

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

3. Conduct a review of the security arrangements of all NEC facilities.

## **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.

### **Policy Review**

- The policy includes time-bound actions that NEC will implement between 2019 and 2024. This period covers the last year of the electoral cycle 2015-2019 and the entire electoral cycle 2020-2024
- The Policy will be reviewed on a five-year basis to align with the parliamentary and presidential electoral cycle.

## **RELATED POLICIES AND REFERENCES**

Draft NEC Gender Policy 2014,

UNDP-UNWomen, Inclusive Electoral Process: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation