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# Mission Report

## ECONEC Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission

6 - 13 June 2021 – Monrovia, Liberia

Implemented by

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

# Mission Report

## ECONEC Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission

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### Acknowledgements

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The ECONEC Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the National Electoral Commission of Liberia, NEC Liberia, and its chairperson, Mrs. Davidetta Brown Lansanah, for having accepted to host the Mission on short notice: making time and mobilizing her team to welcome the delegation; and for all the logistics deployed to facilitate movement of members of the Mission, throughout their stay in Monrovia.

The ECONEC Secretariat takes the opportunity of this report to express appreciation and thank sincerely, Dr. Aladou Amada, vice president of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Niger (CENI-Niger) and Mr. Benjamin Bano Bioh, Director for the Ashanti Region at the Electoral Commission, Ghana, for their availability and leadership during the Mission and the relevant guidance provided to their peers in Liberia.

The Mission underlines and congratulates the commitment and dedication of the technical team from ECOWAS/ECONEC, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the German Agency for International Development Cooperation (GIZ).

Finally, the Joint Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission would like to thank, particularly, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH for the financial support to ECONEC through the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO) project co-funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ).

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## About ECONEC

The ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC) was created in February 2008 to serve as a forum for the exchange of experiences and best practices between the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) of West Africa, to improve the quality of elections in the sub-region and thus, reduce the risk of conflicts resulting from poorly managed elections.

The objectives of ECONEC set out in article 4 of its statute adopted in Conakry on 7 February 2008 are as follows:

- Promotion of free and credible elections in West Africa;
- Promotion of independent and impartial election organizations and administrators;
- Strengthening public confidence in the electoral process through free and credible electoral procedures;
- Development of professional election officials with integrity, a strong sense of public service and a commitment to democracy;
- Predictability of the framework for elections;
- Commitment to the promotion and consolidation of democratic culture to create a conducive environment for the peaceful organization of elections;
- Sharing of experiences, information, technology and election documents;
- Cooperation for the improvement of electoral laws and practices;
- Gradual harmonization of electoral laws and practices, as appropriate, capitalizing on good practice in electoral matters;
- Rationalization and pooling of resources to reduce the cost of conducting elections;
- Improving the working conditions of its members in the fulfilment of their mandate.

To achieve its goals:

- The Network organizes or supports the holding of activities such as workshops, seminars, symposia, meetings, staff exchanges; funding of relevant research; election observation; dissemination of information and experiences in electoral matters; and, in general, any activities or initiatives likely to help it achieve its objectives.
- The Network may offer its expertise and receive consultation and information, as well as publications, to the extent possible, directed to its members.
- The Network can establish and maintain relationships with other regional and international electoral organizations.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

### **BVR**

Biometric Voter Registration

### **CSO**

Civil Society Organization

### **CVE**

Civic and Voter Education

### **EAD**

Election Assistance Division

### **ECONEC**

ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions

### **ECOWAS**

Economic Community of West African States

### **EISA**

Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

### **EMB**

Electoral Management Bodies

### **EOM**

Election Observation Mission

### **EPSAO**

ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations

### **GIZ**

German Agency for International Cooperation

### **NAM**

Needs Assessment Mission

### **NEC**

National Electoral Commission

### **PEEM**

Pre-Election Exploration Mission

### **PEFFM**

Pre-Election Fact Finding Mission

### **PEFM**

Post-Election Follow-up Mission

### **PEF/NAM**

Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission

### **PWDs**

Persons with Disability

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## Executive Summary

The ECOWAS Commission in accordance with its mandate to support electoral processes in Member States uses a complete cycle-wide assessment methodology that entails the deployment of pre-election exploration missions (PEEMs), followed by long-term and short-term election observation missions (EOMs) during the election period, and finally, post-election follow-up missions (PEFMs).

In line with this election assessment methodology, the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), in collaboration with the ECOWAS Election Assistance Division (EAD), deployed, from 6 to 13 June 2021, a joint post-election follow-up and needs assessment mission, PEF/NAM, to Monrovia, Republic of Liberia.

The Mission had two objectives:

1. Assess the level of implementation of the recommendations made to the actors of the electoral process by the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission during the 2017 legislative and presidential elections in Liberia.
2. Assess the needs of the National Elections Commission (NEC) and other key electoral stakeholders in the run-up to the 2023 general elections in Liberia.

Regarding implementation, the Mission gathered from its various interactions with key electoral stakeholders that efforts were made to take into account the recommendations provided by the 2017 ECOWAS Election Observation Mission.

- A proposal for amendment of the Electoral Act has been submitted before the legislature.
- A referendum has been organized in the country, in 2020.
- A road map for the adoption of a Biometric Voter Registration system has been drawn.
- A 'gender' section has been created with the responsibility of gender mainstreaming and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Efforts have been made towards collaboration and interaction with Civil Society Organizations.

Then, the following possible areas of support were identified:

- Civic and Voter Education, CVE
- Institutional communication
- Election results transmission
- Biometric Voter Registration, BVR
- Gender mainstreaming
- Relationship between the EMB and electoral stakeholders (political parties, CSOs, media)

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# Introduction.



The Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission, PEF/NAM, composed of Dr. Amada Aladoua, Vice-President of Niger's Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI); Mr. Benjamin Bano Bioh, the Electoral Commission of Ghana's Director for Ashanti Region; Mr. Francis Gabriel Oke, Head of ECOWAS Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) and Permanent Secretary of ECONEC.

The Mission was supported by a technical team which included Mr. Raouf Salami, Program Officer (ECONEC Secretariat); Mr. Baïdessou Soukolgué, Head of Elections and Political Processes (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa – EISA); Ms. Alicia Kamara, Embedded Expert Electoral Affairs; and Ms. Valerie Arikpo-Ettah, Technical Adviser from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

PEF/NAM was deployed with the financial support of GIZ, through its ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO) Project which is co-funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ).

Meetings were held with the board of commissioners of NEC, the heads of technical departments in the Commission, representatives of political parties, Civil Society Organizations involved in the monitoring of the electoral process and technical and financial partners (UNDP,

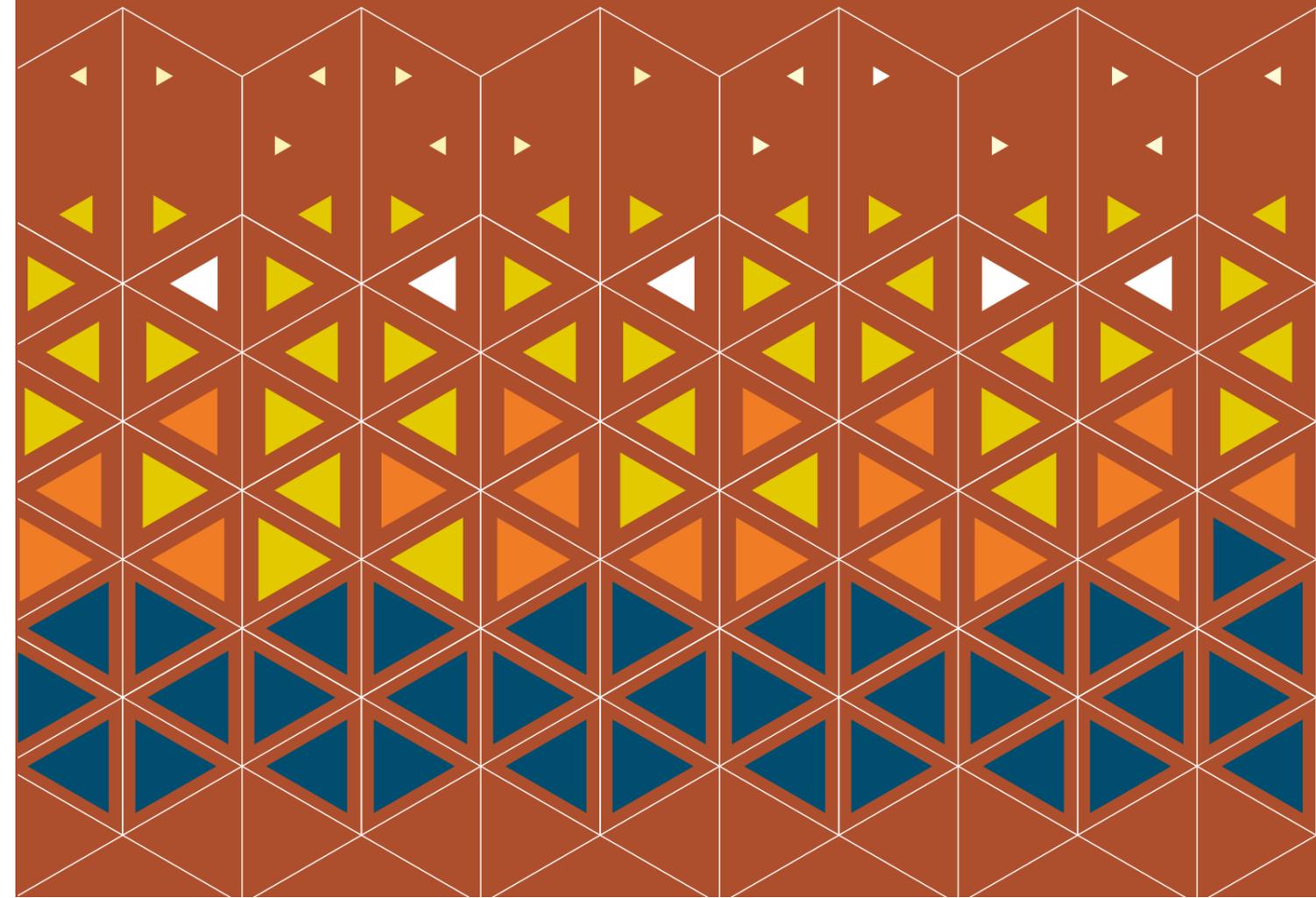
EU, USAID) currently providing support to actors of the electoral process.

Interactions and discussions focused on:

- Concerns around building a credible voter register system through the adoption of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system to replace the current Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) system;
- Constitutional reforms to prevent disputes;
- Steps towards more inclusive elections, particularly, affirmative measures (30% quota for party lists or reserved seats for disadvantaged groups, access for PWD);
- Capacity reinforcement for NEC staff;
- Early release of funds by the government;
- Need for continuous civic and voter education;
- Recruitment and training of polling officials;
- Recruitment and training of party/candidate representatives;
- NEC institutional communication and enhanced relationship with electoral stakeholders (media professionals, political parties, CSOs).

This report seeks to present a clear account of interactions and discussions held with key electoral stakeholders in Liberia.

## Background and Context.



In 2017, ECOWAS deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) for the presidential and legislative elections in Liberia. On this occasion, the Mission made a series of recommendations all aimed at improving the organization and conduct of the electoral process in Liberia.

Some of those recommendations triggered some actions. For example, in response to the recommendation that steps should be taken to improve the Final Registration Roll (FRR), ECONEC and INEC Nigeria, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission, deployed a technical mission before the runoff of the presidential elections in 2017 which assisted the National Election Commission (NEC), Liberia in improving the Final Registration Roll in compliance with the ruling of the Supreme Court prior to the 2nd round of the 2017 presidential elections.

This technical assistance, consisting of the cleaning of the voter roll, continued during the 2020 senatorial elections, with the deployment of a 2nd Technical Mission to assist NEC Liberia with the FRR.

Since then – the 2017 Mission, new members and a new chairperson have been appointed to the National Election Commission, Liberia. The commissioners are already working on the 2023 elections, in a general context, marked by political tensions, insufficient financial and technical resources and the covid-19 pandemic.

Hence, the Post-Election Follow-up Mission's main objective of assessing the level of implementation of the recommendations made by the ECOWAS EOM in 2017 in preparation for the upcoming elections will serve as a guide for ECOWAS' future support to Liberian electoral authorities.

## Recommendations from the ECOWAS Pre-election Fact-finding and Long-term Election Observation Missions Deployed in 2017.



### Recommendations from the ECOWAS Pre-Election Fact Finding Mission.

- Take necessary steps towards improving the voter registration system as this will also serve as basis for NEC to better operate and perform in the long term, a continuous voter registration process.
- Take necessary measures to strengthen, institutionalize and promote women's political participation. Enforce affirmative action initiatives such as 30% quota for party lists or reserved seat for women.
- All political stakeholders to engage in constitutional reform in order to address all the inconsistent provisions in the current Constitution and Code of Conduct as a pre-emptive measure to curb any future disputes triggered by the 10 years' residency clause (Art.52c of the Constitution), the resignation clause for presidential appointees that desire to contest public elections (Art. 5.1 and 5.2 of Code of conduct) and the issue of dual citizenship.
- Approved funds for the National Electoral Commission (NEC) should be released on quarterly basis in the future, to allow the Commission to perform effectively.

### Recommendations from the ECOWAS Long Term Election Observation Mission.

#### To NEC

- **Standard for the recruitment of polling staff.**

Considering the challenges witnessed during the counting and tallying of results, there is a need for NEC to ensure that people recruited to serve as polling agents possess a minimum level of education. When planning for the recruitment of polling agents, it may be useful if NEC can consider targeting schoolteachers.

- **Devolution of non-critical duties to magisterial offices.**

The current practice of concentrating NEC's decision-making authority at the headquarters creates a disconnect between the electoral umpire and politicians at the local level while also slowing down its decision-making process. Devolving some non-critical duties (such as accreditation of party agents) to the magisterial offices at county level will help resolve this.

### To the Government of Liberia

- **Establishment of a national media regulatory body.**

Although the initiative to establish a National Media Council to regulate the activities of media professionals is a laudable initiative, enforcement of its mandate remains difficult because it is a voluntary, self-regulatory body. Hence, a need or the Liberian Parliament to enact a law establishing a media regulatory body vested with the authority to set and adequately enforce standards for media practice in Liberia.

- **Guaranteeing participation of disadvantaged groups in politics.**

The draft Affirmative Action Bill that provides for seven seats to be reserved for women, youths, and PWDs is a laudable initiative which will ensure all shades of national opinion are taken into account in national decision-making. It is, therefore, imperative that the national legislature carefully considers and passes the bill into law.

- **Review of election Timeline.**

The most critical aspect of the election process, outward and inward movement of electoral materials, was greatly challenged by the lack of usable road infrastructure in most parts of the country.

This situation was particularly exacerbated by the rains, which made otherwise passable roads impracticable.

Therefore, considering that the UNMIL will complete its withdrawal in March 2018, there is a need for Liberian authorities to consider reviewing the timing of future elections to coincide with the dry season, in order to minimize the impact of bad road infrastructure on the electoral process.

### To Liberian Political Parties

- **Commitment to women's participation.**

Because women represent approximately 50% of the electorate, there is a need for political parties to make a firm commitment and take necessary steps to enforce affirmative action initiatives in favor of women vying for elective positions. This will help ensure that political decision-making considers the views and opinions of all segments of the population.

# Level of Implementation of Recommendations from the 2017 Missions.

In 2018, NEC Liberia undertook a series of meetings with political parties and Civil Society Organizations to discuss the recommendations made by international EOMs and citizen EOMs which led to further consideration of some of the recommendations.

## **Proposal for amendment of the Electoral Act.**

A proposal was submitted to the National Assembly in March 2019 for a review and amendment of certain provisions of the Electoral Act – particularly, the chapter dedicated to the Gender – with a quota of at least 30% of appointive and elective positions reserved for women. However, the amendment has not yet been validated. Although, some other elements of the proposal have been submitted to a popular referendum conducted in 2020.

## **Adoption of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR).**

The NEC board has made a clear decision to move to biometric voter registration system to enhance confidence in the electoral roll. In effect, a road map has been drawn and a feasibility study on the introduction of the BVR has been conducted by UNDP - through its project in support to the electoral process.

In addition, the Electoral Commission of Ghana committed itself to accompanying and supporting NEC Liberia in this project (during the ECONEC Consultative Meeting on Election Resources Sharing Data base project [14 May 2021]). This discussion continued with a NEC technical exchange mission to Ghana (May 2021). But due to the technical and political sensitivity of the issue, and probably, the cost implications, the project to migrate to BVR is slow to materialize.

Nonetheless, the strong willingness of national actors regarding the need for a migration as part of steps to take in deepening the democratic process in Liberia shows the efficacy and need for continuation of the advocacy work of ECONEC and ECOWAS with political authorities.

## **Establishment of interactive collaboration with CSOs.**

Since the 2017 general elections, NEC Liberia has established a framework for interaction and collaboration with CSOs. While there is a robust engagement with CSOs through a consultative platform at national level, two staff members of each magisterial office appointed by NEC in the 73 districts of the country engage the civil actors at the district level. This should serve to broaden the scope of NEC's actions regarding information dissemination and voter education.

The Mission, therefore, encourages NEC to define, more precisely, the terms of this collaboration.

**Establishment of a Gender and People with Disabilities Unit.**

A dedicated Gender unit has been set up by NEC, and a gender policy adopted (May 2017). However, efforts still need to be made for gender equality in general, and to effectively implement the mechanism of collection of gender disaggregated data during voter registration and voting operations.

The Mission offered insights on experiences observed in the sub-region (Cape Verde, Niger, Benin Republic, Ghana and Nigeria), to be considered as best practices.

Furthermore, a draft policy for the inclusion of PWDs has been prepared by the Gender Department, to the attention of the NEC board members.

While underlining the considerable efforts made by NEC and other electoral actors to make use of the recommendations made by international EOMs, notably the ECOWAS EOM, it was noted that at least two important recommendations which could have an impact on the proper conduct of the current electoral process are yet to be addressed. They are, the creation of a national media regulatory authority, and the timely provision of funds to NEC.

Given the sensitivity of these issues, the ECONEC PEF/NAM strongly encourages political authorities to find the means to address them as soon as possible, in order to meet the relevant standards of election process.

*“..efforts still need to be made for gender equality in general, and to effectively implement the mechanism of collection of gender disaggregated data during voter registration and voting operations.”*

**Possible Areas of Support.**



### Capacity reinforcement on Civic and Voter Education.

Considering the violence surrounding certain phases of the electoral process in Liberia over the past, the representatives of political parties and CSOs who met with the Mission were critical of NEC Liberia's capacity to conduct CVE campaigns. They stressed that CVE campaigns on well-defined segments could help prevent, or at least, decrease election related violence in the country.

Staff of the CVE Directorate who also met with the Mission agreed that CVE campaigns should cover aspects of the electoral process such as voter registration, withdrawal/distribution of voter cards, candidate nomination, voting and counting, as well as results proclamation. They also added that emphasis should be put on the role and responsibilities of voters and citizens in preventing and resolving electoral violence.

The conduct of these campaigns should be inclusive and run in synergy, under the supervision of the NEC Liberia, through its dedicated CVE department.

NEC Liberia should set up a clear CVE strategy that would serve as a guide for actors intervening in this area.

### Enhancement of institutional communication.

Discussions with the Communications Department of NEC - responsible for information dissemination and relations with electoral stakeholders, revealed that there is need for an effective communication strategy and reinforcement of staff capacity.

So, technical support could be provided through the deployment of an embedded expert from a sister commission of an ECONEC Member State, in form of a staff exchange mission.

### Capacity reinforcement on election results transmission.

Transmission of results appeared to be a real concern for NEC Liberia. While there is an ongoing debate on the need to adapt the electoral calendar to the country's climate, this cannot be the only answer to the challenge of poor road infrastructure aggravated by intense rains.

Hence, the need for logistical and material support to enable NEC Liberia collect and publish results within a reasonable timeframe, thereby, reducing suspicions and risks of contestation.

NEC Liberia also needs logistics support for dispatching electoral materials. This is another area ECOWAS/ECONEC should consider in its support to the electoral process.

### Biometric Voter Registration System.

The Mission continued discussions started just a month ago between NEC Liberia and the Election Commission of Ghana. This support intends to be in form of donation of used but functional biometric registration kits and transfer of knowledge to NEC technicians.

These discussions are still on at bilateral level; so, the Mission expressed the availability of ECOWAS EAD and ECONEC to accompany the negotiations until a suitable decision is made by NEC Liberia and an agreement signed between the parties.

### Orientation for NEC's new commissioners.

Orientation/briefing sessions for the new commissioners appointed to NEC Liberia would be appropriate, to make them more operational and efficient. This can be done under the aegis of ECONEC, with technical support from its partners or veteran commissioners from within the network.

Also, ECONEC could initiate an experience sharing program in form of interactive live coaching sessions, with the choice of discussion topics determined through further interactions with NEC Liberia.

### Technical support for the Gender Division.

Commendably, NEC Liberia has already set-up a gender unit. However, efforts remain to be made in terms of legal reforms and measures for more inclusion in the electoral process. ECOWAS can, through ECONEC, involve NEC Liberia in all activities, at regional level, aimed at promoting women representation and participation in politics and management of public affairs.

### Relationship with political parties and Civil Society Organizations.

Exchanges with representatives of political parties and CSOs revealed limitations in their interactions with NEC Liberia. They, very clearly, expressed a desire for better communication from NEC, all through the electoral process, to build more trust and confidence in the process.

Hence, ECONEC PEF/NAM believes that it is necessary to strengthen the framework for exchange and interaction with political parties and CSOs at national and regional levels.

The relevant department of NEC Liberia should institutionalize a multi-actor's exchange framework to better inform on the conduct of the process and collect grievances of the actors of the electoral process for consideration.

*“Commendably, NEC Liberia has already set-up a gender unit. However, efforts remain to be made in terms of legal reforms and measures for more inclusion in the electoral process..”*

## Conclusion and Recommendations.

From all the meetings held with key electoral stakeholders in Liberia, the Post-Election Follow-up and Needs Assessment Mission concluded that the recommendations provided by the 2017 ECOWAS EOM were being given considerable attention.

The Mission, during its interactions with the technical and financial partners, notably UNDP and the European Union - currently supporting the ongoing electoral process, and other political and social actors for peaceful and transparent elections in Liberia, pointed out that the interventions of ECOWAS/ECONEC would serve only to complement existing support from the international community, in the spirit of building synergy amongst actors providing assistance to the country.

Going forward, the ECONEC Mission insisted on the necessity for ECOWAS and ECONEC, as well as other technical and financial partners, to prioritise efforts in:

1. Providing technical support and other forms of assistance for the prompt migration to Biometric Voter Registration system.
2. Further exploring the support offered by the Electoral Commission of Ghana for the migration to biometric registration system, to remove any doubts on its relevance and obtain the full support of all stakeholders, including the Executive.
3. Advocating for timely release of funds to NEC Liberia, to facilitate planning and avoid last minute preparation activities in the electoral cycle.
4. Encouraging Liberian authorities to set up an independent media regulatory body in accordance with the relevant provisions of the African Charter on Democracy Election and Governance and the ECOWAS Additional Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.
5. Supporting necessary actions to strengthen, institutionalize and promote women's political participation.

*“...the interventions of ECOWAS/ECONEC would serve only to complement existing support from the international community, in the spirit of building synergy amongst actors providing assistance to the country.”*

# Annexes.

## Mission's Agenda

Day	Time	Activities	Location
Sunday 06 June		Arrival of Participants	Monrovia-Roberts Intern. Airport
Monday 07 June	9:00 - 09:30	Pre-mission briefing	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	10:00 - 11:00	Meeting with the Chairperson of NEC and close collaborators (BoC & Exec. Dir....)	NEC HQ
	13:00 - 14:30	Lunch Break	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	15:00 - 17:00	Meeting with Operations Department of NEC	NEC HQ
Tuesday 08 June	10:30 - 12:00	Meeting with Legal Department of NEC	NEC HQ
	12:30 - 14:00	Lunch Break	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	14:30 - 16:00	Meeting with Communication and Sensitization Departments of NEC	NEC HQ
Wednesday 09 June	10:00 - 12:00	Meeting with Technical Partners of NEC: (USAID / IFES – UNDP-EU)	NEC HQ
	12:30 - 14:00	Lunch Break	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	15:00 - 16:00	Meeting with Civil Society Organisations	NEC HQ
Thursday 10 June	10:00 - 11:00	Meeting with representatives of political parties	NEC HQ
	12:30 - 14:00	Lunch Break	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	15:00 - 16:00	Debriefing with NEC Chairperson	NEC HQ
Friday 11 June	10:30 – 12:00	End of Mission briefing - Reporting	Boulevard Palace Hotel
	12:30 - 14:00	Lunch Break	Boulevard Palace Hotel
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Courtesy calls on German Ambassador and Country Director of GIZ</li> <li>Debrief with the Head of EU delegation to Liberia</li> </ul>	Mamba Point Hotel  EU Residence Mamba Point
Saturday 12 June		Departure of participants	Monrovia-Roberts Intern. Airport
Sunday 13 June		Departure of participants	Monrovia-Roberts Intern. Airport

## List of Participants

Participant's Details				
Name	Institution/Country	Provenance	Email	Telephone
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## Pictures



Members of the ECONEC PEF/NAM with NEC Liberia's Head of Operations and her team



ECONEC Joint PEF/NAM meeting with representatives of political parties in Liberia



ECONEC delegates with the German Ambassador, GIZ Country Director, UNDP Project Coordinator



Representatives of CSOs in Liberia meeting with ECONEC delegates

## Pictures II



Members of the ECONEC Mission to Liberia (June 2021)



ECONEC delegates with members of NEC Liberia's Board of Commissioners



Courtesy visit to the EU Ambassador to Liberia.



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