

Sierra Leone Post-Election Seminar

REPORT SUMMARY

30 January -1 February 2024

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Following the June 2023 General Elections in Sierra Leone, CPA UK was invited to deliver a Post-Election Seminar in the Parliament of Sierra Leone from 30 January to 1 February 2024.

A cross-party delegation of three UK parliamentarians and a clerk travelled to Freetown to participate in this three-day programme with 70 Sierra Leonean MPs.

The programme was designed in partnership with the Parliament of Sierra Leone and topics included cross-party cooperation, the work of committees, and engaging the public.

In addition to the seminar, the delegation visited development projects and organisations in Sierra Leone, giving the UK delegation a greater understanding of issues facing both parliamentarians and the public in Sierra Leone.

CPA UK DELEGATION

The Rt. Hon The Lord Foster
of Bath

Theo Clarke MP

Kate Osamor MP

Sarah Rees, Clerk

Martin Vickery, CPA UK

Imogen Richards, CPA UK



A panel of Sierra Leonean and UK delegates at the event opening.
Photo credit: Prince Kenneh, Principal Strategic Planning Officer - Centre for Strategy and Parliamentary Studies (Specialised Office of Parliament).

Sierra Leone Post-Election Seminar

FULL REPORT

COUNTRY PROFILE

Population: 8.4 million

Capital: Freetown

Head of State: President of the Republic of Sierra Leone
His Excellency Rtd.
Brigadier General Julius
Maada Bio

Type of Legislature:
Unicameral

Members of Parliament:
149 (135 elected and 14
paramount chiefs)

Districts: 16 districts

Speaker of Parliament:
Rt. Hon. Dr. Abass Bundu



The CPA UK Delegation outside the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

UK and Sierra Leone Bilateral Context

The UK and Sierra Leone have a long history of collaboration and partnership, especially during some of Sierra Leone's most challenging periods of recent history, including the Civil War and the Ebola epidemic. CPA UK's work contributes to this partnership.

This Post-Election Seminar represents the most recent programme of a long chain of activities that have been delivered in the past decade. These include delegation visits to both Westminster and Freetown, Legislative Scrutiny Workshops, and Committee Workshops.

2023 General Elections

General Elections in Sierra Leone were held on 24th June 2023 to choose both the President and Members of Parliament. There were 13 presidential candidates contested in the election, with the two leading candidates dominating the opinion polls – Incumbent President Julius Bio of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) and Dr Samura Kamara of the All People’s Congress (APC). Election campaigning began on 23 May 2023, and important issues raised for voters were the high cost of living, rising inflation, electricity supply challenges and the rising cost of fuel.

The election resulted in President Bio being re-elected to serve a second five-year term in office with 56.17% of the votes. Samuel Kamara came second with 41.16% of the votes. The SLPP won 81 seats in Parliament, and the APC won 54.

There were comments made by several countries and international organisations commending the strong Voter turnout, however, they equally expressed concern over the “lack of transparency in the tabulation process” with election observers flagging “statistical inconsistencies.” [1]

In response, the opposition party, the APC, initiated a boycott of parliament, with most APC elected members vowing it would not take part in any level of governance in the country, from parliament to local councils, following what it alleged were ‘fraudulent’ presidential election results.

In October 2023, ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States), the Commonwealth and the African Union mediated peace dialogues, facilitated by the Sierra Leone Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion, to find a way to bring both parties together to end the political stalemate. Following these talks, the remaining APC members returned to parliament in November 2023. [2]

On 26th November 2023, a group of militants attacked a number of locations in Freetown, including a military armoury and a prison – releasing the majority of its 1800 prisoners. A number of senior APC officials, as well as former president Ernest Bai Koroma, the APC condemned any attempt, however, to associate the party with the attempted-coup.

[1]<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/30/africa/sierra-leone-polls-controversy-intl/index.html>

[2]<https://nightwatchnewspaper.com/apc-mps-sworn-in-today-what-the-future-holds/>



Sierra Leone Parliament buildings. Photo credit: Prince Kenneh, Principal Strategic Planning Officer - Centre for Strategy and Parliamentary Studies (Specialised Office of Parliament).

Cross-Party Cooperation

With these events occurring before the programme, a significant priority of the seminar was to explore and recognise the important role of cross-party cooperation in parliament. Throughout the seminar, participants from both parties would work collaboratively, brainstorming topics including stakeholder engagement, public outreach, and diversity and inclusion. Cross-party panels of parliamentarians shared their experiences as members in both the UK and Sierra Leone parliaments.

Campaigning for constituents, especially on major development issues, can benefit from working cross-party. Members from different parties and regions share similar aims of addressing gender-based violence, increasing access to clean water and improving cellular network in rural areas. In parliament members can work together on these issues by jointly proposing amendments, collectively lobbying ministers and by attending debates together.

Committees in both Sierra Leone and the UK are cross-party, and committee members must work as a team to ensure effective analysis and scrutiny. During the seminar, participants took part in a committee hearing exercise, with the UK delegates acting as witnesses, to explore how committees can work together to co-ordinate lines of questioning and elicit useful information from witnesses.

Women in Parliament

The 2023 General Elections saw a significant increase in elected female parliamentarians, from 14.5% to 30.4%. This increase in female lawmakers is largely thanks to the new Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, which set a 30% quota of women in parliament, and other institutions. Fifteen of the new female parliamentarians took part in the Post-Election Seminar.

Female participants shared that the Sierra Leone Parliament has not been physically designed for the inclusion of women, with the very limited sanitary facilities for women. Female members shared the challenge of waiting to be called to speak in the well of parliament and that there had been debates in which no woman had spoken.



Sierra Leone delegates sharing their contributions during the seminar. Photo credit: Prince Kenneh, Principal Strategic Planning Officer - Centre for Strategy and Parliamentary Studies (Specialised Office of Parliament).

A strong theme in response was the importance of women sticking together, regardless of party and background. Male MP allies similarly can play an important role in making sure that parliament is an inclusive and receptive place for female MPs.

To celebrate and recognise the importance of the increased presence of female parliamentarians, the British High Commissioner hosted a reception for the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Dr Isata Mahoi, a number of female parliamentarians, and the CPA UK delegation.

Following Dr Mahoi's appointment, the Women's Caucus of Sierra Leone has been re-established, with the aim to create a non-partisan forum to identify common challenges facing female parliamentarians and to collaboratively offer solutions and support. Female law and policy makers from both local to national level have been invited to join the forum.



Minister Dr Isata Mahoi addresses the Women's Caucus of Sierra Leone during a reception hosted by the British High Commissioner.

Public Engagement and Expectations

The expectations of the constituents in the UK and Sierra Leone on the responsibilities of their MPs is very different. Whilst in the UK, constituents often expect MPs to be very involved locally through activities like campaigns, surgeries and community events, in Sierra Leone there is an expectation of them having a significantly different role. Sierra Leonean MPs can be expected to attend and finance funerals and weddings within their district. These different expectations of an MP brought to light the challenge of finding the right balance of engaging with the constituents and the public, whilst maintaining professional and fair boundaries and communicating reasonable expectations.

Social media was accepted as a key tool for informing and engaging with the public. It can be a useful platform to hear from constituents and inform them of a member's activities. Different regions and demographics prefer different platforms and in Sierra Leone WhatsApp and Facebook are often the most popular. Hosting or taking part in radio shows are a useful way to engage with the public, especially for those in rural areas.

Although the methods of engagement and expectations from the public may have differed between the two legislatures, there was strong consensus of the behaviours the public would expect from their MPs, including transparency, accountability, being approachable and fairness.

Impact & Next Steps

This Post-Election Seminar represents the most recent programme of a long chain of CPA UK activities that have been delivered with the Parliament of Sierra Leone in the past decade.

There continues to be an appetite for future engagement, with women in parliament and cross-party collaboration continuing as areas of interest. In March 2024, several Sierra Leonean MPs are participating in CPA UK's annual Westminster Seminar conference in London. We look forward to future bilateral programmes, likely after the UK's next General Election.



Sierra Leonean MPs working on a break-out activity in the seminar.



Participants sharing their contribution following a brainstorming activity.

Public Engagement and Expectations

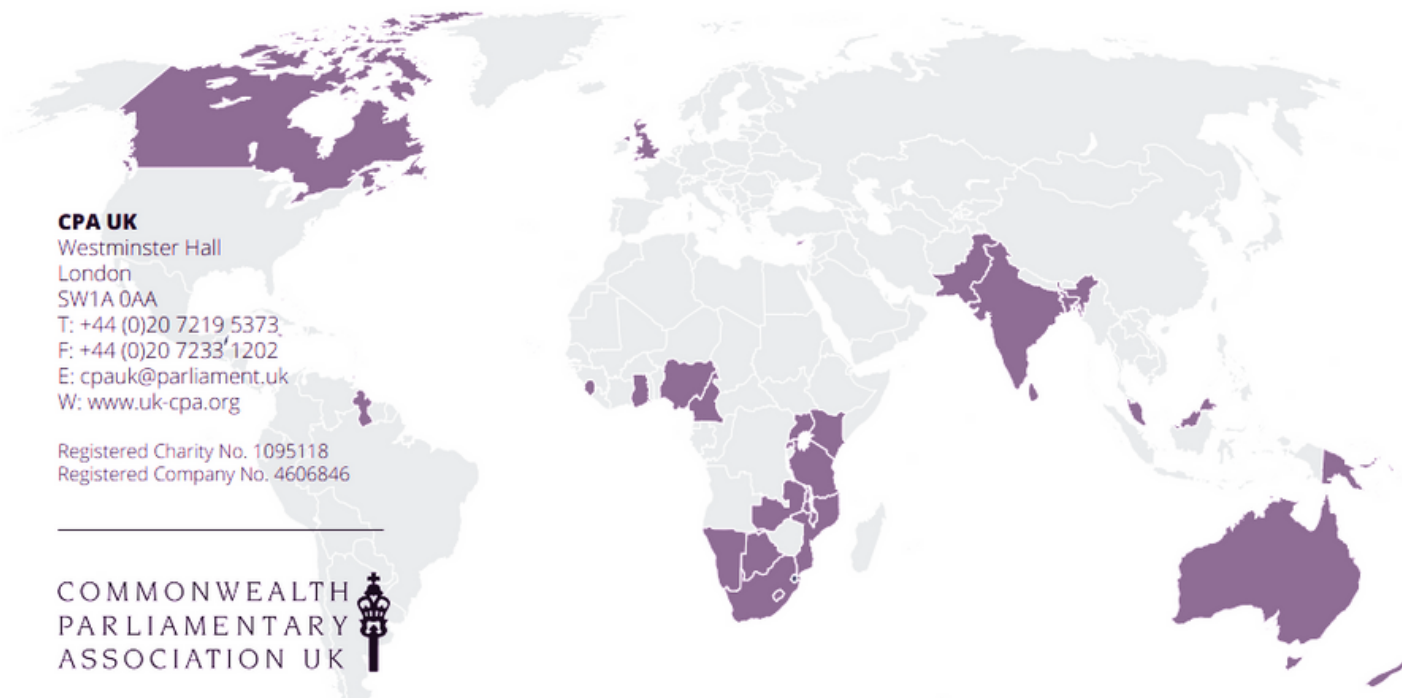
The expectations of the constituents in the UK and Sierra Leone on the responsibilities of their MPs



The CPA UK Delegation at the Leh Wi Lan Headquarters, an education programme that has received support from the UK Government.



A participant sharing his contribution to the group, following a brainstorming activity. Photo credit: Prince Kenneh, Principal Strategic Planning Officer - Centre for Strategy and Parliamentary Studies (Specialised Office of Parliament).



CPA UK

Westminster Hall
London
SW1A 0AA
T: +44 (0)20 7219 5373
F: +44 (0)20 7233 1202
E: cpauk@parliament.uk
W: www.uk-cpa.org

Registered Charity No. 1095118
Registered Company No. 4606846

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Report by Imogen Richards, CPA UK