



NATIONAL ELECTION WATCH (NEW) SL

MAIDEN EDITION NEWSLETTER

What's Inside!

- ◆ NEW Concludes National Meeting
- ◆ NEW provides platform for civil society on Decentralisation Policy.
- ◆ Pre Assessment to Gauge the Electoral Landscape.
- ◆ NEW Signs MoU with NEC for 2022/2023 Electoral Cycle
- ◆ NEW's Reaction to President Bio's Proclamation of Sierra
- ◆ Leone's Ever First Mid-Term Population Census
- ◆ NEW en di Pipul
- ◆ Update on the Procurement Process.

Message From the Chairperson Marcella Samba –Sesay

I am delighted to introduce to you our Maiden edition of the NEW Quarterly Newsletter on our activities, membership interactions, elections Pre-assessments and advocacy visits on democratic and governance reforms in-between elections. NEW as a national civil society coalition brings on board citizens voices and interests in a number of policy processes and actions in order to make democracy work for the people. The prospects for democratic consolidation in Sierra Leone lies in a system of governance where citizens and policy makers can curate joint ideas so that outcomes can be tangible and benefit the entire nation. Our work with a number of institutions has increased their democratic legitimacy because NEW's organizational presence helps close the feedback link between public institutions and citizens. Our work has helped improved the level of transparency of democratic institutions as the coalition creates the platform for effective dialogue and disseminates information from such engagements through our national structures across the country and our media talk show 'NEW EN DI PIPUL'.

This edition shares exciting news and information on participatory democracy as the coalition signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for the 2022/2023 Electoral cycle. NEW also engaged the national statistics office- Stats SL to work towards an inclusive people centered Mid-Term Population and Housing Census that will bridge the social capital and a census that would be credible and nationally owned. Inside this edition also NEW engages the Ministry responsible for Local Government and Rural development and presented a position paper on the Reviewed Decentralization Policy put together by CSO leaders across the country.

NEW will continue to advance the promise of democracy for all.

Happy Reading!



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Welcome to our maiden edition

We welcome you to the maiden edition of our newsletter, which will be published quarterly by the Communications Team of National Election Watch (NEW). The newsletter intends to ensure NEW maintains a strong direct relationship with citizens, civil society, government, International Community and elections stakeholders in the country, and to also keep them abreast of its engagements on a regular basis. We will not only report NEW's activities and the impacts they are creating on the governance trajectory, but also, we will share NEW's positions on critical national governance issues, especially those issues that border on elections.

NEW is a coalition of over 400 registered national and international civil society and nongovernmental organizations, established in 2002 primarily to observe and monitor the fairness, transparency and credibility of public elections in Sierra Leone in order to increase public confidence in the legitimacy of elections results.

In the spirit of volunteerism and neutrality, NEW has observed elections since 2002. Prior to the 2018 elections, NEW received support from the European Union (EU) to engage with the in-between elections' activities. NEW used the opportunity to engage with the 2018 electoral cycle at the very early stages. This funding support enabled NEW to move from merely observing elections to actually participating in planning and implementing various election processes with electoral stakeholders. The EU has provided similar support to NEW for the 2022/2023 electoral cycle. This maiden edition of the newsletter provides highlights of different activities NEW carried out under this support in the last quarter.

We wish you a good read!

NEW Comms Team

NEW Concludes National Meeting

The National Meeting has been the highest decision making body in the National Election Watch (NEW) Structure. NEW as a Coalition of over four hundred Organisations, works in a decentralized structure and the National Meeting is the platform that is used to take critical decisions in the implementation of activities and administrative arrangement. This Meeting constitutes the Chairperson, members of the Strategic Management Committee (SMC), Regional and District Structures and the NEW Secretariat. The National Meeting is held in a rotational basis in District Headquarter towns of the Country in a bid for the leadership to interact with Districts and Chiefdoms Structures at all levels.

Since NEW received funding from the European Union at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the coalition had not met physically before this time to take critical decisions, though there had been virtual meetings. It is against this backdrop that NEW Organised a two-day National Meeting as part of the implementation of the EU funded Project as carved out in Result Area 1 of the Project Document: “Building Internal Processes and Systems to Strengthen NEW’s Governance”, held at the Port Loko City on Thursday 19th and Friday 20th, November 2020. The purpose of the meeting was to position NEW ahead of the 2022 and 2023 electoral cycle.

The two-day National Meeting held in Port Loko focused on the framework of activities 1.2; 1.3; and 1.9 i.e. Developing NEW’s Communications Strategy, Review of NEW’s Constitution, and Capacity Building for NEW’s Structures. Hitherto, the National Meeting in Port Loko was set out to achieve five strategic objectives:

- ◆ To update all layers of the NEW Structures on the Status of activity implementation of the EU Funded Project so far
- ◆ Engage the National Meeting on the validation of NEW’s Communications Strategy and the Review of NEW’s Constitution
- ◆ Capacitate the Leadership Structures with brand new Computers, accessories, and Modems; and trainings
- ◆ Get update on the Political, COVID-19 response and District Teams’ Updates from all the districts
- ◆ Position NEW for the observation of the 2022 and 2023 electoral cycle.

At the National Meeting, Series of activities were carried out to mark the two-day exercise which included:

district updates

At the general Plenary, all of NEW’s seventeen (17) District Coordinators gave updates on the Status of their various districts under the headings of Political Climate, COVID-19 Response, and the NEW’s District Team activities. Each District Coordinator gave a detailed update of happenings in their districts from the period under review including challenges and recommendations.

secretariat report

The National Coordinator of NEW, Rev. James Lahai, gave a succinct Report on activities carried out since the grant agreement was signed with the EU on 12th May 2020. His presentation covered the 4 ‘Result Areas’ to be achieved in the EU funded project and key activities undertaken which included; Training on the NCRA process, Decentralization Policy CSO conference, Collaborative and Partnership Engagements, Procurement of goods and services, Distribution of COVID-19 Prevention Items and Chieftaincy elections.

session with consultants

Two Consultants were brought in at the National Meeting to do presentations on their individual consultancies on the Review of NEW’s Constitution and the NEW Communications Strategy respectively. The Plenary extensively deliberated on the Legal Status of the Coalition and agreed to have a Memorandum of Association as part of efforts to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission.

Whilst, the Consultant for the Communications Strategy presented a Draft Strategy at the Meeting for validation by the Plenary; Members then made their inputs to the document and some action points and recommendations were put forward as well.



Capacity building/trainings

NEW distributed 24 laptops to the Regional Coordinators, District Coordinators, IT officer and the Project team during the National Meeting. This was followed by training in a bid to enhance their capacity to be able to use technology to communicate effectively and network, access NEW’s online social media platforms, and be an integral part of the conversation. The training also covered the basic use of laptop, Zoom, hotspot connection, the use of WhatsApp on laptops and more. The capacity building was carried out in a bid to enhance effectiveness of the NEW Structure amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.



Laptops for District Coordinators



Following the publication of the draft National Decentralization Policy by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), National Election Watch (NEW) convened a meeting of civil society leaders from across the country at the Buxton School Hall at Charles Street in Freetown on Tuesday 22nd

September 2020. This was to enable civil society to discuss the draft National Decentralization Policy and to make inputs for the attention of the government.

NEW invited the Director of Decentralization in the MLGRD, Mr Alex Bonapha, to present the draft policy statement and justifications to civil society leaders to better inform the discussions and to ensure quality inputs.

“We welcome the review of the National Decentralization Policy, as it provides for citizens to reflect on their experiences of 16 years of local governance in the country. The draft policy is very progressive for local level democracy, citizens participation and local level accountability.

“We are also encouraged by the recognition of the importance of revisiting the stalled constitutional review process by the Draft decentralization Policy, which states in page 11 that the absence of provisions for decentralization in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone is a ‘major problem to the Local Government Act 2004,’ Chairperson of the National Election Watch, Mrs Marcella Samba-Sesay, said.

However, NEW and civil society leaders raised a number of critical issues relating to the draft policy, including: the absence of constitutional provisions for local governance in the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone; the continuous redrawing of territorial boundaries without taking into consideration historical, cultural, ethnic and social factors; conduct of local council elections on non-partisan basis; establishment of Regional Coordinating Offices (RCOs), which conflicts with the



principles of decentralization and undermines the effectiveness of the process; the draft policy provides for only four regions, whereas according to the Provinces Act of 2017 as amended, there are five regions in the country; the RCOs will make room for non-elected officials to wield more power and authority than the elected

officials with the potential to usurp the powers of local councils; and MPs sitting in local council meetings.

NEW and civil society leaders strongly emphasized the need for the government to finalize the constitutional review process, as the implementation of this progressive policy will be hampered by the failure to finalize the 1991 constitutional review process.

The leadership of NEW presented these concerns in the form of a Position Paper to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Hon Tamba Lamina, at the Ministry’s Youyi Building Office in Freetown on Tuesday 6th October 2020.

A similar presentation was also made to the Parliamentary Committee on Local Government on Wednesday 4th November 2020 in one of the offices in the House of Parliament. Both the Minister and the Committee assured NEW and civil society that they would look into the concerns they have raised and do the needful.

“The participation of civil society is in tandem with the objectives of the review process, which is to consult widely until the people get what they want,” Minister Tamba Lamina said.

On his part, whilst responding to civil society’s Position Paper, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Local Government, Hon Aaron Koroma, said: “What NEW and civil society have done is a clear demonstration of responsible citizenship. This is what we expect civil society to be doing; to be engaging governance constructively. We look forward to further dialogue between our Committee and NEW”.



Pre-election assessment in Constituency 110, Western Area Rural District

Ahead of the parliamentary re-run bye-election in Constituency 110, Western Area Rural District, Constituency 078 and Ward 287 in Bo district, Ward 348 in Moyamba district and Ward 226 in Karene district scheduled for Saturday 12th December 2020, National Election Watch (NEW) conducted pre-election assessment in these localities on Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th November 2020. The objective of this exercise was to assess the political atmosphere, gauge citizens' mood and readiness to participate in the electoral process, listen to and document citizens' fears and concerns, determine the readiness of security forces and overall preparedness of Election Management Bodies (EMBs). As the political temperatures rose to boiling point in Constituency 110 close to the re-run bye-elections, the need for an independent assessment became imperative. The 12th December 2020 scheduled re-run bye-election in Constituency 110 was the third to be conducted by NEC in a little over one year.



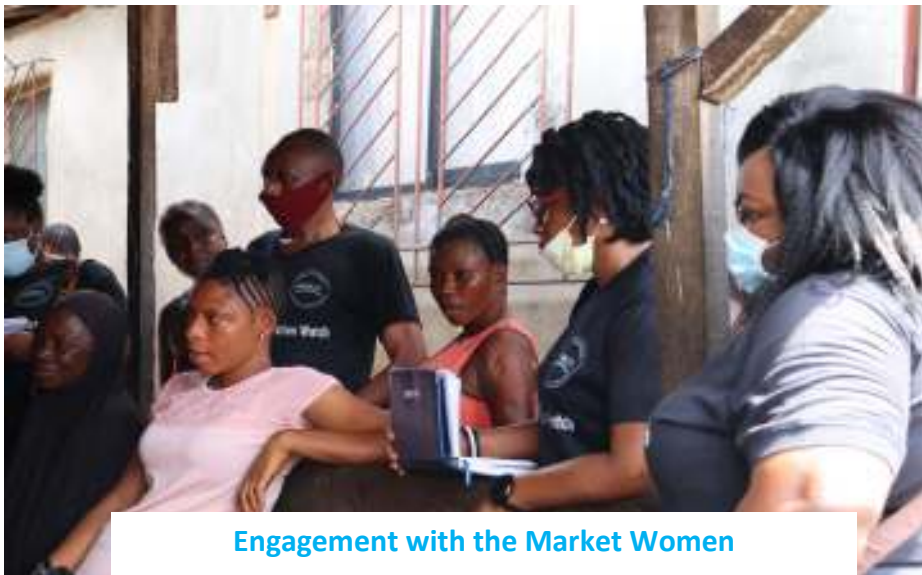
Engagement With the Police



Engagement With the Community Members

NEW targeted several groups and other community stakeholders during the assessment, including National Electoral Commission (NEC), Office of National Security (ONS), Sierra Leone Police (SLP), political parties' candidates, village head candidates, local party stalwarts/stakeholders, village heads, Paramount Chiefs, Community youths, women's leaders, market women and religious leaders.

It will be recalled that NEC conducted parliamentary bye-elections in Constituency 110 on Saturday 24th August 2019 following the nullification of the result of the 2018 general election by a court order. The bye-election of 24th August 2019 was also marred by political tensions, rivalries, and outright violence leading to the destruction of sensitive voter materials, including ballot boxes and papers at the Sarah Modern Preparatory School, Centre Code 15086. Up to the time NEC announced the date for the re-run bye-elections, the perpetrators of this broad daylight violence were not brought to book. The failure of the police to investigate this incident and make their findings public became a serious concern for residents of the constituency who feared such violence might occur again in the re-run bye-election. There were tensions brewing all over the constituency.



Engagement with the Market Women

The day NEW conducted its pre-election assessment in Constituency 110, serious conflicts erupted between rival supporters of the All-People's Congress (APC) and Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) over who should take lead in rehabilitating the Goderich Community Centre resulting in community tensions and unrest. Police invited the two political parties stakeholders to the Lumley Police Division for questioning.

Among the key concerns that the people NEW spoke to raised, were the importation of thugs into the constituency to cause mayhem during elections; the impartiality and independence of the Sierra Leone Police to effectively discharge their responsibility during elections; the failure of the police to arrest and prosecute those who destroyed ballot boxes and papers during the 24th August bye-election, even though "there was enough evidence" to identify and arrest the perpetrators; the unchecked movements of political party heavyweights in and around polling centres with unaccredited youth; the interference of Paramount Chiefs in election and the discrimination against women in the award of party symbols.

NEW shared the findings and recommendations of this exercise with all the EMBs, other elections stakeholders and the general public through press statements, radio and television programmes, press and social media, as well as bilateral engagements and multi-stakeholders' fora. This did not only increase awareness about the growing insecurity in these elections' communities, but also, it generated a lot of activities by different stakeholders with the common objective of ensuring peaceful elections.



Godrich Community Center



NEW Signs MoU with NEC for 2022/2023 Electoral Cycle

National Election Watch (NEW) is a coalition of local and international organizations in Sierra Leone with the common objective of supporting free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections. In pursuit of this objective, NEW works and collaborates with all Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) and elections stakeholders in the country. NEW always formalizes its relationship with EMBs and other elections stakeholders with the signing of MoUs. It was in this light that NEW signed a MoU with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) on Monday 19th October 2020 at the Commission's Tower Hill Office in Freetown for the 2022/2023 electoral cycle. The purpose of the MoU is to further strengthen the long existing cordial relationship between the two institutions. The leaderships of both institutions spoke glowingly about the importance of collaboration and the numerous mutual benefits that would be derived from it.

Chairperson of NEW, Mrs. Marcella Samba-Sesay said the signing of the MoU was a clear indication of the willingness of both institutions to work together towards ensuring that all elections-related processes were transparent, inclusive and participatory.

“Our engagement with NEC is to add value to the electoral process, and not to undermine it,” Mrs Samba-Sesay said.

On his part, Chief Electoral Commissioner, Mr. Mohamed Konneh, said he was happy to be given the opportunity to serve as Chief Electoral Commissioner at the time a strong foundation has already been laid by his predecessor for him and his team to build on.



“NEW has always been and will continue to be a strong pillar to democratic institutions in the country. I will lead the Commission with an open-door policy. My doors and my phones will always be opened,” Mohamed Konneh assured NEW.

Prior to the signing of the MoU, NEW held a meeting with NEC on 22nd July 2020 at the Conference Hall of the Commission at Tower Hill. The purpose of the meeting was for NEW to update the Commission on its EU funded project, as well as to get updates from the Commission on its planned activities and its

COVID-19 strategy to support the rollout of such activities. One of the key highlights of the meeting was the presentation of NEC's Annual Report to NEW by the Chief Electoral Commissioner.

NEW is also at the final stages of developing and signing a MoU with the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA). The leaderships of the two institutions have been working on it for some time now.



NEW/NEC MOU



President Bio's proclamation of the conduct of Sierra Leone's ever first mid-term population and housing census on 20th July, 2020, took the entire nation by surprise and it left some people wondering why a mid-term census at a time the country was battling with the Covid-19 pandemic, harsh economic realities and many social upheavals. Whilst proclaiming the mid-term census, President Julius Maada Bio espoused...“in order to help us plan properly, ensure equitable distribution of resources, and foster economic and social development, government has decided to conduct a mid-term population and housing census across the country this year”.



NEW responded immediately to this Presidential Proclamation by issuing a press statement on 29th July 2020, unequivocally stating its position and concerns about the proposed mid-term census. The press release states: “NEW is concerned with the prioritisation of this process NOW at a time the Covid-19 measures should be occupying the whole planning machinery and resources spent in that direction...”, stressing that “questions of non-inclusivity of all voices of the people (political groups, civil society etc.) as befitting democratic governance processes were abound and this announcement falls within that context”. It

further highlights the

“ever-growing trends of government actions that keep casting shadows of doubt on critical governance events and processes as it sets a negative tone to future works”.

This swift response by NEW helped to raise awareness about the dire implications of the proposed mid-term census on the country's electoral calendar, administrative and electoral boundaries among citizens and it also ignited engaging public debates across the country through radio, television, press and social media. NEW engaged the leadership of Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) to further re-enforce its concerns and reaffirm its position on the mid-term census.

Even though these discussions between NEW and SSL were largely considered by both parties to have gone well, yet critical concerns raised at the meeting by NEW did not receive answers during the meeting, rather the leadership of SSL committed itself to respond to those concerns in due course. NEW was further critical of the legal ramifications the conduct of a mid-term census would pose, giving that, the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone provides for the conduct of census every ten years after the conduct of a previous one, without any provision for a mid-term census.

Additionally, there was also no government policy framework to serve as the ‘basis or reference point’ for the conduct of this mid-term census such as the National Midterm Development Plan, the New Direction Manifesto (NDM), 2020, Supplementary budget and or the Strategic Plan of Statistics Sierra Leone.

The major highlight of the 29th July press statement was NEW's outright call for the cancellation of the entire mid-term census for the following reasons:

1. Giving that, in the President's proclamation, he stated that “Data from this mid-term population and housing census will undoubtedly inform and guide the implementation of various development programmes including the 2019-2023 Medium Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. It is NEW's belief that the outcome of a mid-term census to be held in April of 2021 will not be available for public use till sometime in 2022 when we shall be holding local council elections and general elections in 2023. This presupposes the fact that the outcome of this mid-term census will not add any value to the development planning of this government as espoused by the President in his proclamation and no government will re-focus its development plans in the 4th year and yield the desired results when all attention would be shifted to elections;
2. The deferment of the mid-term census from December 2020 to April 2021 has the likelihood of affecting the general elections calendar of 2023. This is because according to law, NEC should have produced the voter register six (6) months to the elections, which falls around 2022; consequently also, any data produced by a mid-term census will likely inform a boundary delimitation process that also has the tendency to affect the electoral calendar.
3. In its press statement of 20th October 2020, SSL gave the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic as the major reason for postponing the mid-term census to April 2021, as it would “impact on its planned support from external institutions. Though, NEW recognized that COVID-19 was still in existence, NEW was however not convinced enough with this reason advanced by SSL for the postponement of the mid-term census, owing to the fact that the President's proclamation for the conduct of a mid-term census was done at the height of the pandemic here in the country and abroad. Also, NEW, in its first press statement, premised its position on prioritizing the fight against COVID-19 pandemic as against conducting a mid-term census at that critical time in our country. This concern was then ignored by SSL.

Further, the fact that SSL has already established structures to ensure the conduct of the mid-term census and that these structures would continue to be supported until the COVID-19 situation is conducive enough for the international consultants to travel and live in Sierra Leone, and in the absence of a predictable end to the COVID-19 pandemic, NEW then recommended for the cancellation of the mid-term census at least for this 2022-2023 electoral cycle.

National Election Watch (NEW) believes, in spite of the growing influence of social media across the globe, traditional media, mainly radio and television still account for a large audience and they can reach out to many audiences at the same time. It is this strong belief that led NEW to initiate and support a radio and television programme called *NEW en di Pipul*. It's a bi-weekly radio and television programme that seeks to provide an interactive platform through which NEW communicates governance-related information to the general public, policy makers, government and its agencies and the International Community, as well as receive feedback from them.


The programme is hosted on Radio Democracy 98.1 FM or in the African Young Voices (AYV) television studios and simulcast on all Independent Radio Network (IRN) -affiliated radio stations throughout the country.

“*NEW en di Pipul* helps NEW to set the national agenda on issues of governance and elections for the press, general public and policy makers through highlighting issues that are prevalent, relevant and urgent at any given time and generate national discussions around them,” Head of NEW Communications Team, Sallieu Kamara said.

After careful planning and consultations, the maiden edition of *NEW en di Pipul* hit the airwaves on Saturday 28th November 2020. The maiden discussions focused mainly on the then upcoming parliamentary re-run bye-elections in Constituency 110 in the Western Area Rural District and the mid-term population and household census proclaimed by President Julius Maada Bio.

Having conducted a pre-election assessment to gauge the mood and preparedness of the people in the constituency, Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) and elections stakeholders ahead of the re-run bye-elections scheduled for 12th December 2020, NEW used this maiden programme to share its findings and proffered recommendations with the general public.

NEW en di Pipul has also dealt with other national topics/issues that are critical to the wellbeing of our democracy, including the role of opposition political parties in governance and the draft national decentralization policy.

**National Election Watch**


NEW EN DI PIPUL

RADIO AND TV PROGRAM

DISCUSSION TOPIC


UPCOMING BYE-ELECTIONS IN CONSTITUENCY 010 AND WARD 012 KAILAHUN DISTRICT AND WARD 192 IN KAMBIA DISTRICT

MODERATOR




Ransford Wright
Moderator


PANELISTS



James Lahai
National Coordinator
NEW




Badriatu Turay Alghali
Project Assistant
NEW



Salieu Kamara
Spokesperson
NEW


**20**
FEBRUARY

**8:00 – 9:00**
PM PM

Join us on Radio Democracy 98.1FM
and all IRN member stations
nationwide



National Election Watch    

**National Election Watch**

NEW EN DI PIPUL

RADIO AND TV PROGRAM

DISCUSSION TOPIC


“THE NEW DECENTRALIZATION POLICY AND THE NATIONAL CIVIL REGISTRATION AUTHORITY PROCESS”

MODERATOR



Ransford Wright
Moderator

PANELISTS



James Lahai
National Coordinator
NEW




Salieu Kamara
Spokesperson
NEW



Marcella Samba-Sesay
Chairperson
NEW

**16**
JANUARY

**8:00 – 9:00**
PM PM

Join us on AYV TV and all IRN
member stations nationwide



National Election Watch    

NEW FOLLOWS DUE PROCESS IN THE PROCUREMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES

As part of the EIDHR 415580 project awarded to National Election Watch SL by the European Union delegation in Sierra Leone, National Election Watch (NEW) strongly desires to review its internal processes to strengthen its governance systems. Hence the need to hire consultants and vendors for the procurement of goods and services. In order to ensure we follow due process as provided for in the procurement laws of the state, we now set up a procurement committee to oversee all of the procurement processes ranging from advertisement for expression of interest, opening of bids, short listing and interviewing, selection and signing of contracts. This process has given rise to the procurement of a vehicle (SUV), Covid-19 Prevention Materials, Consultancies to develop a new communication strategy, review NEW's Constitution and develop an M&A, review and update administrative procedural manual, review of the 2017-2021 strategic plan and develop a new one, and develop monitoring evaluation accountability and learning system (MEAL).

To ensure the procurement processes adhered to best practices and standards, the Terms of Reference for the Procurement Committee was endorsed by the National Coordinator on Wednesday 5th August, 2020 and a procurement committee was established comprising members from the SMC, Programme's team, Communication lead and the Quality Assurance Officer.



Procurement Committee in Session

Since then the Procurement committee has been working assiduously putting out TORs for consultancy services required, requesting for Quotations for the Supply of 24 Laptop Computers and a vehicle with its specifications respectively.

The committee has also held several meetings to shortlist, evaluate and make recommendations.

For the period under review, the following procurement processes have been completed and work in progress:

- ♦ Supply of 24 Laptop computers with accessories and Modems
- ♦ Develop NEW's Communication Strategy
- ♦ Review of NEW's Constitution.
- ♦ Review and Update NEW's Administrative & Procedural Manual.
- ♦ Develop a MEAL system for NEW.

Development of NEW membership Policy



Interview session in progress