

# **The 30% Gender Quota Law in Sierra Leone: A Game Changer for Women's Access to Parliament?**

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## **Abstract**

The June 2023 elections in Sierra Leone occurred against the backdrop of amendments to the Public Elections Act (PEA), the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE), and a switch from the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system to the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system. For the first time in Sierra Leone's history, law reforms, among other things, introduced a 30% gender quota rule for parliamentary and councillorship seats. After the 2023 elections, women won 41 out of the 135 elected parliamentary seats, increasing the percentage of women parliamentarians from 12.32% in the 2018 elections to 30.37%. Despite the increase, there have been concerns about the overall effectiveness of the gender quota rule in facilitating women's access to parliamentary seats. The gender quota rule is set below 50%, is not accompanied by the candidates' ranking order, does not apply in the election of 14 paramount chiefs, and operates within poor data desegregation of the candidates. This article highlights the required reforms to address the identified legal challenges to facilitate women's equal access to representation in Sierra Leone's Parliament.

## **Key Words**

*Gender quotas, women's access to parliament, women's political participation, elections, Sierra Leone, women's and elections, electoral systems.*

## Introduction

The people of the Republic of Sierra Leone took part in multi-tier elections on 24 June 2023 to elect the president, members of Parliament, city mayors, and local councillors. This is the fifth election since the end of the decade-long (1991-2002) civil war in Sierra Leone. While the election observers described the 2023 elections as well funded, peaceful, credible<sup>1</sup> and competitive,<sup>2</sup> they also noted incidences of political polarisation, violence,<sup>3</sup> ill-preparation on the side of the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL), as well as transparency issues during tabulation,<sup>4</sup> and tallying of results.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the 2023 elections occurred against the backdrop of a change in the electoral system and several electoral law reforms undertaken a few months before the elections. A presidential declaration, made six months before the elections, replaced the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system with the Proportional Representation (PR) system for the parliamentary and councillor elections.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the June 24 2023 elections employed the FPTP system to elect the President, Chairpersons, and Mayors, while the District Block PR System was

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<sup>1</sup> African Union, 'African Union Election Observation Mission to the 24 June 2023 General Elections in the Republic of Sierra Leone' (Preliminary Statement, June 26 2023, Freetown, Sierra Leone) <<https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/final-preliminary-statement-26-06-2023.pdf>> accessed 2 July 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth, 'Interim Statement of The Commonwealth Observer Group by The Chair, HE Prof Yemi Osinbajo, Immediate Past Vice President of Nigeria, 2023 Sierra Leone Multi-Tier Elections' (June 26 2023 Freetown, Sierra Leone) <<https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-06/Interim%20Statement%20by%20the%20Commonwealth%20Observer%20Group%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%202023.pdf?VersionId=EyufO8EwUZR08sDeTht6cHTi.Bs9f7vh>> accesse 2 July 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The Carter Center, 'Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement' (June 27 2023) <[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf)> accessed 2 July 2023.

<sup>4</sup> European Union, 'European Union Election Observation Mission to Sierra Leone General elections, Preliminary Statement' (Delivered on June 26 2023 in Freetown) <[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20SL%20PS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20SL%20PS_FINAL.pdf)> accesed<sup>d</sup> 2 July 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth, 'Interim Statement of The Commonwealth Observer Group by The Chair, HE Prof Yemi Osinbajo, Immediate Past Vice President of Nigeria, 2023 Sierra Leone Multi-Tier Elections' (June 26 2023 Freetown, Sierra Leone) <<https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-06/Interim%20Statement%20by%20the%20Commonwealth%20Observer%20Group%20in%20Sierra%20Leone%202023.pdf?VersionId=EyufO8EwUZR08sDeTht6cHTi.Bs9f7vh>> accessed 2 July 2023.

<sup>6</sup> The Carter Center, 'Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement' (June 27 2023) <[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf)> accessed 2 July 2023.

employed to elect members of Parliament and councillors.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, amendments were introduced in the Public Elections Act (PEA),<sup>8</sup> the Political Parties Act (PPA),<sup>9</sup> and the new Gender and Women’s Empowerment Act (GEWE) was enacted.<sup>10</sup> The amendments to the PEA and the newly enacted GEWE Act introduced the 30 % gender quota rule, among other things. Section 58 of the PEA and Section 2 of the GEWE Act require political parties to nominate one woman for every three candidates for parliamentary and council elections. The 30 % gender quota rule is unprecedented in Sierra Leonean politics and was realised after decades of civil society and international community advocacy. Following its application in the 2023 elections, the 30% gender quota has increased the number of women parliamentarians from 12.32% in the 2018 elections to 30.37%. Nonetheless, there have been concerns about the overall effectiveness of the quota rule in facilitating women’s access to parliamentary seats.

Given its newness in Sierra Leone’s legal and electoral system, this article studies the framing of the provisions establishing the 30% gender quota rule as provided under the PEA and GEWE laws. It assesses the applicability of the rule, as well as its strengths and weaknesses in advancing women's access to the Parliament of Sierra Leone. The article employs a mix of research methods, including documentary analysis, literature review and semi-structured interviews. The documentary analysis is instrumental in establishing the trends of women's political participation and the wider electoral and governance context of Sierra Leone since political independence in 1961, the 1991-2002 civil war, and the post-civil war era. Literature review complemented the

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<sup>7</sup>The Carter Center, ‘Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement’ (27 June 2023) <[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf)> accessed 2 July 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Act number 17 of 2022.

<sup>9</sup> 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Supplement to Sierra Leone Extraordinary Gazette Vol CXLXIII, No 91 of 2022.

documentary analysis, notably through the doctrinal research method.<sup>11</sup> An appraisal of the international and regional conventions and national laws is useful for understanding the commitments of the Government of Sierra Leone in ensuring the protection, provision, and promotion of women's rights to participate in public and political life. In addition, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 23 respondents from diverse sectors between June and September 2023. The author held structured interviews with three government officials,<sup>12</sup> six members of civil society organisations,<sup>13</sup> four officials of international organisations,<sup>14</sup> two members of the electoral management body,<sup>15</sup> four leaders of political parties, two members of the media sector, and two members of academia. Interviews were instrumental in understanding the dynamics of the implementation of international and regional conventions. They also facilitated the consideration of the granularity of the legal hindrances facing women's participation in political processes in Sierra Leone. Overall, semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to triangulate the information obtained through documentary analysis and facilitated the formulation of robust conclusions.

Following this introductory section, the article proceeds in four parts. The first part appreciates the historical context of women's political participation in Sierra Leone, and the second part presents the trends and barriers to women's effective political participation. Further, it demonstrates the process towards enacting the 30 % gender quota rule through the PEA and GEWE laws. In this

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<sup>11</sup> Doctrinal research focuses on what the law is as opposed to what the law ought to be. It is concerned with finding and analysing the law to determine the logical reasoning behind it. Mike McConville and Wing Hong Chui (eds), *Research Methods for Law* (Edinburgh University Press 2010)

<sup>12</sup> These were from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) and the National Commission for Social Action.

<sup>13</sup> These were from 50/50 Group, Campaign for Good Governance, Marrah and Associates, Peace Women, Girl2Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G) and Women's Power Organisation.

<sup>14</sup> They were from the Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, and UN Women.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (NEC-SL) staff were undertaken.

part, the article focuses on the 2023 elections, examining the applicability, strength, and weaknesses of the gender quota rule in advancing women's access to Sierra Leone's Parliament. This is followed by recommendations. The historical context for women's political participation in Sierra Leone is provided below to set a foundation for the rest of the article.

### **Historical Context of Women's Political Participation in Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone's electoral governance system is composed of, among other things, the national government, the Parliament, and the local government, which consists of district councils and ward committees.<sup>16</sup> There is also a hereditary customary chieftom structure established during colonialism, which operates at the local level and is represented in the Parliament.<sup>17</sup> Two political parties dominate politics: the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All-Peoples' Congress (APC). Both parties have nearly clear-cut regional strongholds.<sup>18</sup> While negative patriarchal and religious values have hindered women's political participation in North Sierra Leone, there is evidence that some women from the East and South have been participating in public spheres since the pre-colonial era.<sup>19</sup> During the intertribal disputes, women played leading roles in protecting territories against troublesome ethnic groups such as the Temne and Limba. Female paramount chiefs were also witnessed during the colonial era and in the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Sierra Leonean women took an active part in the anti-colonial struggles, with women such as Mrs Constance Cummings-John,

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Koroma, "Decentralisation and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone" in ACCORD, "Consolidating Peace Liberia and Sierra Leone" [2012] Issue 23.

<sup>17</sup> The Native Administration Act of 1927 governs the Customary Chieftom. Chieftoms are led by a paramount chief, under whom are section and divisional chiefs, followed by village-level authorities.

<sup>18</sup> SLPP's strongholds are in the southern and eastern provinces, while APC enjoys the support of the northern and western provinces.

<sup>19</sup> Clare Castillejo, "Women's Political Participation and Influence in Sierra Leone" [2009] FRIDE Working Paper.

<sup>20</sup> These included Paramount Chief Madam Humornya, from Kenema District in the East, and Paramount Chief Madam Yoko, from Moyamba District in the South.

a leader of the Women's Movement, participating in the 1955 historic national strike.<sup>21</sup> Gaining political independence on 27 April 1961 from the British, Sierra Leone enjoyed relative political stability until 1967. The Women's Movement activities, which were instrumental during the independence struggle and in the overall promotion of political consciousness, declined after the change of power from the SLPP, the party of independence, to the APC after the 1967 general election. The exiling of Mrs Cummings John, a Women's Movement leader, to England soon after independence contributed to the slowing down of the activities of the women's movement.<sup>22</sup> No tangible initiatives were adopted to advance women's participation in Sierra Leone's political activities. The post-colonial government reduced women's role in politics to voting during elections and mobilising new members within the political party settings. Accordingly, there were a handful of women parliamentarians between 1960 and 1970.<sup>23</sup>

The period between 1967 and 1991 witnessed Sierra Leone's political landscape, which was characterised by coups due to political misrule, resource mismanagement, corruption, and human rights abuses.<sup>24</sup> The two coups in 1967<sup>25</sup> and 1968 were followed by a semblance of stability under the leadership of Siaka Stevens, who led the country from 1968 to 1985. In 1978, Siaka introduced a one-party system through the 1978 Constitution to silence the mounting pressure directed towards the APC government due to persisting governance challenges and economic

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<sup>21</sup> The protest occurred between Friday, 11 February and Saturday, 12 February 1955, due to wage-related grievances. Hussainatu J. Abdullah, Aisha F. Ibrahim and Jamesina King, "Women's Voices, Work and Bodily Integrity in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Sierra Leone" [2010] DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.121.

<sup>22</sup> Steady, Filomina, "Women and Collective Action in Africa" [2006] New York: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>23</sup> These included Ella Kobolo Gulama, from Moyamba District in the South, Nancy Tucker, from Bonthe District in the South, and Madam Wokie from Kenema District in the East.

<sup>24</sup> Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013]

<sup>25</sup> The first coup happened in 1967, resulting in political instability in the country; Brigadier General David Lansana led it.

hardships.<sup>26</sup> The introduction of a one-party state in 1978 further reduced women's activism, with the majority of women torn between taking part in political life under a single-party arrangement and or remaining apolitical. The women who preferred to be active in politics were mainly cheerleaders and foot soldiers of the one-party rule. Violence, as well as internal and external pressure, led to the adoption of the 1991 Constitution that re-introduced a multiparty system. The undemocratic practices and dire economic conditions during Siaka's period and that of his successor – Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh – led to the emergence of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which resulted in a deadly decade-long civil war from March 1991 to January 2002.<sup>27</sup>

A military coup in April 1992 led to the installation of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) with a new head of state and a new cabinet. The NPRC also dissolved the House of Representatives and suspended the 1991 constitution and political activities, establishing a military rule. Sierra Leone held elections in 1996, which led to the 1991 Constitution being amended and the restoration of a multiparty system, executive presidency, and Parliament. The Constitution was suspended again after a coup in 1997 and was reinstated in 1998. During the coups and civil war, women experienced the worst forms of violence in the form of torture, rape, forced marriage, and sex slavery in rebel camps.<sup>28</sup> In the communities, women continued to mobilise for peace. For example, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW) created a network for women to meet regularly, share information, and deliberate issues of common concern. The

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<sup>26</sup> Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013] *Africa insight* 42 16-29.

<sup>27</sup> Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013] *Africa insight* 42 16-29.

<sup>28</sup> Hussainatu J. Abdullah, Aisha F. Ibrahim and Jamesina King, "Women's Voices, Work and Bodily Integrity in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Sierra Leone" [2010] DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.121.

interaction birthed the Sierra Leone Women's Forum as the umbrella organisation of over 50 women's groups. The Forum led by the Sierra Leonean Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP) and Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN) prepared for the Beijing conference and supported the peace process, including participating in the National Consultative Conferences in 1995 and 1996. Women's associations held campaigns, debates, marches, rallies, and press conferences and issued communiqués supporting peace and transition programmes. Through their communiqués, women demanded to be 50 % of any peace delegation and demanded equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels. This notwithstanding, women continued to be underrepresented in peace processes and positions of power. For example, during the military regime from 1991 to 1996, there was only one female cabinet member. There was no female participant at the Abidjan Peace Accord meeting of 1996, which unsuccessfully tried to bring an end to the civil war.<sup>29</sup> In the 1997 elections, women won only five out of the 80 contested parliamentary seats. Two women were appointed ministers among the 25-person cabinet, and two were appointed to deputy ministerial positions out of 20 deputy ministers.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Abidjan Peace Accord, the civil crisis continued, and on 25 May 1997, the RUF, the rebel group, overthrew the elected government. The overall human rights abuses during the war necessitated international intervention, which led to the signing of a Peace Accord on 7 July 1999 in Lomé, Togo, between the government of Sierra Leone and the rebels.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, a deadly

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<sup>29</sup> The two principal signatories were President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Foday Sankoh, RUF leader, a rebel group. However, Sankoh refused to honour the terms of the agreement, and Kabbah was forced into exile in the 1997 military coup. Hence, the Accord failed to bring about peace. Kabbah regained power the following year).

<sup>30</sup> Hussainatu J. Abdullah, Aisha F. Ibrahim and Jamesina King, "Women's Voices, Work and Bodily Integrity in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Sierra Leone" [2010] DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.121.

<sup>31</sup> ECOWAS, the UN, the EU, and the governments of the UK, the US, and Canada spearheaded the reconstruction under the label of peacebuilding, coordinated by UNOSIL (later UNIPSIL), the government of Sierra Leone, the UN Sierra Leone country team, the UN Peacebuilding Commission in New York, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013] *Africa insight* 42 16-29.



decade-long civil war was declared over in January 2002. Despite their role in infiltrating the junta, exposing their activities in arms deals and diamond smuggling, efforts to bring the warring factions to the table, integration of combatants into the society, and taking part in the pro-democracy campaigns, women were once again marginalised in the formal peace processes to end the civil war.<sup>32</sup> There were only two female members of the delegation – one from each side of the conflict during the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF. Accordingly, the Peace Accord text had only one reference to women, which recognised women as victims of war in need of protection. The Peace Accord did not recognise women as crucial actors and agents of change in peace-building processes.<sup>33</sup> Overall, between 1992 and 2011, out of a representative sample of 31 major peace processes, only 2% of chief mediators, 4% of witnesses and signatories, and 9% of negotiators were women.<sup>34</sup>

The Lomé Peace Agreement also birthed the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC) to "address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation."<sup>35</sup> The SLTRC recognised the link between pre-conflict gender inequalities and conflict-enabled gender-based violations.<sup>36</sup> The SLTRC recommended, among other things, that

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<sup>32</sup> Hussainatu J. Abdullah, Aisha F. Ibrahim and Jamesina King, "Women's Voices, Work and Bodily Integrity in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Sierra Leone" [2010] DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.121.

<sup>33</sup> The text stated that "Given that women have been particularly victimised during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development programs, to enable them [to] play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone."

<sup>34</sup> Swaine Aisling, "Women, peace, and security" in Paul D Williams, Matt McDonald (Eds.), "Security studies: An introduction" (3rd ed., pp. 511– 525) [2018] Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228358-35>.

<sup>35</sup> The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in July 2002. It presented its final report to the President of Sierra Leone on 5 October 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Valji Nahla, "A window of opportunity: Making transitional justice work for women" [2010] UN Women <[https://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/ Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2012/10/06B-Making-Transitional-Justice-Work-for-Women.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2012/10/06B-Making-Transitional-Justice-Work-for-Women.pdf)> accessed 15 August 2023.

Sierra Leone ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).<sup>37</sup> The report also called for laws to require political parties to ensure that at least 30% of their candidates for all national and local elections are women.<sup>38</sup> While Sierra Leone signed the Maputo Protocol in 2003, it took twelve years for it to be ratified in 2015 and nearly two decades for the parliamentary gender quota rule to be adopted in 2022. The delay in ratifying the Maputo Protocol and adopting a gender quota rule signals several barriers featuring in the trend of women's political participation in Sierra Leone, as expounded in the section below.

### **Trend and Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Sierra Leone**

In countries such as Rwanda,<sup>39</sup> and Kosovo,<sup>40</sup> postwar state-building processes offered an important opportunity for placing friendly legal frameworks for women's political participation. However, the situation was different in Sierra Leone after a long civil war (1991-2002). While the Local Government Act of 2004 established a 50 % quota for women at Ward Development Committees in districts and towns, the quota was limited to the lowest level of governance structure. No immediate measures were taken to introduce gender quotas for chieftaincy, mayoral, parliamentary and presidential positions after the end of the civil war in 2002. Although Sierra Leonean women have always come out in almost equal numbers as men to vote,<sup>41</sup> the 1991 Sierra

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<sup>37</sup> Christabel Unobe, "Justice Mirage? Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Local Women's Experiences" [2022] *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 429–436 ISSN: 1078-1919 <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000600>.

<sup>38</sup> Katherine M. Franke, "Gendered subjects of transitional justice" [2006] *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 15(3) 813–828

<sup>39</sup> Article 10 of the Constitution of Rwanda requires women to hold at least thirty percent (30%) of positions in decision-making organs. Article 75 of the same Constitution establishes the Chamber of Deputies, which is composed of eighty (80) Deputies, including twenty-four (24) women elected.

<sup>40</sup> Kosovo's Law on Gender Equality of 2004 provides equal opportunity for male and female political participation. The Law on General Elections 2008 requires representing at least 30% of either gender in elections.

<sup>41</sup> Women constituted 50 and 49 % of registered voters in the 2002 and 2007 elections,

Leone Constitution only makes three references to women under articles 8 (3) (c), 9 (1) (b), and 22 (2) (e). Each of these provisions refers to women as mothers or a vulnerable group, with no specific provisions supporting women's political participation beyond voting rights. Between 2002 and 2022, attempts to introduce a gender quota rule to increase the number of women in political leadership faced strong opposition from the political parties due to fear that men would lose power to women.<sup>42</sup> The status quo remained for two decades despite Sierra Leone already being a signatory to international and regional treaties that call for equal participation of men and women in political and public life.<sup>43</sup> Sierra Leone acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1988 and 1996, respectively.<sup>44</sup> As a member of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Sierra Leone has committed to implement the provisions of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG),<sup>45</sup> the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol),<sup>46</sup> and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.<sup>47</sup> These international and regional treaties call upon state parties to take deliberate measures to ensure that women participate in political life on an equal basis with men.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, Sierra Leonean women have held

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with a civil society leader, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Sierra Leone has non-treaty obligations derived from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, the African Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, and the Declaration of Political Principles of the Economic Community of West Africa.

<sup>44</sup> Sierra Leone ratified CEDAW and ICCPR in 1988 and 1996, respectively.

<sup>45</sup> Sierra Leone ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) in 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Sierra Leone ratified the African Charter in 1983.

<sup>47</sup> Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol for the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

<sup>48</sup> Article 3 and 25 of ICCPR, Article 2,4 and 7 of CEDAW and Article 9 of Maputo Protocol

positions of foreign minister, chief electoral commissioner, Minister of Energy and Power, Deputy Speaker, Assistant Inspector General of Police, and Chief Justice.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, women consistently made a small fraction of candidates and officials elected to positions of power. For example, 64 (11%) of the 566 parliamentary candidates were women in 2007, and 38 (6.5%) were women out of 586 parliamentary candidates in 2012. In 2018, female parliamentary candidates stood at 100 (12.6%) out of 795 candidates. Before the 2023 general election, 18 (14.52%), 16 (12.9%), 15 (12.40%), and 18 (12.32%) of women were elected as members of parliament in 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2018 elections, respectively.<sup>50</sup>

Many barriers keep women out of political and public life, including cultural and religious values that confine women to domestic and private spheres. Politics of regionalism, patronage systems, electoral financing, stigma and disapproval from families and communities, harassment, and violence against women in politics and elections affect women's meaningful participation in political and public life.<sup>51</sup> Girls and women remain disproportionately vulnerable in accessing education, capacity building, and employment opportunities. Scholars have argued that after the civil war, the post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding initiatives that, to some extent, incorporated gender perspectives, failed to have an impact in reorienting the Sierra Leonean polity towards gender-inclusive governance. According to Akanji Olajide, even the National Gender

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<sup>49</sup> Women like Dr. Kadi Sesay from Bombali District in the North, a former Minister of Development, and Mrs. Zainab H. Bangura from Tonkolili District in the North served as Foreign Minister. Hajia Hafsat Kabba from the Western Area was the Minister of Energy and Power. Dr. Christiana Thorpe, from the Western Area, served as the Chief Electoral Commissioner. Mrs Elizabeth Alpha-Lavallie, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, has made a mark in Sierra Leone's political arena. In the Police Force, a woman like Mrs Kadi Fakondor, Assistant Inspector General of Police from Moyamba District in the South, is one of the most senior officers. In business enterprise, Dr. Sylvia Blyden, from Western Area and Presidential Candidate in the 2002 General Elections, has been a very successful journalist, as her Awareness Times Newspaper is one of the most read. The country's Chief Justice is a woman, Her Excellency Justice Umu Hawa Tejan-Jalloh.

<sup>50</sup> Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013] *Africa insight* 42 16-29.

<sup>51</sup> Clare Castillejo, "Women's Political Participation and Influence in Sierra Leone" [2009] FRIDE Working Paper.

Strategic Plan, the establishment of the National Committee on Gender-based Violence, and the adoption of the Sexual Offences Act, did not effectively go hand in hand with the promotion of women's participation in political and public life.<sup>52</sup> Kwame Asah-Asante studied the impact of the Ebola virus disease epidemic and its contribution to weakening the economy and the democratic gains the country has obtained since coming from war in 2002.<sup>53</sup> According to Kwame, women were susceptible to the Ebola disease and made more casualties than men due to the role they played in domestic spheres. He points out that the emergency measures employed to fight against the Ebola epidemic negatively affected the exercise of civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights and rolled back the democratic gains the country made since emerging from the civil war in 2002. In discussing gender dynamics in African elections, Esther Kibuka-Sebitosi points out that while males and females have access to education, men have more access to employment and hold the majority of public service roles compared to women.<sup>54</sup> Hence, men are better off financially. Accordingly, when it comes to elections, women face challenges in getting nominated by their political parties due to poor political networks and financial muscles. Alex Sivalie Mbayo argues that the absence of a political will, strong institutions, financial capacity to implement the laws, the pervasiveness of customary practices, and Islamic law hinder the full realisation of gender equality in Sierra Leone.<sup>55</sup> He also pinpoints challenges related to a high level

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<sup>52</sup> Akanji Olajide, "Reconstruction, Peacebuilding and Elections in Post-war Sierra Leone: A Critical Note" [2013] *Africa insight* 42 16-29.

<sup>53</sup> Kwame Asah-Asante, "The Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic: Implications for the Democratisation process in Sierra Leone. *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*" [2015] 2(1& 2), 71-88.

<sup>54</sup> Kibuka-Sebitosi Esther, "Gender dynamics in elections in Africa, *Journal of African Elections*" [2013] DOI: 10.10520/EJC147379, available at [https://www.academia.edu/12803524/Gender\\_Dynamics\\_in\\_Elections\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.academia.edu/12803524/Gender_Dynamics_in_Elections_in_Africa) accessed 10 July 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Alex Sivalie Mbayo, "Gender Equality for Sustainable Peace in Sierra Leone: Analysis of Policy Frameworks, Strategies, and Efforts by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) to Enhance Equality for Women" [2012] Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

of illiteracy among Sierra Leone women and violence against women in political and public life as impending factors for women to access and thrive in public life.

The shortfalls of the women's movement in Sierra Leone have also contributed to ineffective women's political participation in the country. According to Clare Castillejo, the women's movement stalled immediately after the end of the Civil War in 2002.<sup>56</sup> Gender issues were dropped off the national agenda and women failed to gain the political space they strived for. According to Hussainatu Abdullah et al, the pre and post-war period women's movement in Sierra Leone lacked ideological clarity to deal with patriarchal structures deeply entrenched in the communities.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, when some clarity existed, there was no clear strategy or action plan to execute it. Abdullah further argues that just after the war, the women's movement focused on mainstream issues and downplayed the women-specific nuances in their advocacy. For example, towards the 2002 general elections, women advocated for freer and fairer elections and failed to, in tandem, effectively advocate for increased women's participation in politics. Similarly, Alex Sivalie Mbayo points to the role of male-headed civil society and their incapacity to lead to gender transformation due to deeply embedded cultural and religious bias that consciously and subconsciously limit women's role in domestic spheres.<sup>58</sup> Maseray Ngadie Rogers notes the importance of the rules guiding elections in determining women's access to political and public life. He argues that since the end of the war, the low representation of women in political leadership in Sierra Leone has been caused by the failure of the country's legal framework, particularly the

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<sup>56</sup> Clare Castillejo, "Women's Political Participation and Influence in Sierra Leone" [2009] FRIDE Working Paper.

<sup>57</sup> Hussainatu J. Abdullah, Aisha F. Ibrahim and Jamesina King, "Women's Voices, Work and Bodily Integrity in Pre-Conflict, Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Processes in Sierra Leone" [2010] DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.121.

<sup>58</sup> Alex Sivalie Mbayo, "Gender Equality for Sustainable Peace in Sierra Leone: Analysis of Policy Frameworks, Strategies, and Efforts by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) to Enhance Equality for Women" [2012] Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

1991 Constitution and the Public Elections Act that failed to guarantee gender equality and equal representation of men and women in positions of power. In the same vein, Maseray advises Sierra Leone to follow the example of South Africa, Uganda, Namibia, and Mozambique by adopting affirmative action/quota systems and equity strategies to fast-track both equitable and equal women's political participation in line with the international and regional conventions that Sierra Leone is party to. Maseray further argues that the adoption and implementation of a gender quota system are more feasible than an endeavour to transform the community's mindsets and socio-economic structures. This article contributes to this conversation by studying the newly introduced 30% gender quota rule in Sierra Leone. Leveraging on the most recent elections that took place in June 2023, it discusses the applicability, strengths and weaknesses of the 30% quota rule in facilitating women's access to the Parliament of Sierra Leone and offers recommendations.

### **Role of the Gender Quota Rule in Advancing Women's Access to Parliament in Sierra Leone**

The 1991 Constitution mainly governed the 2023 elections. However, different from other elections, the 2023 elections happened against the backdrop of reforms in the electoral system and electoral laws that happened a few months before the elections. A presidential declaration that was made six months before the elections replaced the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system with the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system for the parliamentary and councillors' elections.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the amendments were introduced in the Political Parties Act (PPA). The Public Elections Act (PEA) and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE)

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<sup>59</sup> The Carter Center, 'Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement' (27 June 2023) <[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf)> accessed 2 July 2023.

were enacted in January 2023.<sup>60</sup> Notably, the re-introduced PR system was embedded with the 30% gender quota rule for parliamentary and councillor positions under Section 58 of the PEA and Section 2 of the GEWE Act.

The passing of the 30 % gender quota rule in Sierra Leone resulted from decades of advocacy and influence by civil society and the international community.<sup>61</sup> A move towards attaining a gender quota rule for positions of power gained momentum in 2019 when a fully-fledged Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was established, separating gender and children's issues from the then Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender.<sup>62</sup> Through consultations with varied stakeholders, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs drafted a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy in 2019. This policy underwent a series of deliberations both inside and outside the Parliament before it was launched in 2020. The Policy required 30 % of elected, nominated, and appointed positions to be held by women by 2022.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the 2022 amendments to the PEA considered options for the realisation of the 30 % gender quota rule in political positions.<sup>64</sup> As the 1991 Constitution contains both PR and FPTP electoral systems, two options for realisation of the 30 % rule were considered. Women-only reserved constituencies were suggested for the FPTP electoral system, and the option to include one woman in every three candidates was proposed for the PR electoral system. The proposals faced opposition from most politicians, sections of civil society organisations, and traditional authorities.<sup>65</sup> Male politicians were not ready to give up their seats to women leaders. Traditional men feared that men would lose control over

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<sup>60</sup> The Carter Center, 'Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement' (27 June 2023) <[https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf)> accessed July 2 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with a civil society leader who prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with a government official, prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Part 3.5, objective 4, and part 4 of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with a government official prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023

<sup>65</sup> Interview with an officer in an international organisation who prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.



women and their wives, arguing that women's political advancement had the potential of breaking families.<sup>66</sup> After thirteen months of back-and-forth deliberations, the option for women-only reserved constituencies under the FPTP electoral system was rejected. Vibrant advocacy from citizens, civil society,<sup>67</sup> and strong political will from the Ministry of Gender and Children and President Julius Maada Bio, resulted in the amendment of the PEA, which, among other things, contained a requirement for one woman to be included in every three candidates in the political party list.<sup>68</sup> Section 58 of the PE provides that; -

58. (1) A candidate shall be nominated in writing by three voters of the electoral area for which he intends to contest an election and shall not be nominated in more than one electoral area.

(2) For every 3 candidates nominated under subsection (1), one of them shall be female.

The integration of a 30 % gender quota rule in the PEA made it easy for its replication in the GEWE Act, which was enacted six months later after the PEA was amended. Section 2(1) of the GEWE Act states that "There shall be, in public elections, the reserved seats of (a) 30% constituency seat in each district... shall be reserved exclusively for female candidates contesting parliamentary election; (b) 30% ward seat reserved in each locality... shall be reserved exclusively for female candidates contesting local council election.

Aside from the elected positions, the GEWE Act extends the 30 % gender quota rule to apply in appointments, employment, and decision-making positions. Section 3 (1) of the GEWE Act

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with a leader in civil society organisation, prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>67</sup>The CSOs leading the campaign included, but were not limited to, the Campaign for Good Governance, Association for the Wellbeing of Rural Communities and Development, Women's Forum for Human Rights and Democracy, Social Enterprise Development, and Network Movement for Justice and Development.

<sup>68</sup> Increasing women's political representation was one of the key promises in Bio's 2018 election campaign, articulated in the SLPP Manifesto.

encourages the President to consider including 30 % of women when appointing members of the cabinet and other government positions. Other public appointing authorities are also required under section 3(2) of the GEWE Act to ensure that 30 % of the appointments benefit women. Section 4 (1) and (2) of the GEWE Act further requires the public and private institutions to ensure that 30 % of their employees and those in decision-making roles are women. Further, the 2022 amendment to the Political Parties Act (PPA) encourages political parties to ensure that 30 % of the party's executive organs are women.

The June 2023 elections were the first elections to test the applicability and efficacy of the 30 % gender quota rule. The GEWE Act carries consequences for non-compliance of the rule by political parties. Article 2(3) of the GEWE Act states that "Where a political party fails to comply with subsection (1), the Electoral Commission shall reject the party's list of candidates." Accordingly, the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) designed software for the submission of party nomination lists.<sup>69</sup> The nomination system was designed to reject party lists that didn't meet the 30 % women representation criterion. Eventually, women accounted for an average of 32 %<sup>70</sup> of the 877 candidates submitted by 14 parties.<sup>71</sup> After the June 2023 elections, women candidates won a record-breaking 41 seats (30.37%) out of the 135 elected parliamentary seats (excluding the paramount chiefs), a 16% increase from 12.32% in the 2018 elections. In addition, one woman was indirectly elected through the 14 extra parliamentary seats reserved for Paramount Chiefs representing the 14 provincial districts. Overall, the proportion of women parliamentarians stands at 28.18%, 42 women out of a total of 149 parliamentarians (41 ordinary MPs and 1 Paramount

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with a government official, prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>70</sup> APC and SLPP lists had 32 and 33 % female contestants, respectively.

<sup>71</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission to Sierra Leone General elections, Preliminary Statement Delivered on June 26 2023 in Freetown, available at [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20SL%20PS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20SL%20PS_FINAL.pdf), accessed on July 2 2023.

Chief MP). The 2023 elections also witnessed two young women (27 and 28 years old) from Kono and Kenema districts, respectively, winning parliamentary seats.<sup>72</sup> The 16% increase in women in Parliament is set to strengthen Sierra Leone's democracy and decision-making processes. The increase will also impact policy-making and legislative processes with unique women's experiences and insights and contribute to changing the community's mindset towards a more inclusive society.<sup>73</sup> It is noteworthy that the figure of 28.18% of women parliamentarians in Sierra Leone is above the average of women's representation for West Africa, which stands at 18.4%.<sup>74</sup> While the 30% gender quota rule under the PEA and GEWE laws has doubled the number of women in Sierra Leone's Parliament, several gaps have been noted after the rule was applied in the June 2023 elections.

The gender quota rule is set at 30%, while the international and regional conventions that Sierra Leone is part of, including CEDAW,<sup>75</sup> the Constitutive Act of the African Union,<sup>76</sup> and the Maputo Protocol<sup>77</sup> call for equal representation of men and women in positions of power. In particular, in 2008, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development included a 50:50 target of women's representation in politics and decision-making positions. The Protocol required state parties to achieve the target by 2015.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the Africa Agenda 2063 provides a roadmap for the next fifty years to speed up actions to achieve gender parity. It envisions a continent that has attained full gender parity, with women occupying at least 50 per cent of elected public offices at all levels.

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<sup>72</sup> Sia Mahawa Habiamia Tommy and Alice Kornya Sandy Esq, respectively.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with a leader of civil society who prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>74</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, Record number of women MPs elected in Sierra Leone, available at <https://www.ipu.org/es/node/12359#:~:text=Overall%2C%20the%20proportion%20of%20women,to%20the%20IPU's%20regional%20averages>, accessed on 12 September 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Article 7 of CEDAW.

<sup>76</sup> Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union

<sup>77</sup> Article 9 and 11 of Maputo Protocol.

<sup>78</sup> Articles 4, 12 and 13 of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Sierra Leone adopted the gender quota rule in 2022, seven years after the SADC deadline that was set for 2015. The country has also set its gender quota rule at 30%, way below the 50% SADC and the Africa Agenda 2063's gender representation target. This serve as evidence of Sierra Leone's slow pace in respecting and complying with its own international and regional treaty commitments.

On the other hand, the gender quota rule under the PEA and GEWE laws does not provide for the positioning, placement, and or gender ranking of candidates in political parties' lists. Section 58 (2) of the PEA simply requires political parties to include one woman in every three candidates and leaves it to the political parties to decide the placement of women in the candidate's list. Despite the fact that women eventually made up 32 % of the parliamentary candidates in the June 2023 elections, the process of ascertaining the number of women candidates through the submitted political parties' candidate lists was cumbersome. Political parties refused to disclose their candidate lists, allegedly due to internal negotiations on the ranking of candidates.<sup>79</sup> Some political parties provided incorrect gender data for their candidates by identifying male candidates as female to circumvent meeting the gender quota requirement.<sup>80</sup> As the law required one woman in each of the three candidates but failed to provide for candidates' ranking order, women candidates were placed in the third place in the majority of party lists. Only four out of 63 parliamentary lists from the political parties were led by women. It was also rare for women to be placed in the second position.<sup>81</sup> The trend was also seen with the prominent political parties. None of the APC lists was led by a woman. For the SLPP, women headed one list only, in Kambia.<sup>82</sup>

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Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.  
e 2023.

<sup>80</sup> THE CARTER CENTER, Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement, June 27, 2023, available at [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf), accessed on July 2 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with an Electoral Management Body Official, prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with an Electoral Management Body Official, prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

The desegregation of candidates' data is yet another problem in the implementation of the gender quota rule. While the ECSL released the presidential candidates list well in advance,<sup>83</sup> the final parliamentarians' candidate list was gazetted a few days before the elections.<sup>84</sup> The list was neither desegregated by gender nor indicated the position a candidate was contesting.<sup>85</sup> This brought challenges in ascertaining whether a political party has complied with the 30% rule. Without providing a candidates' ranking order, the PEA and GEWE laws only make it mandatory for political parties to nominate 30 % of female candidates, but without ensuring their election. The gender quota rule was mostly met in the districts where political parties had massive support and could win more than three seats. Any division of seats among prominent political parties pushed women out. For example, no woman parliamentarian was obtained in districts with four representatives, such as Falaba, where SLPP and APC won two seats each. The fact that women were placed on the third position for each list, and the cutting point for each list was on the second candidate, meant that women couldn't win in such districts.<sup>86</sup> It can be concluded that, without the defined candidate ranking rules, the 30% gender quota rule was met by chance in the 2023 elections and not through carefully designed candidates' ranking rules in the PEA and GEWE laws.

In addition, there is a challenge on the election of the 14 paramount chiefs that represent the 14 provincial districts in the Sierra Leone Parliament.<sup>87</sup> The 30% gender quota rule does not apply in

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<sup>83</sup>11 May 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with a leader of a political party who prefers anonymity, Freetown, June 2023.

<sup>85</sup>According to the Carter Centre Election Observation Mission, the list of parliamentary candidates was released on the last day of the campaign period, June 22. The African Union Election Observation Mission noted that the final list of candidates was only gazetted on 20 June 2023, with only three days to the elections.

<sup>86</sup>THE CARTER CENTER, Sierra Leone 2023 National Elections Preliminary Statement, 27 June 2023, available at [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace\\_publications/election\\_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/sierra-leone-prelim-report-062723.pdf), accessed on 2 July 2023. Virtual Interview with a leader of Civil Society Organisation, August 2023.

<sup>87</sup> According to Section of the Public Elections Act, Members of Parliament shall comprise the number of - (a) Paramount Chief Members of Parliament, equal to the number of provincial districts, by paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 74 of the Constitution; (b) Members of Parliament, other than Paramount Chief Members of Parliament, prescribed by Parliament.

the election of paramount chiefs. Due to deep-rooted negative traditions and culture, women are hardly elected among the 192 chief positions from which the 14 paramount chiefs are elected. In the northern regions and Kailahun and Kono districts in the eastern region, women still cannot become Paramount Chiefs.<sup>88</sup> The non-application of a gender quota rule in the election of paramount chiefs has caused the Parliament to slightly miss a 30 % gender quota mark, with women now accounting for only 28.18% of the Parliament. Only one woman (7.1%) was elected to the 14 paramount chiefs' seats available in the Parliament.<sup>89</sup> It is noteworthy that the number of female paramount chiefs dropped from two in the 2018 elections to one after the 2023 elections.<sup>90</sup> The current 28.18% of female parliamentarians might have been higher had a 30% gender quota rule applied to the election of paramount chiefs.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

Sierra Leone women played a formidable role in bringing about political independence in 1961. However, the political instability and the 1991-2002 civil war witnessed minimal inclusion of women in peace processes and, generally, women's political participation. The introduction of the 30% gender quota rule through the PEA and GEWE laws has increased the number of women in parliament from 12.3% in the 2018 elections to 28.9 % after the June 2023 elections. While the quota has doubled the number of women in parliament, challenges remain. The PEA and GEWE laws do not provide for candidates' ranking order. They simply require the inclusion of one woman in every three candidates. This gives wide discretion to the political parties, with most of them

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<sup>88</sup> Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> IPU, 'Record number of women MPs elected in Sierra Leone' <<https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-07/record-number-women-mps-elected-in-sierra-leone>> accessed 5 September 2023.

<sup>90</sup> The 2018 elections contained 19 women members (17 ordinary MPs and 2 Paramount Chief MPs). The current Parliament has 42 female members (41 ordinary MPs and 1 Paramount Chief MP)

resorting to placing women in third positions, thus affecting how women are elected from party lists. To address this challenge and ensure the electability of women candidates from the party list, the law should require women to be placed in safe positions in the party list, preferably the first and or the second position for every three candidates. The 30% gender quota rule should also apply in the election of the 14 paramount chiefs who form part of the Sierra Leone Parliament. The ECSL candidate data desegregation remains poor, consequently bringing about challenges in ascertaining political parties' compliance with the 30% quota rule. The ECSL should adopt robust measures to ensure that candidate lists are desegregated by gender, age, disability, location, and position contested in order to make it easy to validate compliance with the 30 % rule. The ongoing process of replacing the 1991 Constitution with the new constitution should increase a 30 % gender quota rule to 50% by embedding a Zebra System into the PR electoral system. The system, as employed in South Africa and Namibia, would require party lists to alternate names of women and men in the candidates' list, hence enabling an environment for attaining equal gender representation in Sierra Leone's Parliament.

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