

# YOUTH MANIFESTO FOR THE 2012 ELECTIONS

**What young people think about the elections,  
politics and the future of Sierra Leone**

**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
THE YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



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## WHAT IS THE YOUTH MANIFESTO?

In November 2012, around 2 million Sierra Leoneans will go to the polls to elect local and national representatives. A decade on from the cessation of the civil war, this election will be an important milestone in the consolidation of democracy.

A significant proportion of voters in the November elections will be young people. 73% of the population of Sierra Leone is under 35 years, and of the 2.7 million voters registered to vote in 2012 an estimated 55% (around 1.5 million) are between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

Since young people represent a sizeable constituency, their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour will have a significant bearing on the election process. This is one reason why it is crucial that young people's views and concerns are being heard and taken in to account by those striving to ensure a peaceful and fair voting process.

A second reason is that throughout post-independence history, the involvement of young people in governance in Sierra Leone has been marred by periods of disenfranchisement and marginalisation. Although positive changes are now underway, for example with the creation of dedicated youth representative bodies such as District and Chiefdom Youth Councils, many young people still feel distanced from and unable to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Restless Development's own research carried out in 2011 revealed that only 23% of young people are aware of a policy that influences their wellbeing, 38% are aware of community decision-making committees



with young people's representation and only 6% of young people in rural areas have ever attended national level policy or decision-making meetings.

The alienation of young people from governance processes has historically been linked to violence. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report indicated that political disenfranchisement was a key factor leading some young people to join violent movements during the civil war. Elections have tended to be flashpoints for youth violence. There is a long history of political parties mobilising frustrated and disadvantaged young people to carry out acts of disruption and aggression during the campaigning period. Because of these associations, a negative discourse around youth and governance has emerged, tainting many people's views of young people particularly in respect to elections.

Countering this negative discourse is one of the key goals of this manifesto. The youth of Sierra Leone have consistently demonstrated their commitment to the march towards democratic rule and good governance. As campaigners, educators and advocates, young people have been at the vanguard of the drive towards democratisation and the promotion of peace.

This manifesto aims to champion the positive involvement of young people in strengthening good governance and democratic processes. In giving young people and youth representatives the opportunity to openly and frankly share their opinions about the elections and the future development of the country, it celebrates the positive and valuable contribution that young people can make to the elections process and the deepening of democracy in Sierra Leone.

## Purpose

This manifesto shares the thoughts, hopes, expectations and fears of young people in regard to the 2012 elections and their vision for a brighter Sierra Leone of the future. In so doing it aims:

- To ensure the authentic voices of young people are being heard by political actors, donors, civil society and the wider public.
- To demonstrate that young people can rise above partisan politics, grasp the wider development issues at stake and make a useful contribution to the debate.
- To counter the negative discourse around youth engagement in electoral processes.
- To bring together like-minded organisations and individuals to share information and participate in a youth-led advocacy project.
- To give a group of young researchers the chance to deepen their experience of youth-led research.

## How will it be used?

The manifesto is an advocacy tool whose goal is to inform and influence those involved in contesting the elections, bodies administering the elections, donors and civil society organisations about the valuable and important contribution young people can make to strengthening good governance and democratic processes. It does not represent the views of all young people in Sierra Leone, but rather gives a snapshot of opinion from a varied cross-section of society.

The manifesto will be launched at a multi-stakeholder workshop in October 2012 and will be further distributed via the internet and radio, through youth civil society networks and other means. As both a mouthpiece for young people's views and attitudes as well as an example of a youth-led advocacy tool created by young people themselves, it will continue to be a useful reference tool for those involved in promoting youth civic participation and involvement in governance processes.

# HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

## Youth-led research method

Restless Development is a pioneer of youth-led research, an approach that involves empowering young people to design and undertake their own research projects.

This methodology capitalises on the fact that young people are more likely to speak openly and frankly to their peers, meaning that the young researchers are able to gain a depth of understanding and insight from interviewees that other researchers might struggle to obtain. In addition, the approach provides the young researchers with a unique, hands-on research experience and an opportunity to play a leading role in managing and implementing a development intervention.

Eight young researchers, many of whom had previously been involved in youth-led research with Restless Development, were recruited and trained to lead this project. The researchers inputted in to the design of the survey tools, led the data-collection process and undertook the statistical analysis.

## Partnerships

This manifesto was developed in collaboration with a number of partner NGOs working in the field of youth advocacy. Partners inputted in to the study design, contributed case studies and provided feedback on the final manifesto document at a validation workshop. See acknowledgement on the inside cover for details of participating partners.

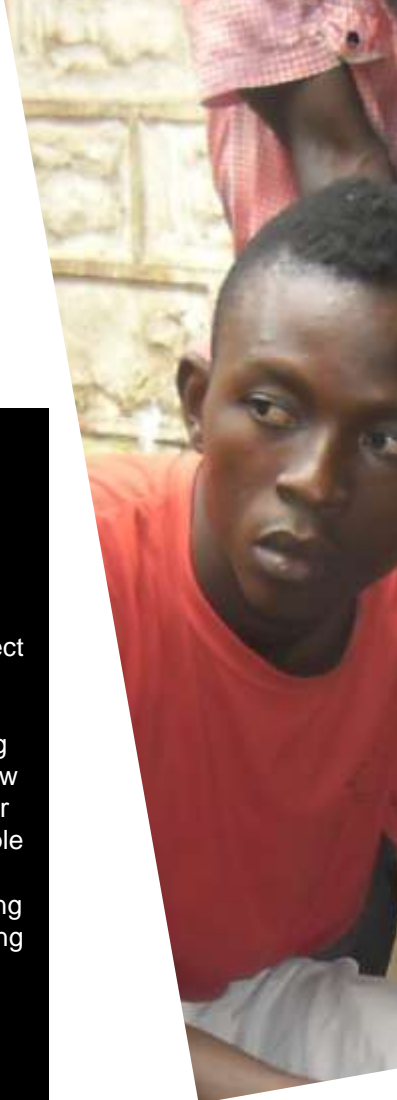
## Research design

The researchers made use of three different research tools: a quantitative questionnaire, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

**Abdul S Koroma, Chairman, 35 years, and Milton Koroma, 34 years, Organising Secretary, Makeni Union of Youth Groups**

“The key word in this election is tolerance. We need to have respect for each especially among the youth. Peer education is very important when it comes to raising awareness among youth. We know as an organisation we’ve done our level best to sensitise young people on the advantages and disadvantages of the electioneering process, the importance of avoiding violence and ensuring full participation of all. The majority have gained this knowledge and are ready to put in to practice.

One of our concerns is the relationship between the National Electoral Commission and the political parties. There seems to be some distrust between the parties and the NEC and there has been a lot of criticism of the NEC on the radio. It’s possible the parties may not accept the election result if they don’t have confidence in the NEC. Political parties should also desist from persuading young guys to get involved in violence as this has tainted elections in the past.”







12 locations were selected covering the northern, eastern and southern regions as well as the Western Area. The locations were selected to give wide geographical coverage as well as a mix of urban, peri-urban and rural settings. The research targeted 376 young people, males and females, all between the ages of 18-28. In-depth quantitative questionnaires were conducted with each respondent, an average of 31 interviews per location

District/ region	Location
Bombali (North)	Makeni town (urban) Kamabai (rural) Manjoro (rural)
Bo (South)	Bo town (urban) Gondama (rural) Tinkoro (rural)
Kono (East)	Koidu town (urban) Kayima (rural) Waidala (rural)
Western Area (West)	Freetown, Kroo Bay (urban) Waterloo (peri-urban) Newton (peri-urban)

A focus group discussion was held in each location incorporating 4 male and 4 female participants. Finally, individual participants were selected for in-depth one-to-one interviews. These were supplemented by interviews with representatives from youth-serving and youth-led civil society organisations.

## Profile of the survey population

The researchers aimed to involve as wide a cross-section of young people as possible. 53% of respondents were female. Just under half (47%) were currently in school. Of those not in school, the top three forms of employment were selling/trade (26%), farming (18%) and informal employment (15%). 19% of respondent described themselves as unemployed. Around a third (31%) were married and 4% declared themselves to have a disability.

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THEIR VOTING HABITS

## Registration in 2012

- 93% of young, eligible voters surveyed said they had registered to vote in the 2012 elections.
- Of the 7% who had not registered, four fifths were female.
- For those who did not register, two fifths gave the reason of a personal illness or disability and a quarter said they were underage at the time of registration.

## Previous experience of elections

- 56% of the young people surveyed registered to vote in the 2007 presidential elections.
- For the majority of those who didn't (87%), it was because they were underage at the time.
- Of those who registered to vote in 2007, less than half (49%) actually voted on polling day.
- Respondents explained their failure to vote as being a result of being ill or disabled on the day (38%), becoming disillusioned or discouraged by the voting process and behaviour of the parties (31%) or failing to find the polling centre (19%).

## Voting intentions

- 79% of respondents said they would definitely vote in the 2012 elections. 5% said they would definitely not vote.
- Three quarters of those who intend to vote have already made up their mind who to vote for. One in five have not yet chosen.

## Voting motivations

- The most important characteristic of a candidate that influences who young people choose to vote for is honesty (43% of all responses), followed by experience (26%) and policies (13%). Ethnicity (5%), religion (6%) and gender (7%) are much less significant.
- 11% of respondents said their choice of candidate will be primarily influenced by who their friends and family vote for.

**Lansana A Kamara, 28, motorbike (ocada) ride from Tongo Field in Kenema.**

"I think young people are feeling that the election process has been transparent so far. According to my fellow motor bike riders, they are seeing the election as being free and fair. I think young people have been engaged well so far in the process: young people led the registration process for NEC and the distribution of ID cards was also done by young people.

Tongo where I come from is well known for election violence where young people fight and kill for political parties or politicians. But now the youth especially ocada riders are preaching political tolerance and for people to accept who so ever will win. That is what is happening right now in Tongo and I believe it will make a difference.

Everybody should go and vote when the time comes because it is your right. People should vote for the person who will best develop the country. I am begging the political parties not to use the youth to cause violence and other bad things because Sierra Leone is the only country we have."







Focus group discussions revealed that many believe young people are more enthusiastic about the elections process than older people, with a higher number of young people perceived to be registered and planning to vote. Some of the reasons given for this included that young people are more hungry for development, are excited about exercising their civic rights and/or are not as disillusioned as older voters with the experience of voting.

However, the pattern of voting in the previous election as indicated by this sample group suggests that enthusiasm for and participation in the registration process does not necessarily mean a young person will in fact vote on polling day. Half of those surveyed who registered did not actually cast a vote on election day in 2007, either as a result of disability or illness, or because of disillusionment with the elections process. Although nearly 4 out of 5 interviewees said they would definitely vote in 2012, it seems that events taking place in the campaigning period, as well as unpredictable eventualities such as illness may have a significant bearing on whether or not people stay at home on polling day.

Although a high number of young people of both sexes have registered to vote in 2012, it is noticeable that of those who have not, four out of five are female. Some of the focus groups and in-depth interviews revealed problems with the registration process, such as that the window was not long enough and the registration centres were too few. Such factors may affect female voters more than male voters because of their greater domestic obligations, reduced autonomy and freedom or other constraints.

In terms of voting choice, the most striking finding was that three quarters of the young people surveyed have already made up their mind who they will vote for. Survey respondents said they were influenced by qualities such as good policies, experience and honesty, and they downgraded the importance of ethnicity, gender or religion. Nonetheless, the high proportion of young people who have already made their choice, added to the apparently low levels of knowledge of party policies and campaigning issues as covered in the next section, suggest that long term allegiances and, for example, the preferences of family and friends, rather than decisions based on party policies or practice play the bigger role in the youth vote.

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THEIR POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

**Mariatu Kamara, 26 years, trader from Manouta in Kailahun.**



“I am personally worried about security. Will there be enough security for the whole country? I really hope so and I hope that the election will be peaceful and without violence.

When I was last in my home community visiting my family I observed that the youth leader was encouraging everyone to stay away from anything that will create violence and to support their councillors and members of parliament of choice peacefully.

Young people should think wisely and vote for somebody who will come and create jobs for young people and develop the country. All the political parties should preach peace, love and non-violence to young people and educate them on how to vote properly.”

## Knowledge of campaigning issues

- Just over half of respondents said they did not have a reasonable knowledge of the main campaigning issues of the contesting political parties.
- For those that did feel they had a good knowledge, this knowledge was obtained in the main through the radio (a quarter of respondents), with a smaller number obtaining information through printed material from parties (9%), through the newspapers (3%), from political party meetings (3%) or through friends (2%).
- Only one respondent said they obtained information about political parties online.

## Youth specific policies

- 70% of young people are not aware of any youth specific policies or campaigning issues promoted by political parties.
- In response to the question ‘how well are political parties consulting with young people or taking young people’s views in to account when designing policies and priorities,’ only a quarter of respondents (23%) said they felt parties were doing this very well. On the other hand, 15% said parties were not consulting at all and a third of respondents didn’t know or couldn’t say.



**Abdul T Kargbo, 19 year old JSS3 student, Manjoro, Bombali district**

“I have registered to vote for the first time in my life. The process is not yet complete though because I’m still waiting for my voter ID card. I feel good about the elections and I don’t think there will be any violence in my community or in this area. Most people I know have registered. I have personally already chosen who I’m going to vote for. I have not met any of the candidates nor have I received any civic education but I plan to vote for the candidates that will do the most to develop the country. I am very excited to be voting for the first time.”

Young people as represented by this sample population appear to have poor knowledge of the main campaigning issues of the political parties, partly perhaps because very little canvassing or campaigning takes place before the official campaigning period. What information is circulated reaches young people mainly through the radio and through community and public meetings. Nearly three quarters of respondents were not aware of youth specific policies being promoted by contesting parties. The focus group discussions further revealed some cynicism around this topic with many suggesting that a campaign focus on youth issues is a way to win votes and that electoral promises are rarely fulfilled.

There were mixed views on how well political parties have consulted with young people when designing policies and setting priorities, with a roughly equal number of respondents suggesting young people have been well consulted as those saying they have not. On the positive side, many young people claimed to have been consulted themselves or seen active consultation take place. They also mentioned the creation of youth wings of political parties and bodies such as the National Youth Commission as vehicles for youth representation. On the negative side, respondents said they have never seen such consultation taking place or that consultation with youth is a superficial exercise designed to win votes. Many also feel youth are not well represented numerically within political parties and that youth issues are not adequately addressed in manifestos or policies.





# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS

## How the elections will go

- Two thirds (68%) of respondents said they are hopeful that things will improve for young people after the election, 16% are not hopeful that things will improve. The rest don't know or can't say.
- Two thirds (67%) of respondents strongly agree that the elections will be free, fair, credible and peaceful and only 3% strongly disagree.
- The biggest obstacle that young people see to free and fair elections is political violence (35% of all responses), followed by ballot rigging (30%), low voter turnout (11%) and failure of the police to maintain order (8%).

### **Joseph Tucker, Programme Staff, Campaign for Good Governance, 27 years old**

"I believe young people are far more aware and informed about the elections than they have been in previous years. Through radio, jingles and the print media more young people are accessing a lot of different information that means they are less easily influenced about their choices. There are still lots of divisions though. Young people are not presenting a united front and working in unity.

My view is that most parties engage with youth negatively. They are only concerned with gaining power and the interest of youth is not paramount. Making young people aware of the potential for being manipulated by politicians is really important. My organisation (CGG) has done a lot on this front and we are waiting to see what happens as a result.

It distresses me to see how politicians are inciting people and taking up issues like tribalism. Politics should not be allowed to become a tribal issue. This is what we're really fighting against. Political parties should put the interests of the country first. We're all Sierra Leonean. We're all fighting for same cause of nation building. There should be no place for provocative messages or hostile behaviour in this election.

I very much hope there will not be youth violence around the elections. Many young people are marginalised and disadvantaged and are consequently vulnerable to manipulation. Too many positions that are meant to be held by young people are filled by older people. Some so-called youth representatives are easily bought and are consequently not representing young people effectively.

Women in politics is an important and neglected issue. They have been left behind in governance and the 30% quota for women representation has not been reached. Women can be an important force for good in politics and can help to fight corruption. Another important related issue is education. There has not been enough investment in the education system. When you talk of development and empowerment you can't leave education behind. For example, women aspiring for political positions must have reached at least secondary school level. Many talented and determined women have not got that level of qualification so are missing out."





In contrast to some of the negative views expressed with regard to the consultation by political parties on youth issues, more general views on the elections and future development were for the most part positive. Most young people are optimistic that things will improve for young people after the election. Reasons given for this included a sense that positive development is already underway and that youth issues such as unemployment are already improving. Those that disagreed cited issues such as the persistence of corruption, the lack of health and education infrastructure and other developmental challenges.

There were also mainly positive views of the likely conduct of the elections with two out of three respondents expressing confidence that it will be free and fair. Some of the reasons given for this included a strong faith in the biometric system, the competency of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the fact that the registration period had run generally smoothly. Those that disagreed alluded to a lack of neutrality of the NEC and issues such as youth violence. Indeed, political violence is seen as the biggest risk to the elections process according to young people, followed closely by ballot rigging.

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THEIR DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

## Politicians' priorities

- Young people feel that the youth-related issue most discussed by politicians is unemployment (61% of responses), followed by political violence (18%) and sexual and reproductive health (9%).

## Young people's priorities

- When asked what is the number one issue facing young people in Sierra Leone today, almost two thirds (63%) of respondents cited employment and just under a quarter (23%) replied lack of educational opportunities. The next most important issue identified after these were sexual and reproductive health (3%) and the threat of violence or crime (2%).
- Respondents said that the issue that the new government should prioritise first is the creation of jobs (48%) followed by the establishment of industry (22%), agriculture and food security (14%) and education (11%).

The issue of unemployment is regarded as being the most important issue as identified by youth themselves as well as the priority issue at the top of the political parties' agendas. However there is less alignment over other key issues. For example, politicians are currently dwelling a lot on youth political violence which is considered less of a priority by young people themselves. Politicians are also failing to prioritise the issue of educational and training opportunities for youth, which was identified by young people as the second most important issue they face. The young respondents gave clear priorities with regard to where they feel a new government should place the policy emphasis.

### Ibrahim Jalloh, Chair, Bombali District Youth Council, 34 years old

"Bombali district is known as model of political tolerance and during the 2007 elections was entirely peaceful. I believe this has something to do with the orientation of the people around here who are mostly traders and more interested in carrying on their business than becoming involved in politics! I am personally very optimistic that Bombali will be peaceful this time round.



However I do have some fears with regards to politicians themselves. Political patronage is a problem in this country. Ideologies of violence can emanate from youths but they will always be provoked and sponsored by politicians. Politicians mustn't misuse the youths like this. It's not a common practice in Bombali but unfortunately it is common in other parts of the country.

This is going to be a complicated election – in fact it is 4 elections in one – so it's important that people know their rights and responsibilities. The biometric system is good innovation although there are some challenge such as faulty machinery and inadequate staff training. The greatest advantage of the system is that it reduces multiple voting and multiple registration. This is important for free and fair elections"



**Auguster A Sankoh, Project Officer, CCYA Centre of Coordination of Youth Activities**

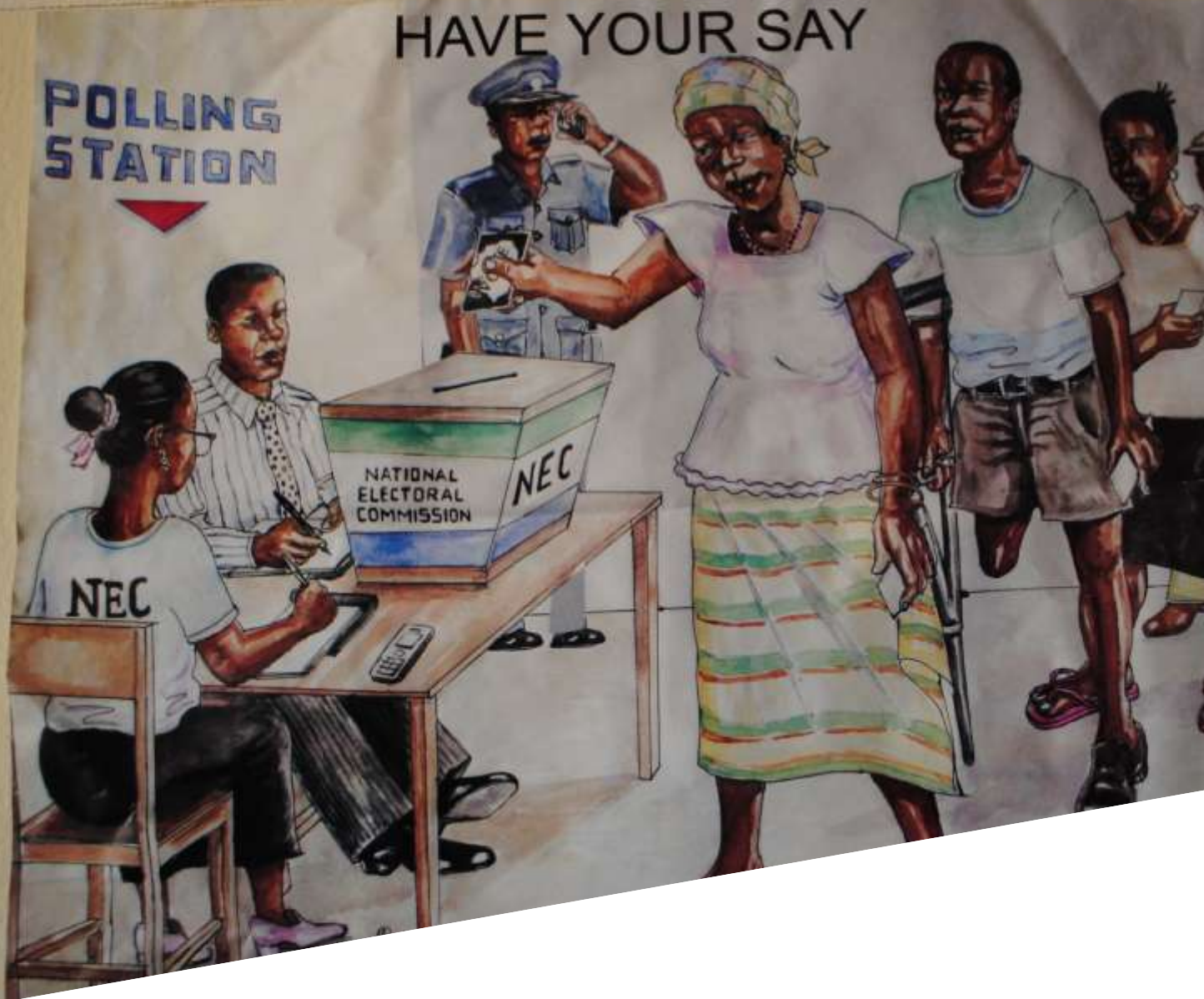


“I have mixed feelings about the elections because I have seen what the current government and the last one has done. I’m still comparing the two. Putting them on the scale, I don’t even know who I’m going to vote for because I’m still looking for things that I want to be seen in the country. My main concerns are that the education system is too poor, the condition of living is very expensive, and youth are left out of governance.

I don’t think enough is being done to engage young people in the elections process. There should be a forum for young people in each sector. This elections process seems to be just for the high and mighty. When they are in power the political leaders let us down over the promises they’ve made. The youth groups in all political parties are really just a name – these groups should be actualised and made more representative.

My fear is that political parties may be too greedy about power and will go to the extra mile to ensure they gain power or hold on to power. There is a risk if that happens that we might be taken back to the past. We saw what happened in the war and we don’t want anything like that again. If the parties put Sierra Leone first, the elections will be a really positive experience, especially for first time voters. There are a lot of organisations advocating for youth, but youth themselves have to step up and be heard. We know what problem and challenges we face and what we want changed. Young people should be leading the process of change.”





## WHAT NEXT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

### An optimistic outlook for youth engagement

This research has revealed a picture of an increasingly engaged, slowly more informed youth voting constituency who believe in the principles of democracy and who are embracing their rights and responsibilities with enthusiasm. Furthermore, many have demonstrated a strong inclination for actively engaging their peers and bringing more young people in to the arena of active citizenship. This is a hugely positive step forward for the country which has seen some of the worst effects of youth disengagement in the past.

The 2012 elections are an opportunity for young people to exercise their civic rights and to uphold their civic responsibilities, many of them for the first time. Contrary to the discourse currently prevailing in Sierra Leone, the overwhelming majority of young people intend to do so peacefully and in a spirit of patriotism not partisanship. Most young people are hopeful that their actions at the ballot box will usher in a new era of growth and development and it is a truly encouraging sign that they understand the electoral process as a means for them to direct the country's course.





The 2012 elections are a key milestone in the political process and democratic maturity of Sierra Leone, but young people's meaningful participation in governance goes beyond simply casting a vote on elections day. As this research shows, most young people feel that politicians and officials don't include them in decision making or consult meaningfully with them on policies that affect their lives and there is a big disconnect between the priorities young people identify for themselves and what politicians discuss.

## Looking beyond the 2012 elections

Looking beyond 2012, ensuring the effective engagement of youth in governance must be a priority for all those seeking to further democratic development in Sierra Leone. Ensuring real, meaningful youth representation in decision-making at all levels from the village to the ministry is a critical part of this. Equally important is ensuring all young people are educated about their civic rights and responsibilities and understand how to hold their elected representatives to account through democratic means.

During the course of undertaking this research, Restless Development engaged with a plethora of youth-led civil society organisations led by committed, values-driven young people who are developing vital skills and engaging with an important constituency of peers through sensitisation, advocacy and grassroots engagement. By engaging these organisations and building their capacity to engage and mobilise young people on issues of good governance, rights-based advocacy and citizenship, we have the opportunity to equip a generation of young people to act as responsible, engaged citizens and to become role models for good leadership.



# ABOUT RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

Restless Development is Sierra Leone's foremost youth-led development agency. Our mission is to place young people at the forefront of change and development in Sierra Leone. We began working in Sierra Leone in 2005 at the invitation of the then Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Our strategy focuses on the key goal areas that are most critical for unleashing the potential of young people as assets for development:

- Livelihoods and employment
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Civic participation

Today Restless Development works in every district of the country empowering young people to address the most urgent issues facing their communities and wider society. In the seven years it has been working in Sierra Leone Restless Development has built a far-reaching reputation for its unique youth-led model and for achieving ambitious results.

Restless Development takes five approaches to achieving its goals:

- **Direct Delivery** of evidence-based grassroots programmes and services to a critical mass of young people;
- **Building a Strong Youth Sector** by providing technical support to a critical mass of national youth-led and youth-focused civil society organisations;
- **Shaping Policy and Practice** through sustained engagement with strategic partners (government, donors and the private sector) to help them work more effectively with and for young people as part of their core strategies and business models;
- **Sharing and Learning** by capturing and disseminating best practice, replicable models and learning from other organisations;
- **Generation of Leadership** by linking young leaders to professional experiences and opportunities.

# ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS



**Esther Bangura** is 19 years old and comes from Kono. She was a Volunteer Peer Educator (VPE) with Restless Development in 2011-12. One of the things she enjoyed most about being involved in this research was the chance to interact with both young people and older people.

**Salamatu Conteh** is 25 years old and comes from Bombali. She has been involved in youth-led research with Restless Development on two previous occasions. She enjoyed participating in this research because she wasn't expecting so many people to be willing to talk and share their views.



**Joseph Kenneh** is a 25 year old from Freetown. He was a VPE with Restless Development in 2007-8, a Dance for Life intern in 2010 and also participated in a previous piece of youth-led research. One of the interesting things he observed doing this research was the much lower level of political knowledge of young people in rural areas versus those in urban areas.

**Mohamed F Bangura** is 25 and comes from Kambia. He was a VPE in Kenema in 2011-12. He enjoyed participating in the research because it gave him the chance to travel to places and speak with people he would not normally have the chance to meet.



**Anita Bangura** is 20 years old and comes from Bombali. She was a VPE in 2011-12. She found participating in the elections manifesto research improved her understanding of the elections process. It also gave her an appreciation of how important youth empowerment is when it comes to creating employment.

**Fomba Conteh** is 24 years old and comes from Tonkolili. He was a VPE in 2009-10 and has also been involved in previous youth-led research projects with Restless Development.



**Kadiatu Kamara** is a 27 year old from Freetown. She was a VPE in Kono district during 2011.



**Abdulrahman Diallo Kamara** is 24 years old and comes from Kenema district. He was a VPE in 2010-2011.



This manifesto shares the thoughts, hopes, expectations and fears of young people in regard to the 2012 elections and their vision for the future of Sierra Leone. In giving young people and youth representatives the opportunity to openly and frankly share their opinions about the elections and the future development of the country, it celebrates the positive and valuable contribution that young people can make to the elections process and the deepening of democracy.

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