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2019 NATIONAL GENERAL ELECTION (NGE) Summary of discussions on LESSONS LEARNT (Operational aspects)

15th – 27th April 2019, Gizo, Honiara and Auki



Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands Project (SECSIP) is implemented in partnership with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission. SECSIP receives financial assistance from the Government of Australia, the European Union and UNDP





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The concept and agenda were designed by Mr. Mose Saitala, SIEO Chief Electoral Officer and SIEC Commissioner, in consultation with Mr. Muammer Mrahorovic, UNDP-SECSIP Electoral Operations Specialist and facilitator of the workshops. Mr Mrahorovic has assisted and worked alongside the SIEC/SIEO throughout the 2018 Voter Registration and the 2019 NGE (June 2018-April 2019).

The views expressed here reflect the discussions held during the lessons learned workshops (held in April 2019 in Auki, Honiara and Gizo) as recorded by the note takers and compiled by Mr. Muammer Mrahorovic.

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Lessons Learned report with notes from debriefing sessions for Election Managers (EM), Returning Officers (RO) and Assistant Returning Officers (ARO)

I. Introduction:

The Solomon Islands Electoral Office (SIEO) conducted three Lessons Learned workshops involving the Elections Managers, Returning Officers and, where practical, the Assistant Returning Officers. The purpose of the workshops was to share the experiences on the recently implemented Biometric Voter Registration and 2019 National General Elections; identify best practices, as well as process weaknesses for learning purposes. The workshops were held in Gizo (15th – 16th April), Honiara (23rd – 24th April) and Auki (26th - 27th April). Finally, the points raised during the workshops were presented to the SIEO in Honiara on 29th April 2019.

Participating at the workshops were: SIEO CEO, SIEO Principal Officer Corporate Services, SIEO Operations Manager/EM Rennel-Bellona (brief visits to workshops in Honiara and Auki), 3 International Advisors (2 ESSP and 1 UNDP-SECSIP), UNDP SECSIP HR Consultant (Honiara), UNDP Graduate/Field Coordinator, UNDP SECSIP Admin/Finance – note taker, 8 EMs, 35 ROs, and 8 AROs and 1 Finance Officer. Unfortunately, the SIEO Head of Media Awareness Unit was not able to attend the said workshops.

The workshops began with an introduction that underlined the importance of an honest, constructive and friendly discussion on the difficulties and challenges, as well as on the successes, achievements, positive experiences and results. The discussion was intended to contribute to the overall learning rather than in any way make anyone feel exposed or criticized.

Elections management bodies are unique institutions. They are the front-line defenders of democracy and, if they fail to uphold that role, if there are doubts about their performance and management expenditures or, if the hiring process is not transparent and ethical, the elections and by extension the political system might be compromised. It is therefore important to view the process through that lens, and draw the lessons learned exercise with that in mind.

II. Executive Summary:



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The discussions during the workshops mostly focused on experiences from the recently implemented 2018 biometric voter registration (BVR) and the 2019 national general elections (NGE).

The CEO informed the participants that the SIEO was planning to establish permanent electoral offices in 9 Provinces with 2 core staff in each of them. This information influenced some of the recommendations on what the future processes, especially in the area of voter registration, should look like taking the planned permanent electoral offices into consideration. The CEO also informed the participants of SIEC's intentions to initiate another Electoral Act revision which would incorporate, to the extent possible, outcomes of the lessons learned workshops. The participants agreed that the revision of the Electoral Act is necessary to address the existing inefficiencies such as the ordinarily resident definition, pre-poll voting, polling hours, etc. They also agreed that the permanent presence in Provinces would be useful for the continuous voter registration and for easier preparations for elections.

In most cases the participants were able to identify problems and formulate specific recommendations to improve the electoral processes. The summary of recommendations reflecting the discussions are, for ease of reference, grouped into four categories, detailed at the end of this document.

The participants identified a clear need to institute a residence criterium in voter registration as a way of minimizing politically driven cross-border voter registration. The participants also proposed several voter registration initiatives targeting youth as well as the remote communities.

The participants commended SIEC's efforts to establish the permanent electoral offices in the Provinces and made recommendations related to the development of SIEO's capacities in the Provinces.

The participants also identified several areas in the electoral process which should be reviewed in order to improve and strengthen the electoral procedures and protect the integrity of the process.

Finally, the participants recognized that the technical capacity of the SIEO to conduct elections has reached an important level, demonstrated in the implementation of 2019 elections. However, the participants also recognized that the SIEC and SIEO are affected by the structural limitations such as staffing levels, low capacities in the areas of training, procurement, logistics and data-management. Therefore, the participants noted that the SIEO will have to focus extensively on overcoming those limitations with the support of other governmental agencies and donors through their implementing agencies.

III. Notes on discussions and lessons learned



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A. Biometric voter registration

1. **Ordinarily resident**¹ – Across the board the participants expressed their view that the definition of ordinarily resident in its current form enables electoral engineering by prospective political candidates. This was in part due to the ambiguities in the definition and insufficient awareness that the cross-border registration, undertaken under pressure or for a financial incentive a punishable offense. The ordinarily resident, thus, may need to be more clearly defined in the legislation, and the appropriate law awareness may need to be done to familiarize the populations with the terminology and the law.
2. **Cross-border voter registration** - The participants recognized that in many cases the cross-border registration was politically driven and that some voters used a loophole to change the place of registration as a favour or under pressure from the candidates. The participants thus recommended to limit number of times the registration can be made across locations.
3. **Out-of-constituency registration** - centres are perceived as damaging to the register of electors, as they have provided an opportunity for non-eligible registrants to be registered. While several such practices were addressed during the Omissions and Objections period, it is probable that significant number of non-eligible registrants remained on the voter lists.
4. **Six months residence requirement**, as defined by the Electoral Act, is seen as a welcome addition to the eligibility criteria and is expected to correct some of the practices related to the cross-boundary registration. The participants were of the opinion that the residence requirement needs to be strictly imposed as an eligibility criterium.
5. **Under-age registration intention** was useful because the individuals that were not yet 18-years-old during the registration period were left out of the voter lists despite being 18-years-old or older on the election day. To address this, the participants discussed the possibility to implement the “voter registration in schools” initiative, which would provide for registration of eligible under-age registrants.
6. **Voter ID cards**, while useful to verify voters’ identities against the list of electors on the election day, also caused a lot of confusion. This is particularly the case with registrants who registered several times, and are subsequently in possession of more than one voter ID. The participants’ view on whether to continue or

¹ As interpreted by the High Court ruling on Inoke v. Attorney General

discontinue the use of voter ID cards was divided. The conclusion, however, was that if ID cards are continued, the commission should seek to replace current ID cards with new ones, and potentially issue voter ID cards at the later stage either during the O&O period or on the election day.

7. **Public scrutiny of Voter Lists** – Significant delays in the release of funds affected the schedule of the O&O centres and resulted in the rushed O&O and Public Hearings processes. Participants felt that a number of objections filed would have increased had the time for public scrutiny been longer and without confusion caused by the constant changes in the O&O centres movement schedule. An additional factor affecting the O&O process was a general lack of awareness concerning the public scrutiny process. Quite often, the communities were not aware of the significance of objections.
8. **Publication of voter lists** is a necessary part of the process to ensure the confirmation of registration details. The use of technologies, SIEC web-page and SMS system was recognized as a positive initiative. However, the limitations of the network coverage necessitated publishing of voter lists all the way to the village level through community leaders and church pastors. In addition, the names of registrants removed from the Voter Lists should be published at Polling Stations so potential complainants are informed in advance on their registration status. This would prevent confusion on the Election Day.
9. The participants supported a **continuous registration process** as a way of giving registrants more time and opportunity to visit communities, as was done in the past, as well as schools. The registrants would benefit from increased opportunity to register at any time.
10. **Intra-governmental cooperation on data exchange** was also recommended to allow the Ministry of Public Service to extend the records of birth, marriage and death to the SIEO. This would automate some of the registration activities e.g. removal of deceased persons' registration records. Data from the Statistical Institute would create an opportunity to plan voter registration of 17- and 18-years old Islanders.
11. **Voter awareness campaign** should start well in advance of any voter registration activity and extend as far as possible into all communities, including those in remote areas. The campaign should focus on eligibility criteria, public scrutiny of the process as well as on the electoral offenses related to the abuse of electoral processes.

B. Candidate nomination

12. **Candidate nomination application** was useful innovation and it improved the nomination system, although there were frequent, often trivial, mistakes made during the candidate nomination process which could have been avoided with a more focused training, with more time for practical exercises. The SIEO should plan to provide technical support facilities, at least in provincial electoral offices, given that the remote support from the SIEO office in Honiara was limited. Overall, the publications printed directly from application were useful. The participants also identified a need for more comprehensive training on the use of the application so that errors such as misspellings, in the voter register data were minimized or avoided.
13. **Communication** was a challenge, particularly in cases where 2 candidates selected the same candidate symbol in different nomination centres. Merging of data collected in different nomination centres was slow which in the case of Small Malaita led to the confusion. Namely, the RO could not provide accurate information on a particular candidacy when the data, due to the communications difficulties, was not passed to the RO until several days later. The SIEO should distribute the satellite phones to constituencies most affected by poor or no networks.
14. **Candidate awareness** – more attention should be given to briefing the intending candidates on the eligibility requirements. The candidates should also be supplied with practical information on the candidacy process. As an example, the candidates were often not aware that the photo on the ballot paper was to be taken during the nomination process. Because of that, some of them came poorly dressed and demanded to have a new photo taken after the nomination was completed.
15. **Public service and resignation process** – there was a confusion as to which institution is authorized to accept resignation of public servants who intend to run for an elected office. This, in one particular case led to re-printing of ballot papers to include the candidate previously excluded due to the confusion.
16. **Candidate fitness and education criteria** – The participants raised the question if it was possible to institute the criteria on education and general fitness of intending candidates. The CEO explained that an attempt to regulate such matters would not be in line with the Commonwealth practices. Imposing such limitation would possibly be seen as the violation of basic human rights and as such, it is rather left to the voter to judge and decide if the candidate is capable to represent his/her electorate.

C. Polling station identification

17. **Polling station identification process** was severely affected by bad weather. In addition, the time pressure over candidate nomination process influenced the AROs' ability to timely conduct the exercise. The newly introduced criterion on having the maximum of 600 voters per Polling Station was a positive way forward. This allowed for an increased accessibility to the voters and has led to a smoother polling process, reduced delays and minimized opportunities for over-crowdedness at Polling Stations. One identified difficulty was a delay in confirmation of the PSs by the SIEO. Given that the number of established PSs is not expected to significantly change, confirming the number of any new ones should be faster the next time around, allowing for uninterrupted planning process and the publication of locations earlier in the process.
18. **Village/area revision** – The participants noted that some of the villages/areas have a disproportionately high number of assigned voters which did not correspond to the actual population. The issue tracks back to the 2014 BVR when the registrants were often allocated to the village where the PS was located, rather than to the village where they lived. This needs to be rectified before the 2023 elections.
19. **Voting hours** – 97-98% of the voters showed up in the morning hours. The queues were minimal because of a large number of polling stations. The voting was therefore, largely completed by 3 pm, with a majority of polling stations completing the polling even earlier, by 1 pm. Very few voters showed up to vote after 3pm. Without exception, the participants requested the SIEC to revise the working hours and consider closing the polls by 4pm. This would allow more time for the completion of the forms and the retrieval of the materials in many cases could be done during daylight.
20. **Mapping** – In some cases, the polling station maps were not accurate which occasionally made air-drops difficult. The maps will need to be carefully reviewed for accuracy.

D. Pre-poll voting

21. **Pre-poll voting** was perceived as a welcome addition to the Solomon Islands electoral process. Despite that, the participants voiced disappointment that the Attorney General's Chamber interpreted the Electoral Act provisions to limit the duration of the pre-poll voting to a single day across the country. The subsequent decision not to extend the pre-poll voting service to the Presiding Officers and

Polling Assistants was also disappointing. As the pre-poll categories will be further expanded, the legislation will need to be reviewed.

22. ***Pre-poll application process*** was centralized and this was viewed by the participants as generally positive. The participants felt that the pre-poll application process was unified and that there was a good measure of shared responsibility with the institution nominating the applicants. Due to the number of potential applicants, the participants agreed that de-centralized in-person application process in provinces would require additional resources, both financial and human.
23. ***Pre-poll application status*** – there were numerous cases of Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) Officers not having their names listed in the pre-poll lists at the pre-poll voting stations affecting their ability to vote. Almost without exception, these officers were rejected during the verification process as ineligible. Because some may not have applied for pre-poll voting within prescribed period, the participants recommended better channelling of the information next time around, making sure that the officers are informed in advance of their pre-poll status. In addition, it was recommended that the final pre-poll voter lists with all approved pre-poll voters should be made available at least a week in advance and it should be posted at the pre-poll voting stations for public viewing.
24. ***Pre-poll voting information campaign*** – Overall impression among the participants was that pre-poll voters, public and candidates were inadequately informed of the pre-poll voting process. In several instances, the candidates were complaining that they were not offered an opportunity to field their polling agents to pre-poll voting stations. The observers were present in some provinces but generally the information on the process was lacking. As the pre-poll voting is expected to expand to include other groups of voters, timely awareness campaign will be crucial for the success of the process.
25. ***Packing of pre-poll ballot papers and onward distribution*** – handling and verification of pre-poll ballot papers for the selected few Provinces caused public consternation when the ballot papers were returned to the Provinces inside the ballot box (Western Province). It is therefore strongly recommended, that the pre-poll ballot papers, as initially indicated in the instruction, are handled by the counting officials only.
26. ***Pre-poll voter flow and handling of ballot papers*** – while there were no major issues with the process, it was noted that in few cases, ballot papers were placed in wrong envelopes. In one case, the PO issued several mismatching envelopes. Those ballot papers were rejected during the counting as they went to the wrong counting centres. It is therefore necessary to reiterate the need to verify that the envelopes

match the ballot papers. Additionally, self-sealing envelopes should be used in the future to avoid unintentional damage of ballot papers.

27. **Batching, verification and counting of pre-poll ballot papers** – There were no major criticism of processing of pre-poll ballot papers at the counting centres. The only issue faced with that was with the Provinces where pre-poll envelopes were verified at SIEO in Honiara as those envelopes were not accompanied by prescribed reconciliation forms.

28. **Double voting prevention** – Although the EMs and ROs were informed during the training in Honiara that the names of the pre-poll voters should be removed from the voter’s lists, this was apparently not always the case. The names were marked with an asterisk but still appeared in the voter’s lists. This caused some confusion among the poll-workers. The SIEO should remove those names from the voter’s lists as this, apart from leaving space for double-voting, also affects proper recording of the voter turnout.

29. **Out of constituency voting** – The CEO informed participants that the SIEC is considering conducting the OCV under the condition that the out of constituency registration will be disallowed. The participants recognized that the OCV can increase the inclusiveness in elections and can make the voting easier for voters living outside of the constituencies they are registered to vote for.

E. Distribution of electoral materials and coordination with the RSIPF and Provincial Governments

30. **Transportation routes from Honiara** – Although the time for the electoral materials distribution was sufficient, the delivery route to Isabel, Western Province and Choiseul saw delays and faced constraints and additional expenses as the training in constituencies could not be delayed. Delays in the distribution especially affected Choiseul as the established route does not have enough time allocated for distribution. In order to avoid time constraints and unplanned costs, it is required to review the distribution timings and make the materials available at least a few days earlier than planned before. This is important in lieu of limited transportation alternatives in the Solomon Islands. Should the ADF air and sea support not be available in the future, any similar boat failure could cause the elections to be delayed. In addition, the matter of creating a separate route for Western Province and another one for Isabel and Choiseul would result in a more optimal distribution of materials.

31. **Use of provincial government assets** was regarded positively by the participants. It was recognized that the IMEOC’s role in mobilizing resources was very helpful to

the entire process of elections organizing. Nonetheless, it would have been beneficial to have government resources made available earlier in the process, to give more time for proper planning at provincial levels. It must be recognized however that even if all governmental assets were mobilized, they would only cover 40% of transport needs. To have 40% of transport needs covers however represents significant savings to the budget.

32. **Government mobilization coordination** – While the purpose of IMEOC was recognized as a positive initiative, it was noted that creating similar bodies in provinces could be beneficial to coordinate government response in the field. Such provincial coordination bodies should have representatives from all relevant government branches as well as the RSIPF. Their role should be to help coordinate electoral activities. The CEO informed the participants that the government considers adding the provisions to the Electoral Act which would enable the SIEC to mobilize all government assets as needed to help with the election’s organization.
33. **Coordination with the RSIPF** – The participants agreed that the coordination with the RSIPF has significantly improved since the previous elections. In all cases, the EMs and ROs held regular meetings to coordinate their efforts in deployment of RSIPF officers. Despite the high level of coordination and clear understanding that the SIEC would not have any budgetary responsibility over the RSIPF response, there were cases of local police officers requesting additional allowances and payment of accommodation costs. While the Provincial Electoral Officers did not make requests for additional allowances, in Western Province, the ROs covered the costs of meals and accommodation for local RSIPF. There were no such issues with the RSIPF deployed from Honiara. The SIEO will need to look into these payments as the funds are already expended, albeit against the instruction that no expenses toward RSIPF were to be made. Planning of electoral material distribution and retrieval was done in close coordination with the RSIPF and was executed without major problems.
34. **RSIPF presence at the Polling Stations and Counting Centres** – Despite the limited number of Police Officers that RSIPF could deploy, they still provided permanent presence in all areas which were identified as potentially difficult. On the other hand, the RSIPF deployed significant numbers of police officers to the counting centres, which boosted the confidence of counting officials and in great number of cases their presence prevented heated situations at the counting centres. Additionally, the RSIPF provided escorting support during the delivery and retrieval of election materials to and from the Polling Stations.
35. **RSIPF electoral briefings** – while RSIPF was professional and did not interfere in the process, it was evident that the RSIPF deployed from Honiara was generally better prepared and informed about their role than their colleagues in some of the

Provinces. It is therefore recommended to provide stronger support in structuring the briefing package RSIPF receives across the board.

F. Training

36. **Training structure** – The participants agreed that organizing the training into two programmatic sessions, improved the overall quality of the training. Such a training structure proved to be more focused and easier on the participants. The training was designed to cascade down so that EMs and ROs could train AROs who would assist training the poll workers. While the EMs and ROs were able to train AROs, the AROs appeared to have lacked the confidence to deliver independent training to the poll workers. The participants therefore recommended to the SIEO to include the AROs into the first level cascade training. The SIEO should plan for robust training structure. Where possible, the SIEO should engage other relevant institutions to provide enough trainers, e.g., Ministry of Education.
37. **Training manuals** – The participants noted the value of training manuals however, they also noted that, due to their size, the manuals were impractical as a reference guide on the election day. The poll-workers benefited more from 1-page checklists outlining the relevant parts of the process. In many cases, aton their own initiative, the EMs and ROs summarized the manuals and provided those to the poll-workers. They also focused on providing relevant practical exercises.
38. **Cascade training** – Most of the AROs were not confident enough to separately deliver the training sessions to poll-workers. ROs therefore carried out those trainings as well. Some of the ROs delivered the theoretical part of training to entire group, and then split the training participants into smaller groups for practical exercises.

G. Election day

39. **Number of voters at Polling Stations** – A smaller number of voters per polling station resulted in an uninterrupted flow of voters. The revision of voter allocation to PSs within established criteria coupled with a ‘vote early’ campaign resulted in most voters casting their votes in the morning hours. This allowed for timely closure of polling stations, in keeping with the schedule.
40. **Location and physical size of polling stations** – The ROs were able to identify sufficient number of adequate hard structures to serve as polling stations. Only in a few isolated cases, the temporary structures had to be created to serve as polling stations. The weather was fortunately cooperating and did not test the durability of temporary structures.

41. **Authorized persons inside the polling stations** – There were no issues with candidates attempting to spend more time than needed inside the polling stations. Even though the Candidate Agents were not issued with the badges, no issue was observed or reported with having more than one authorized agent in a polling station. The only time when there was more than one candidate agent inside the Polling Stations or Counting Centres was during the shift changes, when both, the departing and the replacing agents were at the venue together. In general, that practice did not cause any problems.
42. **Indelible ink** – Participants noted that the use of indelible ink is a positive practice in preventing multiple voting. However, in some cases the ink stained the ballot papers when those were handled before the ink dried. The participants discussed when the ink should be applied and reached a consensus that dipping the finger in indelible ink just before the ballot paper is cast inside the ballot box will minimize the risk of staining the ballot papers.
43. **Signature or thumb print by voters on Voter Lists** – Participants noted that in few cases polling officials incorrectly marked the voters who had voted. Ticking the boxes next to the names of those who had voted leaves process open to abuse, and while it was not seen as a major issue during this election, it might become so in the future. The participants agreed that reformatting the voter lists to provide for a space for voters’ thumb print instead of a tick-box prevents potential abuse. The thumb prints captured this way represent forensic evidence if allegations are made that people voted in place of others.
44. **Sealing of ballot boxes and recording of serial numbers** - In few cases the ballot boxes were not properly sealed. More often, the top seal number was not properly recorded. In the future, the training should reiterate the importance of both, proper sealing and careful recording of seal numbers. Some ROs were of opinion that the contract payment should be withheld until all materials are checked and verified as received in required condition.
45. **Electoral forms** – The participants agreed that there are too many forms to document the process. There was a consensus that forms should be combined to simplify the process, and avoid having to unnecessarily enter identical information multiple times. As the staff rushed to complete the packing process before dark, some forms were left incomplete or not filled at all.
46. **Polling hours** – Some participants noted that with the increased number of polling stations and a majority of voters voting in the morning, polling stations could close at 4pm and poll-workers could have an extra hour of daylight to retrieve materials. Others thought that urban areas would benefit from the later start, while rural areas benefit more from the earlier start of polling so people can get back to farming.

47. **General complaints** – The EMs and ROs were not trained enough nor were they provided a written guidance on how to deal with general complaints. This caused the inconsistent handling of the complaints. The SIEC needs to issue guidelines on processing the complaints so they can be handled in a structured and consistent manner.

H. Counting and Declaration of electoral results

48. **Centralized counting and counting venues** – The participants positively viewed the initiative to centralize the counting process. Despite more complex logistics in retrieving the ballot boxes to central counting centres, centralized counting and counting venues allowed for better oversight of the process; it reduced security burden on RSIPF; and improved communication with the EMs and the SIEO, making it possible to transmit the results to the SIEO faster. Each Province was able to identify suitable number of counting centres.

49. **Setting up of counting centres** – The participants agreed that the counting process can be further improved. The participants also recommended to the SIEO to provide detailed guidelines for setting up the counting centres. A consideration should be given to the appointment of a small Counting Centre Management team to fulfil the role of managing the flow of visitors to the counting centres; provide uniformed briefings to the counting agents and observers; and ensure dissemination of relevant service information on the process to those present inside the counting centres. This would enable the counting teams to concentrate on their task at hand (i.e., counting).

50. **Batching, verification of ballot papers and counting** – Removal of a serial number from the ballot paper and a voter ID number from the counterfoil served to protect the secrecy of vote. The batching additionally reinforced the efforts to protect the secrecy of vote. The batching however made counting process more complex causing initial delays. The counting speed picked up later on as the routine was established. It may be useful therefore, to provide practical exercises of counting during the training.

51. **Audit** - One area that requires guidelines from the SIEO is “internal audit” in cases where the discrepancies are determined. Often, those were found to be administrative errors. However, in order to properly assess and rectify such errors, a proper guidance needs to be established. Polling Station codification was useful as it allowed easier tracking of Polling Stations.

52. **Use of Forms EF031-EF034 and their timely submission** – several mistakes were discovered in the results forms received by SIEO in Honiara. The participants noted

that this could have been avoided with a proper training on the use of the forms. The results management system was introduced very late in the process and was never covered in the training. Considering that the staff were operating from a written instruction only, and despite delays in the final verification and submission to the Governor General and the Parliament clerk, the process went relatively well.

53. **Declaration of results** – It was explained that while the ROs were responsible for declaring the winner of an election, the process did not end there. The SIEC was tasked to verify electoral results and announce them publicly. The verified result forms were then submitted to the Governor General for approval and were published in the Official Gazette. Only then, the negotiations for the formation of the Government could commence. Therefore, the ROs engagement in the timely correction of errors/discrepancies is crucial.

I. Human Resources Management

54. **Recruitment process** – There was a general feeling that the recruitment process was relatively flexible which meant that, at times, the ROs had liberty to decide on a recruitment process. Lack of competitive process in some cases opened the ROs to criticism.
55. **Recruitment of essential field staff** – Late timing of recruitment on all levels resulted in a very tight timeframe for the implementation of activities and often led to rushed training, especially for the poll-workers.
56. **Selection criteria for Revising Officers** – The Revising Officers (RVOs) were effectively exercising the role of a judge. At times, some of the RVOs were under significant pressure by the public and had a difficulty to execute their tasks in an unbiased manner. In many instances this was attributed to the lack of legal training.
57. **Gender balance in recruitment** – in several constituencies where more attention was given to the recruitment of female officers, the process benefited from better organization.
58. **Code of Conduct** – introduction of oath ceremony was perceived as a useful practice reinforcing the message of accountability. This ceremony should be extended to the poll-workers as well.
59. **Monitoring of performance** – As there had been no prescribed mechanism for monitoring the staff performance, previously underperforming staff apparently applied and were rehired to work on this election. Therefore, the recommendation is to develop staff performance monitoring tools.

J. Finance

60. The SIEO Head of Finance gave the financial overview of the BVR and the 2019 NGE and explained the budgeting process and MoFT procedures. While SBD 40 mill was budgeted, the expenditures mounted to SBD 48 mill.
61. Overall, participants acknowledged that the budget was sufficient however the release of funds was in almost all cases delayed which affected the elections timings. The retirement of finances represents the biggest issue for ROs and AROs as many of them are not acquitted to the financial procedures. Furthermore, poor practices and poor culture of using invoices by vendors in the field made the accounting process unnecessarily complicated. The SIEO should therefore introduce internal invoice booklets which could be used for local payments. This would improve the situation caused by the lack of invoices from vendors.
62. **Budgeting process** – The SIEO Head of Finance explained to the participants that the budgeting process precedes the start of the operation by 6-10 months. As the changes in the Electoral Act led to the operational changes, the approved budget had to be repeatedly recalculated. He stressed that the unspent funds need to be returned to the MoFT.
63. **Withdrawal of funds** was an issue as the bank branches operate with limited liquidity. The EMs had no option but to withdraw funds in smaller amounts of SBD 50K over the period of several days.

IV. Summary of Recommendations

The summary of recommendations deriving from the lessons learned, for ease of reference, are grouped in 4 categories: 1. Voter registration, 2. Structural improvements and skills development, 3. Elections preparations, and 4. Strengthening of electoral process integrity.

A. Voter registration

1. Definition of “Ordinarily resident” should be better explained and for purposes of registration eligibility should be limited to reflect maintained residence within the constituency of registration.
2. Out-of-constituency registration in general should be discontinued as it provided an opportunity to ineligible registrants to seek registration for constituencies to which they had no link.
3. Voter registration should be a continuous process, linked with the governmental agencies that can provide information relevant to voter registration (e.g. Civil Registry, Statistical Institute, Courts, RSIPF, etc.).
4. Wherever possible, a documentary evidence proving the eligibility should be used for voter registration purposes.
5. Voter awareness campaign should be reaching remote communities and should start much earlier. The campaign particularly needs to address the importance of public scrutiny process.
6. Voter ID cards should be replaced, and consideration should be given to issuing the cards to registrants only after the public scrutiny process is over.

B. Structural improvements and skills development

7. SIEC should establish Provincial Electoral Offices to facilitate and manage continuous electoral processes.
8. SIEO structure should be improved to better reflect work demands.
9. Recruitment process should be more structured and should include clearly defined criteria for the recruitment of staff.

10. Recruitment of temporary staff should be initiated sooner to allow for more time for training and pre-poll voting of poll-workers.
11. SIEO should develop a staff performance monitoring and evaluation tool.
12. SIEO should explore a possibility of engaging other institutions in providing electoral training e.g. Ministry of Education.
13. More direct training should be provided to AROs.
14. Training manuals for poll-workers should be streamlined. This should be supplemented with election activities check-lists that can be used as easy reference material during the process. In addition, a consideration should be given to developing training videos on various processes to enable consistent messaging during the trainings.
15. Forms should be revised and where appropriate combined. Duplication of information should be avoided.
16. Queue master should be recruited for each polling station.
17. Counting centre management structure should be established to provide information and guidance to persons authorized inside the counting centres.

C. Election preparations

18. Elections material delivery route to Isabel, Choiseul and Western Province should be divided in two: a) Isabel and Choiseul and b) Western Province. This would enable more time-efficient material delivery and more time for onward distribution of materials.
19. Election materials should be delivered at least 4-5 days before the elections to allow for quality control and repacking of materials for onward distribution to Polling Stations.
20. SIEO should establish provincial coordination bodies to mirror the composition of IMEOC as appropriate. This would enable a coordinated mobilization of assets on provincial level.

21. Polls should be closed by 4pm to allow for the retrieval of materials during the daylight. This would also minimize the possibility of tampering with ballot boxes at downtime before the close of polls.

D. Strengthening of electoral processes integrity

22. SIEC/SIEO should develop several guidelines to provide more direction in dealing with certain aspects of the electoral processes, the list below is not conclusive:
 - Guidelines on the electoral complaints,
 - Guidelines on the recruitment of staff,
 - Guidelines on the establishment of counting centres,
 - Guidelines on audit of electoral materials at counting centres in cases where discrepancies were identified.
 - Guidelines on the verification of electoral results and announcement of winning candidates.
23. Voter lists should be reformatted to include the space for voters' thumbprints.
24. Pre-poll voting arrangements should be widely publicized to allow for better public awareness over the process.
25. Pre-poll application process should provide for better follow-up information to individual applicants.
26. Pre-poll ballot papers should be handled and verified by appropriate counting centres staff only.

V. Conclusion

The lessons learned workshops were held in good and collegial spirit, and the discussions were frank and constructive. The participants agreed that such debriefings should take place immediately after the elections while the memory is still fresh.

There was much interest among the participants to learn from the just completed elections and work on identifying deficiencies in order to improve the processes and strengthen the SIEO as an institution. It is therefore important for the SIEC, the SIEO and its technical support partners to use the next phase to reform their most critical processes, taking into consideration the lessons, positive and those in need of improvement, learned from this past election. The next elections will clearly benefit greatly if these lessons are learnt and internalized.

VI. List of participants in workshops

1. Mose Saitala – SIEO CEO and Commissioner;
2. Reuben Rongomea – SIEO Head of Corporate Services;
3. Frederich Bosoboe – SIEO Operations Manager/EM Rennel-Bellona
4. Muammer Mrahorovic – UNDP-SECSIP, Electoral Operations Specialist;
5. Phil Whelan – ESSP, Strategic Operations Adviser;
6. Walter Rigamoto - ESSP, Election Management Adviser;
7. Hyemin Yeo – UNDP-SECSIP, Finance and Administration Officer;
8. Joy Manu – UNDP-SECSIP, Field Coordination Assistant;
9. Patricia Maike – UNDP-SECSIP, Human Resources Consultant;
10. Gideon Tuke – EM Western Province;
11. Nelson Tanito Kere – EM Choiseul;
12. Reuben Dotho Junior – EM Isabel;
13. Maesac Suia – EM Guadalcanal Province;
14. Jude Devesi – E Honiara City Council;
15. Frank Omelanga – EM Central Province;
16. Pearson Simi – EM Malaita;
17. Gilbert Tabihau – EM Makira;
18. Hopeful Piosasa – RO Gizo-Kolombangara;
19. Mathew Sakiri – RO Marovo;
20. Clemence Sivoru – RO Shortlands;
21. Fores Hebala – RO South Vella La Vella;
22. Ataban Zama – RO North New Georgia;
23. Christina Mamupio – RO South New Georgia, Rendova & Tetepari;
24. John Sele – RO West New Georgia & Vonavona;
25. Henry Deva – RO North West Choiseul;
26. Abel Pitakomoki – RO South Choiseul;
27. Stanley Seni – RO Ngella;
28. Joseph Malende – RO Russels/Savo;
29. Nixon Koligehenga – RO Hograno, Kia, Havulei;
30. Oliver Hiromana – RO Gao/Bugotu;
31. Anderson Sikapu – RO Maringe Kokota;
32. Cornelius Tariga – RO East Honiara;
33. Jasper Anisi – RO Central Honiara;
34. Atueta Balekana – RO West Honiara;
35. Selwyn Kole – RO North West Guadalcanal;
36. Silverio Mangapaga – RO South Guadalcanal;
37. Doris Sukaria – RO North Guadalcanal;
38. Bradley Lenga - RO Central Guadalcanal;
39. Andrew Aukere – RO Rennel-Bellona;

40. Cecelia Warokohi – RO East Makira;
41. Silas Laulifu – RO West Makira;
42. Timothy Samani – RO Fataleka;
43. John Talu – RO West Kwaio;
44. Mannasseh Ivan – RO Central Kwara’ae;
45. Nickson Atu – RO East Malaita;
46. Jeffrey Kinifu – RO West Are’are;
47. Kemuel Iro – RO Aoke/Langalanga;
48. Peter Clay Taraumae – RO Small Malaita;
49. Adrian Aihari – RO North Malaita;
50. Ledley Diudi – RO Lau Mbaelelea;
51. Peter Kaena – RO Malaita Outer Islands;
52. Richard Misi – RO West Kwara’ae;
53. Frank Samo -RO Baegu Asifola;
54. Gabriel Daomae – ARO Baegu Asifola;
55. Davidson Dau – ARO Aoke/Langalanga
56. Wendy Sade – Registration Officer North Malaita;
57. Augustine Nihopara – ARO Small Malaita;
58. John Evans – ARO North Malaita;
59. David Williams – ARO West Kwaio;
60. Olson Fafale – ARO Lau Mbaelelea;
61. Diudi Molea – ARO Lau Mbaelelea;
62. Selson Faisi Ulasi – ARO Lau Mbaelelea;
63. Francis Irofimae – Accounting Officer Malaita;
64. Iven Tonafalea – ARO West Kwara’ae;
65. Philothea Paul – SIEO Communications, Media and Public Awareness Officer;
66. Sharon Ulufia – SIEO Data Officer;
67. Raewyn Ngoro – SIEO Data Officer;
68. Newton Tonawane - SIEO Data Officer;
69. Steve Rau’ona – SIEO Data Officer.
70. Olga Rabade – UNDP-SECSIP CTA;
71. Pisoth Wing – UNDP-SECSIP Project Coordinator;
72. Afulia Billy – UNDP-SECSIP Women Leadership Advisor
73. Ednal Palmer – UNDP-SECSIP National Media Consultant;
74. Mokther Hossain – UNDP-SECSIP M&E/Reporting Officer;
75. Samantha Mali – UNDP-SECSIP Voter Awareness Assistant;
76. Burns Waroka – UNDP-SECSIP Human Resources Assistant;
77. Catherine Tozaka – UNDP-SECSIP Voter Awareness Assistant.