

Draft Concept Note

On

Website Upgrade for the Parliament of Sierra Leone

Submitted to

The European Union [EU] 11<sup>th</sup> EDF Project

By

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Through the Office of the Clerk of  
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# Concept Proposal

1. **Name:** Website Upgrade for the Parliament of Sierra Leone
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7. **Type:** Website Upgrade for the Parliament of Sierra Leone
8. **Beneficiaries:** Members of Parliament, Staff of Parliament, the  
Electorates, and the general public

## **9. BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION**

Parliament of Sierra Leone is the Legislative arm of Government responsible to make Laws, ratify treaties, policies, scrutinize budget and carry out oversight scrutiny for the wellbeing, of the people of Sierra Leone (Section 73 subsection 1-3 and Part VI of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone).

These functions are carried out by Members of Parliament (MP's) which comprises of directly and indirectly elected representatives who meet to debate, amend and pass laws for the good governance of the people,

The Fifth Parliament of the Second Republic has a composition of 146 Members of Parliament, 132 directly elected and 14 Paramount Chiefs representatives from the 14 Districts.

The administration of the Parliament of Sierra Leone is headed by the Clerk of Parliament, assisted by two Deputy Clerks and 12 heads of department with total staff strength of 293 that are responsible to provide backstopping technical, administrative support and advisory services to enable Members of Parliament effectively and efficiently execute their constitutional mandate.

The use of modern technologies has significantly changed the dynamics and the methods involved in operationalizing Parliamentary activities and the dissemination of information to Members and to the general public.

The timely availability in preparing and providing the relevant information for Members of Parliament and the public has become essential for achieving greater parliamentary transparency and accountability, as well as efficiency in the Law-Making process and the systems and processes of receiving and disseminating information and accessing relevant materials for a thorough parliamentary research is a disquiet to the Leadership, Members of Parliament, staff of Parliament and the general public.

The issue of technological enhancement, receiving and disseminating information by Members of Parliament, staff of Parliament to Heads of

Government Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) and the general public is another apprehension.

The other concern for the Fifth Parliament is the issue of accessing and leveraging the internet for effective research, receiving and disseminating information by Members of Parliament and the staff.

In most parliamentary jurisdiction, the official Parliament website is the authentic Information resource carrier that drives information to and fro, parliamentary activities undertaken within and out of Parliament are sent to the public through the website and the public response or citizens participation on an ongoing legislation is also sent to the Members of Parliament through the website.

In other to achieve the strategic objectives 4: in Parliament of Sierra Leone Strategic Plan 2016 – 2019 which states that “Making Parliament Open, Transparent and Accessible and to increase the outreach work of Parliament”

There is an urgent need for the existing website to be overhaul and upgraded to meet the current parliamentary websites trend and to solve the present challenges of ineffective and inefficient accessibility of information from the website.

Parliamentary websites are one of the most important windows for citizens to view the work of their legislatures, providing parliamentarians with the means to communicate actively with citizens and to enhance public understanding of the legislature's role and responsibilities.

The Parliament Strategic Plan (2016-2019) states the need to enhance Parliaments outreach to stakeholders using ICT, radio and electronic media.

The best way to achieve this objective is through upgrading of Parliament website to reflect the present technological tools that are used to communicate effectively with the general public.

In other to increase the Outreach work of Parliament and to Make Parliament Open, Transparent and Accessible to the electorate and the general public, the website is the most important means for citizens to view the work of their legislatures, providing parliamentarians with the

means to communicate actively with citizens and to enhance public understanding of the legislature's role and responsibilities.

The afore said summary is geared towards enhancing efficient, effective and robust Information and Communication dissemination for the Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

In 2016 European Union made a commitment to support the governance sectors in Sierra Leone during the ACP/EU joint assembly meetings when the former Majority Leader and former CO-President of the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly advocated for EU support to Parliament of Sierra Leone.

In the same year the European Union delegation to Sierra Leone headed by Tom Verns met with the Leadership of the Fourth Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, in that meeting the delegation reaffirms their commitment to support Parliament for effective Legislative strengthening and to overhaul the Parliament website that will make Parliament Open, Accessible and transparent.

The European Union delegation to Sierra Leone sent a consultant named Manuel Wally to undertake needs assessments on critical I.C.T needs to enhanced Members of Parliament to effectively perform their core functions The consultant disseminated online questionnaire to 124 Members of Parliament using survey monkey to reach every Member to get their opinion on the need for ICT enhancement to effectively perform their legislative task.

Focus group discussion and one to one interviews were done for staff to ascertain the ICT needs and onsite inspection were done by the EU delegation to finalise the needs assessment.

The outcome of the needs assessment led to the development of the EU 11<sup>th</sup> EDF Project Action Document Annexe 1 and the Terms of Reference Annexe II for the Key Experts.

In that document it is clearly stated in Component 1b Democracy Support – Parliament Support – Sub Component 2: “Parliament’s openness is improved through overhaul of its website”

In the inception report on the support to Parliament presented by Human Dynamics KG. On the 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2018 under its expected results page 7 of 25: Result 5: Parliament’s openness will be improved through overhaul of its website and new committee policies on consultation.

The Communication Strategy developed by Human Dynamics for Parliament of Sierra Leone in page 15; Point 5.1 Objectives and Implementation Strategies 5.1.1 f. states that there is need for the redesign of Parliament website to actualizes openness, accessibility and transparency.

#### **10. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION**

Parliament of Sierra Leone website [www.parliament.gov.sl](http://www.parliament.gov.sl) which was developed in 2013 hosted by [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) and later on transferred to [www.webhost4life.com](http://www.webhost4life.com) has been fraught with a lot of challenges, since inception of the development to date due to the meagre resources expended and the unwillingness of UNDP Sierra Leone Country office the donor agency to heed to the recommendations and advises proffer by Parliament ICT Department on the development process and the recruitment of the developer.

There are overwhelming gaps and challenges on the existing website which can be delineated as a rationale to overhaul and upgrade the website, so that it will have the capacity to serve as a medium for Information dissemination and Communication.

1. The hosting capacity is not enough to meet the current information of Parliament and it is on a shared server which is not secure and usually experience too many hosting hits from the different websites on that server.

2. The email storage facility is too small, its capacity is for 300 email messages only and the total email storage space for each email account is 2 gigabytes, which is inconvenient for Members as well as staff.
3. It does not have an intranet portal provision that will give access to Members as well as staff to view internal office documents online on a secure virtual private network to give users access to work everywhere, regardless of location.
4. The website developer was unable to complete the website, because of his inexperience in developing an enterprise resource website that involves a lot of advanced technology features which were outlined in the Terms of Reference (TOR) for Parliamentary website development.
5. The hosting service provider which is [www.webhost4life.com](http://www.webhost4life.com) is not a stable website hosting company, in most occasions whenever they are doing maintenance and upgrade of their servers, the website will go offline until they are done, before it comes online.
6. The Content Management System (CMS) dot net nuke 5.0 that was used by the website developer is obsolete and does not make provision for any upgrades and plugins; he was unable to move to the recent version and that system was a tailored made not custom built for Parliament of Sierra Leone; therefore it lacks the features for parliamentary websites.
7. The website does not have any disaster recovery plan, no automatic backup and restore system and it lacks hypertext transfer protocol secure shell that is why anytime users are accessing their official webmail it will state that 'this website is not secure' that makes it vulnerable to internal and external attacks as we experienced the last time, it was attacked by Arab terrorists for more than two weeks, the website was offline.
8. The website does not have Search Engine Optimization (SEO) within the site to search for any document without going through many clicking buttons, and does not have SEO for general search engines such as Google, msn, yahoo, Netscape navigator etc. that will give you a link directly to a specific document on the website.

9. The website lacks dynamic database driven system and does not have interactivity features wherein the electorates can communicate to the Members of Parliament on a real time basis such as parliamentary forum, chat room, online blogging etc.
10. It does not meet the requirement Guidelines on Parliamentary website development that will involve citizens' participation features and facilities.
11. It does not make provision for disability accessibility, usability and Language
12. It does not make provision for online promotion and marketing wherein the general public will know about recent information/programs updated on the website.
13. It lacks effective tools for finding, receiving and viewing information.
14. It is a single website that does not make provision for the 146 Members of Parliament to have direct accessing to upload their parliamentary activities on a daily basis.
15. It does not have website statistical analysis tool to determine how many people view the site, how many documents access and download, users history and information cannot be retrieve, to crown it all the contact us page does not give response to the site.

## **11. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives are focused on closing the gaps and challenges identified and using the Inter Parliamentary Union Guidelines for the development of Parliamentary websites to strategically overhaul and upgrade Parliament of Sierra Leone website to better deal with the issues affecting Openness, Accessibility and Transparency and to increase the outreach work of Parliament in showcasing their representational activities, Law Making, Oversight responsibilities and their Budget scrutiny and allocation function.

This concept note is prepared to outline the potential impact of the website upgrade that will give Parliament the opportunity to showcase their core functional activities to the general public.

The specific objectives will include:

1. To overhaul and upgrade Parliament of Sierra Leone website to overcome the issues of information dissemination and to actualize Strategic Objective 4 in the Parliament of Sierra Leone Strategic Plan (2016 - 2019) and to increase the outreach work of Parliament.
2. To disseminate timely information to the electorate and the general public and to give the citizenry the opportunity to participate in an ongoing legislation or agreements.
3. To bring Parliament closer to the people and the people closer to Parliament by making use of Parliamentary Forum, Chat to your MP etc.
4. To provide easy and cost effective way of watching live plenary deliberations and other important hearings through live video streaming from the website.
5. To give citizens a window to view the work of their legislatures and to provide parliamentarians the means to communicate with citizens and to enhance public understanding of the legislature's role and responsibilities
6. To serve as a tool that would demystify the roles and functions of Members of Parliament and to serve as a sensitization medium on the work of Parliament as opposed to the perception of the constituents.

## **12. JUSTIFICATION**

Parliament of Sierra Leone website is an important tool to disseminate information to the public and to give citizens the opportunity for their voices to be heard by the Members of Parliament.

The quintessence of the website on enhancing information and communication are so much relevant that it cannot be overemphasized.

The drive for website upgrade and enhancement is clearly seen on the day to day demand for more access to parliamentary information from Members, the electorates and the general public.

There is a need for a complete overhaul and upgrade of the website to overcome the gap of ineffective and untimely delivery of parliamentary information and the inaccessibility of the electorates to contact their Members and their inability to participate in the legislative process.

As a strategy of finding ways to overcome the inefficient means of sharing parliamentary documents to MPs, slow transmission of information and documents sent to MPs, to overcome inaccessibility and unaccountability of MPs to the public and the difficulties encountered in updating and reporting on the status of a bill and agreements to MPs and the public.

This concept note seeks to overcome the issues of Information Systems integration and enhancement process to parliamentary functions to overcome the stated challenges.

- a. It will help disseminate information on parliamentary activities in an easy and faster pace.
- b. It will generate Search Engine Optimization to give Members and the general public access to parliament documents as and when required
- c. It will improve workflow and communications by aligning the strategic objectives 4 of Parliament to the Information Systems.
- d. It will increased the capacity to disseminate information and documents to Members, staff and the general public
- e. More timely delivery of information and documents to Members and the general populace
- f. More interaction with citizens and the general populace
- g. It will provide better management of documents
- h. It will reduce cost of accessing Parliament information through automation of tasks and reduce data risk.

The implementation of this concept note will change the narrative of parliamentary information and communication challenges.

### **13. SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

Once the concept note is approved the upgrade of the website is anticipated to complete within four months which inclusive of acquisition of dedicated enterprise hosting server, website transfer, followed by design, coding, programming, testing, maintenance and documentation

#### **14. METHODOLOGY**

The implementation process should involve EU 11<sup>th</sup> EDF Project contracting Agency Hulla and Co. Human Dynamics, Parliament of Sierra Leone ICT Department and the website developer

#### **15. BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROJECT**

The Office of the Clerk of Parliament and the Parliamentary Service Commission are aware that the improvements of the Parliament of Sierra Leone website will create a platform for Openness, Transparency and Accessibility and it would increase the outreach work of Parliament that would give Members of Parliament, staff, the electorates and the general public opportunity to access Parliamentary information as and when necessary and it will bridge the communication gap between the electorates and their Members.

#### **16. COLLABORATION**

The Deputy Director of ICT Department will collaborate with the EU 11<sup>th</sup> EDF project team assigned to Parliament in the execution of this project.

#### **17. REPORTING**

A detail report covering all the phases of the website upgrade development will be recorded and submitted to the Clerk of Parliament for effective concurrence and the EU 11<sup>th</sup> EDF project team.

#### **18. RISK AND CHALLENGES**

The potential challenge and risk which will affect the overhauling and upgrade of the website is the issue of EU refusing to fund the project, and also if they would not heed to the advises and recommendations that would be proffer for recruitment of the website developer and the

acquisition of the website hosting company from the Parliament ICT Department.

#### **19. DELIVERY/OUTPUT**

It increases timely dissemination of information to the general public and it will make provision for interaction with citizens

#### **20. EXPECTED OUTCOME**

Website overhauling and upgrade will make parliament more open, transparent and accessible to the general public and will create access for citizens to participate in the legislative process, which in turn will produce the following outcome:

- Increased capacity to disseminate information and documents to Members, staff and the general public
- More timely delivery of information and documents to Members
- More interaction with citizens
- Enhanced intranet and internet communication

#### **Proposed area of coverage for the Website overhauling**

1. Website Dedicated Server Hosting
2. Website overhauling and Upgrade for the Internet and the Intranet
3. Live Video Streaming development
4. Social Media Integration
5. Website Security systems
6. Website Backup & Recovery Plan
- 7. Webmail Email Security**

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