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**A GUIDE FOR THE CONDUCT OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE
ASSESSMENTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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I. THE SELECTION OF ASSESSMENT TEAM PARTICIPANTS

A. Team Size

An assessment team should be comprised of four political scientists working together in-country for five full weeks. As we discovered in Ghana and Niger, it is difficult for five people to communicate day-to-day findings -- three people for six weeks would be preferable to five people for four weeks. If a team member is unable to stay for the full time, the least disruptive scheduling would be to arrive a few days later than the team and leave no more than a few days before the report deadline. Leaving earlier crams the process of researching and discussing conclusions and recommendations for the entire team, which creates high levels of tension and often means that the departing member's contribution is not well integrated into the report.

B. Qualifications

Two team members should be country specialists with long time horizons and good connections in the academic, civil society or political communities. Two should be familiar with institutional analysis. One should know how USAID works as an institution. All team members should have solid African experience as there is insufficient time to pick up a new area. All team members should be experienced in this type of fieldwork: triangulating through many interviews, reading from a wide range of sources, working with local academics, finding their own sources, making their own appointments, and writing up their findings analytically and quickly, using judgement at times in place of a scholarly standard of research. Team members should be comfortable about working as a team and the amount of time that will be spent in team meetings and informal communications. For a number of academics, the democracy and governance (D/G) assessment was their first consulting experience -- most did very well, the worst failures were made by those who found working in a team uncongenial or found it difficult to meet deadlines.

C. African Participation

Local academics who work with the team are critical to the report's quality. We have successfully included political scientists and local professionals from a number of other disciplines, including law and sociology. Many of them have been junior faculty members -- senior faculty do not usually have enough time available to do at least two weeks with the team. The important qualifications are a deep understanding of how their political system works and an analytical framework that is compatible with institutional analysis. In most D/G teams the dynamic has been that those with institutional analysis experience spend a lot of time convincing those without of the validity of the methodology; getting the core team to write from the same perspective has left little energy for extending the process to the local colleagues. For this reason, the writing submitted by local colleagues has usually not been included in the final reports. Local colleagues, however, have been invaluable as people who can deepen the team's knowledge, temper the team's conclusions and help with travel, appointments, and research materials. FSNs from the USAID Missions have also been valuable resources for D/G teams. Their availability is not under the team's control, however, and we have found that it is not wise to assume that they will be able to work full-time with the team (except when traveling with the team) because of conflicting pressures.

We have found that traveling out of the capital is vital to getting some sense of how political life is faring for the majority of the country's population; here, local colleagues are necessary traveling companions. We would recommend a local counterpart for each team member. Ideally, the local counterpart has done work that involved contact with people in the area visited or is from the area. It is important to visit villages where either the team member or the local colleague has connections and a time perspective. We have normally spent no more than two days in a village, so existing relationships are the only way to get a reasonable flow of information. Such relationships are an important consideration in making decisions about where to travel.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF A SCHEDULE FOR CONDUCTING ASSESSMENTS

A. Pacing the Process

Five full weeks in country with four full-time team members are enough to do a D/G assessment; if, however, the Mission wants its portfolio analyzed in detail and intends to hold a series of discussions about governance implications for the Mission a sixth week should be added for at least two team members. Second visits to complete reports are probably not cost-effective -- they do add some certainty about political trends, but the work of updating the report is considerable in relation to the additional information.

B. Sequencing of Tasks for a Five-week Assessment

Week One: Team meetings to cover the Scope of Work, D/G theory and methodology (preferably in Washington); meetings with the USAID Mission and country team to clarify the expectations for the assessment and the Scope of Work (most Scopes of Work have included a few items, e.g., analysis of the military, which both the team and the Mission then agree are not feasible, and most Missions have a few items that they put particular emphasis on); meetings with local colleagues; collecting literature from the Mission, academics, recent newspapers, government reports and laws; settling logistics of cars, office support, appointments, etc.; and, discussions on travel plans. By the end of the week the following decisions should have been made:

- the team should have heard enough about what is on the minds of the country team, FSNs, academics, friends, etc. to know what special issues must be included in the report and to have written a work plan and a provisional report outline;
- the team and the Mission have agreed on what the Scope of Work means (the team will probably present its work plan and draft report outline during the week);

- the team will have determined how to handle potentially sensitive situations like interviews with senior government officials and the media. A schedule of debriefings will have been set; and,
- the team will have agreed on a division of labor for covering specific institutions, special issues and background report sections.

The first week, with its emphasis on process and setting up working relationships, puts a heavy burden on the team leader, while team members are impatiently waiting to get going with research. If the Mission puts a heavy emphasis on analysis of the portfolio as part of the assessment (some Missions have not), this first week would be a good time to bring team members and project managers together to acquaint team members with the details and implementation modalities of USAID projects, so that team members begin their research with a good knowledge of the specifics of USAID projects and strategies. This could eliminate some of the difficulties of tying recommendations concretely to USAID activities. The general briefings and documentation that have usually been given to teams are not specific enough about the dynamics of working in the prevailing political environment.

Weeks Two and Three: Research must be nearly completed and travel must be finished in these two weeks. Whereas the first week is an often maddening process of working as a team internally and in interviews, weeks two and three test the ability of team members to accomplish individually the research needed to write their report sections while keeping other team members informed about items of interest.

Most people will have research components that require time in the capital and components that require triangulation in towns or villages. Not everyone needs to travel or to travel for equal amounts of time; an obvious pattern however is to leave on a weekend and arrive back the next weekend, having covered two areas. It is logical to pair a country expert and an institutional analyst. It has worked well on several teams to go to major secondary cities and for one team member to interview the business and professional communities, and the other to concentrate on villages and local associations. People traveling must cover not only their own responsibilities but those of other team members; field notes for other team members must be written up or fully communicated verbally (it is not realistic to expect that all field notes will be written up).

Research in the capital can be greatly assisted by local colleagues or FSNs; it is each team member's responsibility to make sure that appointments are made, meetings and deadlines with colleagues set, material collected, etc. While there should be plenty of informal discussion and problem-solving, and some joint interviewing, these two weeks should be flat-out data gathering and processing, mainly by individual responsibilities.

Formal team meetings should not cut into research time. It is likely that there will be a weekly briefing for USAID and the country team. Preparation for these meetings should involve team time -- they should be thoughtful but brief.

Week Four: Intensive team work and tying up loose research ends should be the focus of week four. The team should hold a series of meetings to reach consensus on themes, conclusions and recommendations. These should be structured as sets of rules, behavior and the resulting governance implications. The report outline should be revisited and revised as necessary. Individual writing responsibilities should be clarified and understood by all team members, and necessary information exchanged. Members should be encouraged to reach closure on research and agree on the level of descriptive detail and historical background appropriate for their sections. Ideally, people should start writing this week, but the pressures of team meetings, discussing the USAID portfolio and finishing research often squeeze out writing, particularly for those who want large blocks of uninterrupted time. This is normally a high-tension week.

Week Five: Writing is the primary task; most people want to isolate themselves in order to concentrate. It is reasonable to expect that a team member will produce about four research/report sections totaling about 30 pages in about a week. The best field reports have been those in which team members commented on each other's drafts, adding material or pointing out gaps that could be filled in the time available. Dinner discussions are useful.

Team members normally find it difficult to concentrate on detailed recommendations for the USAID portfolio until they have drafted their analysis sections. One way of ensuring the relevance of the recommendations to the portfolio is to give the person with the most knowledge of USAID procedures responsibility for taking the governance implications analyzed by all team members and applying them to the portfolio; another is for the team to focus initially on recommendations during week four and revisit them during week five. Probably the best would be to schedule the team to work intensively with USAID on recommendations after drafting the analysis sections, but this would assume that the team will meet cast-iron deadlines and have energy left over.

The deadline for submitting the report draft to the Mission is usually set a few days before most team members leave, with a debriefing session at about the same time. The Mission and the team leader need to spell out the responsibilities and timetable for final changes and editing. In most cases team members will be unable to take any further part in writing or editing after they leave the country so it is important that their contributions are complete by the time they leave.

C. Final Thoughts on Developing a Schedule to Conduct Assessments

Timing the content of presentations to USAID is tricky. During the first three weeks reporting on research in progress is straightforward. The team during its process of reaching consensus in week four goes through a period when the findings are fairly abstract and not immediately relevant to USAID practitioners. The trick is to create a process to bring the findings to the portfolio without requiring huge amounts of team time while members are preoccupied with getting their analysis on paper.

A logical method might be for some time to be spent in the first week in team meetings with USAID project managers discussing their projects in some detail, particularly the relationships with government and civil society actors. When the team generates its list of governance implications during the fourth week, it would be easier to relate them to USAID's projects. The week four presentation could then be used to explore the connections between the team's assumptions about how these governance implications affect USAID projects and project managers' perceptions about priority opportunities and constraints.

The task of relating findings to recommendations that the Mission finds usable is complicated by the fact that supporting democratic governance is unfamiliar territory for most Missions and country teams. The D/G assessment team arrives, with a tight schedule and, usually, years of experience in debating the fine academic points of politics in Africa, but little knowledge of what USAID project managers must contend with. Teams would benefit from more contact with USAID practitioners.

What is also missing from the process is the time to discuss with the Mission why some strategic aspects are more important than others and the role that donors can play -- in other words, teaching the essentials of institutional analysis of democratic governance to non-political scientists in order to give them the tools to react to political events constructively. The way that assessments have been structured does not allow time to do this; it might make sense for one or two team members to make a second trip with the primary purpose of holding discussion/training sessions with Mission staff and the secondary purpose of checking political trends since the first visit. The D/G project now has enough experience with enough Mission staffs to put together a training module at the right level of sophistication.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Background

Researching each institution or set of political actors will involve getting some sense of the following aspects:

- its history, resources and the expectations of the role it will play in a multiparty democracy;

- how it functions, how effective it is, the formal rules and actual behavior, how it is affected by the prevailing political dynamics; and,
- its role in and potential for supporting democratic governance.

Each institution must be analyzed in terms of its part in the six dimensions of the "democratic disciplines" in order to understand its potential to contribute to a workable democratic system. In practice, building and enforcing a consensus on constitutional rule, a rule of law and an open public realm outrank the other three in the early years of a transition to democracy; i.e., free and fair elections are important and necessary but freedom of speech and association will provide more impetus to changing political dynamics because they provide more opportunities to more people to act out their preferences and practice democratic behaviors. Similarly, a rule of law increasingly eliminates opportunities for arbitrary behavior, and consensus on constitutional law focuses all groups on the necessity for fair rules within a system whose boundaries are set by the body of constitutional interpretation and practice.

B. Suggested Data Points for Democratic Disciplines

An outline of the initial research questions regarding the "democratic disciplines" and the content and application of the country's constitution follow. The answers will vary significantly from country to country, but the countries can be compared in terms of the functioning of their constitutional processes in actualizing the multiple aspects of a democratic system.

1. Constitutional Limits (Constitutional Democracy)

- Is there acceptance by the society that constitutional law supersedes other law?
- How can the constitution be altered? Is the process easily dominated by any group (particularly the executive)? Can elected officials make amendments at their sole initiative? Are referenda required?
- What are the test cases regarding constitutional limits and what do they show? Who has standing to bring what kinds of constitutional test cases?

2. Popular Limits (Electoral Democracy)

- Are elections held regularly and conducted fairly?
- Who manages elections?
- How are candidates nominated?
- What is the mode of representation (i.e., single-member constituency)?

- How are campaigns financed?
- What recall provisions are there?
- Are there provisions for popular initiation of referenda?

3. Legislative Deliberation (Deliberative Democracy)

- How free are legislators to make up their minds on the basis of the merits of the issue brought out in debate? What are the rules of debate? How is party discipline applied? Can MPs cross the floor?
- What is the committee structure? How are MPs assigned to committees? How is the legislative leadership chosen?
- What is the timetable for debate? How can amendments be brought? Can legislators initiate legislation? How do citizens or interest groups make their views known?
- Do legislators have subpoena power? What access to information do they have (government and non-government)?
- Can parliament effectively hold the government accountable for its actions and expenditures?

4. Rule of Law (Juridical Democracy)

- Is there an independent judiciary with norms of impartiality and procedural fairness? What is the discovery process? What are the limitations of standing and access (including cost and timeliness)?
- Do those with coercive powers use those powers within the limits of the law (e.g., obtain search warrants)?
- Does the executive consistently enforce court orders?

5. Open Public Realm (Liberal Democracy)

- Are freedoms of speech and association limited?
- What is the legal grounding for these freedoms and other civil and human rights? Does the individual have standing to lay claim? Is it feasible to do so in practice?
- What safeguards for these rights have been established?

- What are the rules on disclosure of information (e.g., U.S. Freedom of Information Act)? Private businesses and associations? Political parties?
- Is there central control of information (media monopoly)?

6. Local Autonomy (Federal Democracy)

- Is the principle of subsidiarity followed (i.e., Is the lowest level of government able to solve a problem/provide a service)?
- Do those most affected by a decision have the most discretion to participate in the process?
- At what points in the political process can the public make its views known to influence the policy-making process?
- Do local governments have independent revenue generation?
- Do local governments have constitutive autonomy?

IV. CONTENT OF THE REPORT

A. Two Major Assumptions

D/G assessment teams make two major assumptions that drive the analysis contained in the reports: 1) actual political behavior is rational and motivated by the available incentives; it may or may not conform to democratic governance principles (a major task of the research is to elucidate the "rules in use" and the opportunities or constraints involved in making them more conducive to democratic governance); and, 2) democratic governance can be objectively analyzed in terms of the six dimensions of democracy described as the "democratic disciplines." These democratic disciplines are as relevant to African countries as to established democracies because they can be achieved in a variety of culturally adapted ways but they are necessary elements of a workable system centered around ultimate accountability of government to "the people." The objective of the analysis is not to produce a "report card" but to reach some conclusions about the obstacles and opportunities for building democratic governance that are both country-specific and comparable across countries.

B. The Historical, Economic and Political Context

The report is structured around several necessities, including the time available. The historical context shapes the expectations for democratization: a country that has no experience with autonomous multi-party democracy is in a different category than one that has sustained democratic rule for some periods of time and has built up some relevant social capital. The team should agree

on the stage of democratic transition that the country is in at the beginning of the report writing process. The accepted historical patterns of wielding power are country-specific and of major importance. The economic context and the pressures on the government from major political and economic actors must be taken into account. Particular political circumstances may be salient: in Ghana, the consequences of the opposition boycott of the parliamentary elections in 1992; in Tanzania, the shift to a multi-party system several years before the first multi-party general elections, and the patching up of the old constitution; in Niger, the consequences of coalition politics and proportional representation, etc. The donors and other external forces, e.g., support for Islamicization, may play important roles in the political arena. The Mission concerned will have some specific questions tied to present or projected activities.

C. Structure of the Report

Each report tries to cover both the contexts in which political change is occurring (current and historical, political, economic and social) and the behavior of all the major actors in the political sphere (including those who ought to be major interest groups but may not be in practice). A logical report structure starts with the various contexts, concluding with a section on the general understanding in the society at the time the system changed of what a democratic system was supposed to accomplish.

This can be followed by an analysis of the formal structures of government, including the constitution, the actual behavior of government officials and the "rules in use" and incentives that appear to be dominant. The constitution can be well or inconsistently crafted, and may or may not be a dominant force in shaping behavior. From the analysis of the constitution, the report proceeds to looking at power relationships between the executive and the civil service, the legislature and judiciary, and the operations of government structures at the local level. There may also be important institutions such as national commissions or Electoral Commissions. The power of party national executives should be taken into account. The essential research questions are: "What is driving behavior and how has changing to a formal multi-party democracy changed behavior? What implications for better governance derive from the observed political dynamics?" The researcher looks at the formal rules, particularly what checks on executive power exist and how they are being used. What are the decision and policy making processes in practice?

The next section should cover the organizations in civil society that allow people to group together to accomplish political, social and economic improvements at the local and national levels. The analysis should look overall at the ability of civil society to act as a counterweight to government officials' incentives to bend the rules in their favor. It should also look at the legal protections for organizations, their autonomy and the density of organizations and networks. There is usually reason to look separately at the organizations that are formed at the village level and those that are primarily urban and professional. Civil societies vary greatly between countries; the report should include a little of their history and roles in relationship to the government over time. Careful attention is paid to legal or informal restraints on freedom of association. Groups that should be included in the analysis are those that represent business, women, farmers, and minority groups. Trade unions,

student unions, human rights and legal aid groups, religious groups and traditional authorities should be assessed. Professional associations, environmental groups and other NGOs may be important. Groups that involve rural people either directly in the political process or in aggregating economic interests are particularly important. Networks within civil society that increase the ability of individual groups to act or to become informed are vital to increasing the ability of civil society to influence the political process.

The third section should discuss what we have been calling "linkage institutions" - those that by the nature of their activities link government and people -- primarily, political parties and the press. Some apex organizations of civil society groups in some countries may also serve as linkage institutions. The main research questions concern how well these organizations carry out a linkage function; for example, do political parties allow participation by members in the most important decisions like choosing candidates? Are independent newspapers constrained by inequitable libel laws, partisan use of advertising, poor distribution systems, etc.?

Each team member should demonstrate in the analytical sections the particular patterns associated with the institutions dealt with in that section, tying some of them into the dynamics that the team has agreed to be of overarching importance. The coherence of the report depends on each team member's ability to show how segments of the society contribute to the political picture and overall dynamics.

The recommendation or final section should summarize the governance implications of the observed patterns of political behavior and discuss how they impact the efforts of donors, particularly those of USAID, to encourage democratic governance. The section should pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the political environment and recommend a strategy for dealing with the major political factors. Depending on the Mission's requests and the Scope of Work, the USAID portfolio of activities should be analyzed and discussed in light of the general conclusions and recommendations and in terms of specific opportunities and constraints. -