

**A REVIEW OF THE GENDER DIMENSION OF  
THE AFRICA REGIONAL ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE  
FUND (AREAF) PROGRAM**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report came as an outgrowth of an incipient dialogue on gender issues related to the democratization process in Africa between the ONI/D&G staff and the AFWID advisor in the Bureau. There was, in fact, a sense of urgency on the part of both Madeleine Williams and Andrea Wynkoop of ONI/D&G that some initial step had to be made soon to verify that the issues were being addressed before the democracy program progresses further on its course and before the era of multiparty elections in Africa was complete. To take advantage of AFWID assistance prior to its contract end in February 1994, ONI/D&G and the AFWID Project Officer Vicky Dreyer in ONI/TPPI conceived of the idea to examine the AREAF program, the vehicle for electoral assistance.

We are specially grateful to Madeleine Williams, Andrea Wynkoop and Vicky Dreyer for their collegial support, commitment of time and resources, and incisive comments in this endeavor to identify issues on gender in the democratic transition early on at a very pivotal time in Africa's history.

We also wish to thank Dr. Jean-Marie Mayas, Project Director of the MayaTech contract for AFWID, for his enduring support throughout this assignment.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Democracy and Governance (D&G) Unit of AFR/ONI requested assistance from the AFWID (Africa Women in Development) Project to conduct an inquiry on how gender issues are being addressed in a sample of their programs. The inquiry was an opportunity for D&G to take a self-critical look at the extent to which the notion of political participation is taken to denote the inclusion of women. It was anticipated that the findings of this report would help guide the D&G Unit in formulating a strategy that will rationalize the design, conceptualization, or expansion of programs in its portfolio in the near future.

The area selected for this brief study was the Africa Regional Electoral Assistance Fund (AREAF) and its activities. AREAF is a cooperative agreement among the African-American Institute (AAI), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI) in collaboration with the Carter Center of Emory University. Its purpose is to support free and fair local and national elections and referenda on constitutional issues throughout sub-Saharan Africa through providing technical assistance, training, and international observer missions to African countries undergoing transition to democratic governance and multiparty participation.

AREAF was selected chiefly because of its work at the critical, inchoate stages of a democracy; interventions at the preliminary stages can pre-determine the full scope of opportunities for various groups, including women, in subsequent stages of the country's political evolution. Biases of various sorts can become rooted in the political system, as it is being established, from voter registration to elections. For example, if women are prevented from registering to vote or if women are not elected to national government, the margin for improving their participation in the democratization process is already diminished. Hence, the focus on the early phases of a new democracy was appropriate for this inquiry.

Under the AREAF program, consortium members are guided by a four-point strategy to respond to the challenges of democratization and electoral assistance. Three components are already evident in the work undertaken by the consortium members as they provided assistance to more than twenty countries over the past 18 months. The fourth component is to "make women special target beneficiaries. The active involvement of African women is essential to ensure the success of transitions, to sustain democratization initiatives, to promote civil society, and to build long-term capacity. Women are often overlooked in discussions of competitive politics and the electoral process" (AREAF Program Description).

This inquiry is concerned with how or if AREAF has been able to address women's involvement in the kinds of assistance it has delivered over the last year or so and what specific issues have come to light that call for greater focus.

## METHODOLOGY

More than one round of interviews was conducted with representatives from AAI, NDI, and IRI, using a general set of guiding questions. In addition, a large sample of pre-electoral assessment reports, monitoring reports, and other documents were reviewed.

The consultancy also took advantage of contacts in the U.S. to conduct interviews with African women who were involved in or knowledgeable about the political changes in their respective countries and how women were being affected.

The bulk of this paper focuses on gender issues in the AREAF Program, broken down by stage of the electoral process and by types of assistance delivered.

## CONCLUSIONS

The assistance provided by AREAF is technically rigorous and complex. It must be able to objectify, decipher, and help chart the course of an intricate landscape of power relations--among (and within) political parties; ethnicities; men and women; budding NGOs; civic groups and government. AREAF must therefore promote the participation and freedom of expression of all stakeholders by encouraging competition while at the same time instilling a democratic order in the process.

One of AREAF's proven challenges is to confront the gender disparity in political participation. No well-defined, discrete activity can really accomplish what is necessary to mainstream women in the electoral, and longer-term political development, process. In large part, the meaningful and equitable involvement of African women in a democratic transition requires a sensitivity to gender issues in the routine tasks undertaken by AREAF, i.e., the training activities, pre-electoral assessments, monitoring and observing, and pollwatching.

The reports which conclude the assessments and elections monitoring consistently omit any reference to gender issues and convey a gender-blindness throughout. No knowledge about the status of women in a respective country or the gender disparities in various areas seems to underlie the observations or assessments that emerge in these reports. Training activities, assessment missions, and international observer missions take an approach of not excluding women while not seeking to specifically include women for the sake of redressing the imbalance. With one or two exceptions, no interventions funded under AREAF are specifically targeted at women.

It is well documented that African women are experiencing discrimination based on their sex during different stages of the electoral process. The manifestations of gender inequities should not go unnoticed or totally unchecked during the process of preparing for free and fair elections.

## SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Women constitute 50 percent of the population, a fact which their historical participation in the economic and political development of their respective countries has not represented. It is illusory to think that the democratic ideal through support to free and fair elections can be achieved without deliberate efforts to include women.

**First and foremost, the AREAF program must give the same primacy, in practice, to the inclusion of women in its activities as the other components of its strategy.** The development of a new lens with which to view the democratization process might then begin with the following:

- Consider acquiring an oversight capacity for addressing gender issues and ensuring their implementation as a way to give primacy to the component of targeting women beneficiaries.

AREAF can undertake a number of small steps integral to the functions they routinely perform to accomplish the overriding recommendation, as stated above. The following summarizes and consolidates the most salient recommendations on gender issues in the AREAF program:

- Provide gender-sensitivity training to pre-electoral assessment teams, international observer teams, domestic monitors, as well as to political party members and civic organizations as part of other training activities.
- Adopt a targeted approach to including women in all training activities and keep a record of the male-female percentages of participation in training.
- Target groups and individuals as informants for pre-electoral assessments who can speak to issues of gender discrimination and seek to achieve a cross-section of the population in those consultations.
- Recommend to the host country that women and men designated to form the Electoral Commission not only be non-partisan but also gender-sensitive and recommend women, particularly, be included on the Commission.
- Make provisions for the electoral code to accommodate women in view of common sociocultural constraints and women's disadvantaged position.
- Promote continuing or long-term civic education that reinforces positive messages about women's equal participation and individual rights to choose and develop special civic education programs for women, given their constraints and special needs.
- Initiate gender-disaggregated research, quantitative and qualitative, in the consolidation stage.
- Assist post-election "democratic institutions" to shift into their new role vis-a-vis the newly-elected government, to make claims of campaign promises.

## INTRODUCTION

The Democracy and Governance (D&G) Unit of AFR/ONI requested assistance from the AFWID Project to conduct an inquiry on how gender issues are being addressed in a sample of their programs. The inquiry was an opportunity for D&G to take a self-critical look at the extent to which the notion of political participation is taken to denote the inclusion of women. It was anticipated that the findings of this report would help guide the D&G Unit in formulating a strategy that will rationalize the design, conceptualization, or expansion of programs in its portfolio in the near future.

The area selected for this brief study was the Africa Regional Electoral Assistance Fund (AREAF) and its activities. AREAF is a cooperative agreement among the African-American Institute (AAI), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI) in collaboration with the Carter Center of Emory University. Its purpose is to support free and fair local and national elections and referenda on constitutional issues throughout sub-Saharan Africa through providing technical assistance, training, and international observer missions to African countries undergoing transition to democratic governance and multiparty participation. One of the chief reasons AREAF was selected relates to its work at the critical, inchoate stages of a democracy; interventions at the preliminary stages can pre-determine the full scope of opportunities for various groups, including women, in subsequent stages of the country's political evolution. Biases of various sorts can become rooted in the political system, as it is being established, from voter registration to elections. For example, if women are prevented from registering to vote or if women are not elected to national government, the margin for improving their participation in the democratization process is already diminished. Hence, the focus on the early phases of a new democracy was appropriate for this inquiry.

It is a well known fact that women constitute at least 50 percent of the electorate. If not for this reason alone, political parties and governments have an interest in women exercising their right to vote. Yet, African women, cutting across ethnic, income, regional, religious, and age groupings, face a much graver problem that goes far beyond voting as a form of political participation; women live with a relatively lower status than their male counterparts and their involvement in decision making and positions of power is negligible. Yet, the barriers to women's full participation and empowerment do not command the same level of acceptance and concern among the male-dominated governing and decision making bodies in Africa, despite the commitment to civil society and more democratic forms of governance. While some of these barriers are cultural, it has also become starkly evident that women's historically disadvantaged position in both the economy and the political arena is cause for a targeted approach to their involvement in the electoral process.

Under the AREAF program, consortium members are having to implement four components of a strategy to respond to the challenges of democratization and electoral assistance. Ensuring African input, facilitating the transferability of successful strategies from one country to another, and applying existing rapid-response mechanisms are three of the

components, already evident in the work they have undertaken in over twenty countries in less than two years. AREAF, however, is faced with a stream of competing demands for which there are limited resources. Assisting countries to construct the electoral machinery is fundamental to preparing for free and fair elections; but building an enabling environment for free and fair elections is a much more complex, multidimensional task. The AREAF program acknowledges in its fourth component another aspect crucial to its overall goal, and that is to "mak[e] women special target beneficiaries. The active involvement of African women is essential to ensure the success of transitions, to sustain democratization initiatives, to promote civil society, and to build long-term capacity. Women are often overlooked in discussions of competitive politics and the electoral process" (AREAF Program Description). This last component departs from the others in that no discrete activity or specific strategy for its implementation presents itself. This inquiry is concerned with how or if AREAF has been able to address women's involvement in the kinds of assistance it has delivered over the last year or so and what specific issues have come to light that call for greater focus.

### METHODOLOGY

This investigation represents an optimal effort to solicit information and viewpoints from AREAF consortium members in the head offices. More than one round of interviews was conducted with representatives from AAI, NDI, and IRI, using a general set of guiding questions, and a large sample of pre-electoral assessment reports, monitoring reports, and other documents were reviewed. Besides learning how consortium members view the theme of women's political participation as it relates to their work in electoral assistance and how they could more effectively address gender concerns, it was clear that questions regarding, for example, the responsiveness of political party candidates to a women's agenda warranted more than just outsider observations. It was felt the inquiry needed to be directed in part to African women as well. Hence, the consultancy took advantage of contacts in the U.S. to conduct interviews with African women who were involved in or knowledgeable about the political changes in their respective countries and how women were being affected. The five African women interviewed were either with the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Law School or the Georgetown University Law Center and were from either Uganda or Kenya. Given the timeframe for this activity, the selection of interviewees was based on convenience rather than a thorough search of African women informants residing in the U.S. and, hence, their views are not presumed to represent the perspective of African women generally.

The bulk of the paper is contained in a section on the gender issues in the AREAF Program, broken down by stage of the electoral process and one level further by the types of assistance delivered. Each focus area covers a description of AREAF interventions; issues relating to gender; and recommendations. This is followed by a conclusions and recommendations section.

THE GENDER ISSUES IN THE AREAF PROGRAM

THE PRE-ELECTORAL STAGE

I. Pre-electoral Assessments

*AREAF Interventions*

In response to a country-based request, the AREAF program sends assessment teams to assist a country in preparing for presidential or legislative elections. There is no one standard terms of reference or pre-established set of requirements for pre-electoral assessment teams. The more common objects of focus during the assessment, nonetheless, are electoral law and administration, status of political parties, role of the media and civil society, and voter registration. The team might investigate the government's ability to administer elections, the existence of laws relating to electoral administration, the competitive nature of electoral politics, the accessibility of the media, and the ability of NGOs and civic institutions to build public confidence in the electoral process, among others. There are also no set rules governing the size and composition of assessment teams, although a conscious attempt is made to achieve diversity within assessment delegations which will often have political party representatives and candidates from other countries, and both men and women. Furthermore, a range of individuals and groups in country -- political party candidates, professional associations, NGOs, advocacy and human rights groups, etc. -- is consulted but less is known about how and by whom they are chosen. Hence, assessments can vary in the set of questions asked, the size and composition of the team, the choice of information sources in the country, and the amount of time spent in country. Yet, they are all directed at determining the type of follow-on assistance needed to ensure free and fair elections.

*Issues*

- **Inclusion of women on assessment teams.** There is no mandate that assessment teams include women, nor is that the recommendation. It could almost be argued that such a mandate is unnecessary, as consortium members take for granted the inclusion of women on the delegations. What differs is the female-male ratio of assessment teams which can be two out of six (Kenya), one out of three (Guinea-Conakry), two out of four (Lesotho), but not likely to exceed 50 percent of the team. In discussions with consortium members, they perceived the need for female participation primarily because it facilitated communication with female voters or the solicitation of information from women in countries where it would be culturally prohibitive for men to do so. However, as pointed out by one AREAF interviewee, women's participation should be recognized for what they have to offer as professionals generally. Rather than assume women will be more attuned to gender considerations in the pre-election phase, concern should rest with the gender-sensitivity of all team members, i.e., both men and women.

- **Gender-blindness of pre-electoral assessment reports.** A review of pre-electoral assessment reports reflects an invisibility of gender issues not only in electoral politics but in the broader sociocultural context of the country drawn upon to analyze the pre-electoral situation. While ethnicity figures into the examination of the pre-electoral environment, virtually no recognition is given to gender relations. Most societies can be said to be male-dominated and patriarchal, but some countries, either by dint of the religion, the culture, or the male personalities in power may harbor a more oppressive environment for women than other countries. In Guinea-Conakry, President Conte issued a directive "... for women to go home and stay out of politics," which has since magnified the tension between men and women and led to widespread, indiscriminate attacks on women in Guinea (including foreigners). Likewise, women's status, which reflects their historical access to power and resources, may be different from one country to another. Certain kinds of information about gender relations, such as the male-female percentages of the population (read electorate), gender-based differences in education and literacy, discriminatory laws pertaining to individual rights, etc., can forecast the disparities or biases that might crop up but go unnoticed during and throughout the electoral phases.
- **Selection of groups and individuals to consult.** The selection of groups and individuals consulted during the pre-electoral assessment would appear to be critical to all subsequent forms of assistance and presumably forms the knowledge base for comprehending the plurality of voices and constituencies seeking representation in and through the elections. This begs the following queries:
  - (a) Do the groups interviewed represent a cross-section of the population or is that even the aim of an assessment? According to reports from consortium members, assessment teams rarely come directly into contact with the grassroots, and the women they meet tend to be women who have achieved a certain status in society, e.g., leaders of NGOs, parliamentarians, professionals (esp. lawyers).
  - (b) Further, it has been observed that women's groups and NGOs have been proliferating in countries undergoing a democratic transition. How do assessment teams choose among them?
  - (c) Do interviews with advocacy groups and human rights groups target women's concerns specifically? If the opportunity here to obtain even minimal information on women's status in that country is missed, how will AREAF raise the right

questions later to ensure mechanisms are in place to prevent (or even anticipate) the play of gender discrimination in preparing for free and fair elections?<sup>1</sup>

- **Gender-blindness in areas of focus.** Assessment reports reviewed to date demonstrate a gender-blindness in mostly all areas investigated. The questions below illustrate the kind of probe needed to identify issues specific to women, i.e., to uncover gender disparities impinging on a free and fair electoral process.
  - (a) On the issue of the competitiveness of electoral politics, are women being barred or discouraged from running for political office or from being nominated as political party candidates by their own parties, as was the case in Kenya?
  - (b) Are there forms of political violence or harassment being directed against women, regardless of political party affiliation? The pre-electoral assessment of Kenya reported the occurrence of physical intimidation and harassment but in a gender-neutral fashion. Women candidates, their supporters, and women voters were not only threatened but many were raped, stoned, beaten, and suffered gunshot wounds.
  - (c) Can women who experience barriers in campaigning or running for office, owing to their gender, appeal to the Electoral Commission and the electoral code of conduct?
  - (d) Do political parties have female members or are they relegated to a women's wing or league?
  - (d) In assessing media fairness and accessibility, is there proportional coverage of female candidates or a women's party?
  - (e) Where civil society is under review, are civic institutions, which are presumably promoting civil rights, delivering a message that encourages the equal participation of men and women in electoral politics (e.g., educating and registering voters, monitoring the electoral process, establishing procedures to guarantee citizens' rights to choose political leaders)? Another example would be organizations providing voter education - are they conveying the message that women have full rights to an independent vote without their husbands' consent?
  - (f) As for voter registration, are there any inherent biases that ignore the conditions that may prevent women from registering?

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<sup>1</sup>In Guinea, the assessment team interviewed various activists, businesswomen, politicians, etc. on the recent repressive acts by the government against women. When women staged a march on Guinean national day to protest, they were beaten by police, sprayed with a chemical agent, and physically and sexually assaulted in prison. On the one hand, the fact that the pre-electoral assessment report for Guinea contained information on this incident was important; on the other hand, the reporting seemed to treat the event more as another example of government repression threatening free and fair elections than as a solid barrier to women's participation in the electoral and political processes, i.e., through the suppression of their civil rights based on their gender.

### *Recommendations*

Certain actions are worth considering to reverse the gender-blindness of pre-electoral assessments and to allow for some consistency in addressing the gender issues in assessing the instruments, institutions and systems in place prior to elections.

- Provide training in gender-sensitivity to assessment teams or consultants who wish to make themselves available for assessment missions. This could simply be part of their orientation and team members should be aware of the component of AREAF's strategy to "target women beneficiaries." They could be given some guiding questions and even a one-page information sheet of statistics, such as male and female literacy rates, number of women in parliament and senior positions in government, etc.
- Target women in the country during assessments who are able to speak to issues of discrimination, their participation in political life, and expectations of the electoral and political development process.
- Include in the selection criteria for groups to be consulted a broad representation of women, particularly grassroots, rural women.

## **II. Technical Assistance**

### **A. Formation of Electoral Commission**

#### *AREAF Interventions*

A country's electoral commission is appointed by an executive branch of government. It sets rules for the conduct of an election and is the primary source of citizen education about the voting process. It ensures honesty and free and fair competition. These guarantees are especially important in emerging democracies whose environments may be fraught with fear and repression retained from the former one-party state.

To accomplish these goals, the commission must enjoy independent status. Consortium members have assisted in the formation of electoral commissions or other electoral authorities and have provided technical assistance to the authorities in Uganda, Burundi, and the Central African Republic.

In assessing the independence of an electoral commission, consortium members determine whether the commission is non-partisan and whether it is seen as an arm of the government. In addition, they ask whether the commission provides for open participation by all parties. The various political parties may or may not be included on the commission, but representation should be sufficiently broad to deflect challenges to its legitimacy. In instances where the independence of an electoral commission was questioned, it was recommended that a multiparty commission or a commission of neutrals be appointed. Inherent in the task of

ensuring free and fair competition is the obligation to reflect a cross-section of the community. **De facto** or **de jure** exclusion of 50 percent of the electorate compromises that mandate.

### *Issues*

The electoral commission performs many important functions. It appoints registration officers; educates the electorate about the voting process; and arbitrates disputes. The commission has the authority to determine who distributes educational and election-related materials, and it oversees the vote counting process and decides who arbitrates disputes. All of these tasks are key to the electoral process, and their effective implementation is heightened by the inclusion of broad segments of the population. The inclusion of women on the commission increases the likelihood that the important decisions made by the commission are reflective of the needs of the larger community. Representative sampling is more likely if the pools from which members are drawn expand beyond traditional party or leadership groups.

- **Cross-section of the community.** In the context of forming a representative commission, consortium members should emphasize the importance of including a cross-section of the community, and particularly women. Affirmative action to undo past discrimination is appropriate. If commission members are drawn from political parties (which traditionally have been populated by men), this minimizes the opportunities for women to be appointed to commissions. Criteria for nomination to these commissions could include women's participation in grassroots organizations.

The social organizations in which women participate reflect a pluralism uncommon in men's groups. With such a background, women might tend to be more inclusive than men and thereby facilitate achievement of the democratic ideal.

- **Gender sensitivity.** In an attempt to move closer to the democratic ideal, inclusion is the rule rather than the exception. There is no automatic assumption that women are more gender sensitive than men. If men, through their experiences, have demonstrated a sensitivity to the situation and needs of women--a special class entitled to special considerations--their memberships will enhance planning and development activities. The preparation and distribution of election-related materials, as well as oversight of the voting process, should be reflective of input from the entire citizenry. Gender disparities could flourish in the absence of a gender-sensitive approach in the carrying out of any of these activities.
- **Educational materials.** In emerging democracies, the electoral commission has the vital mission of educating the electorate about the voting process. The manner in which these materials are prepared and distributed could affect women's participation. Featuring women prominently in educational materials sends an important message to women, young and old. It encourages other women to participate while giving credence to the

capacity of women to act as full-fledged citizens in the democratic process. Placing materials in locations frequented by women and to which they have easy access increases the likelihood that the materials will serve their intended purpose.

- **Arbitration.** The electoral commission arbitrates disputes. In societies where women are unaccustomed to challenging authority, the composition of the electoral commission could determine whether women seek redress if they suspect a curtailment of the full exercise of their rights. The democratic process mandates not only that certain rights be available, but also that mechanisms are in place to ensure the full implementation of those rights. Commissions which continue to reflect old patterns cannot be expected to broaden the sphere of influence.

#### *Recommendations*

- Assist in the development of appropriate selection criteria for the election commission--gender-sensitive men and women; participation in a range of political and civic activities.
- Recognize the importance of the inclusion of women at every stage of the electoral process.
- Suggest that women be included on the electoral commission.
- Design materials reflective of society (women, handicapped, elderly) and distribute them in appropriate sites.

#### B. Review of Electoral Code

##### *AREAF Interventions*

The electoral code sets out the election procedures and provides the legal basis for citizen participation by individuals and political parties. It delineates policies for voter identification procedures and the validation of parties.

Consortium members have considered the electoral codes in Uganda (IRI) and in Burundi (NDI). Generally, they ask if the code is fair. Specifically: what are the voter identification procedures? How are parties validated? Is there adequate time for campaigning before an election? Does election coincide with a major holiday? Are domestic and international monitors encouraged? Are the procedures for challenges well delineated and published?

##### *Issues*

- **Sociocultural constraints.** None of the consortium members reported gender discrimination in the electoral code in any of the countries served, but they did acknowledge sociocultural constraints on women voters. Ironically, the type of voting system

prescribed in the code may reflect sociocultural constraints and inadvertently limit a woman's franchise.

Queue voting, which requires that voters physically line up behind a candidate, is fairly common. In cultures where it is inappropriate for men to stand in line behind women, how is a woman's decision to vote affected? Will there be separate lines to accommodate women? Will women be moved to the end of the line in deference to men? Although queue voting was ostensibly put in place to maximize efficiency, the potential for abuse is evident.

Public balloting may not be advisable for either men or women for security reasons, but women required to make a public choice may hesitate or refuse to do so for cultural reasons as well. In certain cultures, voters are expected to support the "corporate choice" (group decision) instead of a personal choice. Public balloting in effect denies the voter the option to follow his/her conscience in spite of the corporate choice. Will a woman risk ostracism by voting her conscience? An assessment of the environment before a system becomes effective would minimize the compromise of basic guarantees such as the secret ballot.

- **Illiteracy.** Although it is not known whether illiteracy is a more severe problem for female vs. male voters, it does alter the voting landscape. During the Kenyan elections, illiterate voters made their choice by relying on political party representatives--all of whom were male--at polling stations to mark the "X" for them. Women may not have voted their conscience as a result, thereby compromising the right to a secret ballot.
- **Polling stations.** Gender disparities may be reflected in access to polling stations. The code may designate voting hours that are not sensitive to women's time constraints, resulting either from the nature of their daily activities or the distance/time to reach the polling station. The location of polling stations, particularly in rural areas, may also be inhospitable for women, if the environment is hostile and police protection is scarce. Further, women may need to be in the company of their children, and they may therefore be disinclined to vote, if the ruling party or the military is using intimidation tactics at polling stations.
- **Filing fee.** A filing fee is usually required of all candidates. If women have generally been in the lower socio-economic rungs of a society, this requirement may serve as an automatic disqualification of women candidates if they are not supported by the political mainstream. It is not clear how filing fees have in fact affected women's participation (for example, in Cameroon, the filing fee for the 1992 elections was CFAF 1,500,000 and in Uganda, 100,000 shillings--\$100), but democracy is not fostered if experience, dedication, and progressive ideas are supplanted by a candidate's ability to pay.

### *Recommendations*

- Ensure that code provisions include rather than exclude women. Develop gender inclusive language. Refrain from using only the male pronoun in the code.
- Accommodate illiterate voters throughout the process (registration, voting, etc.).
- Discontinue voting systems with a potential for abuse of women's rights (public balloting and queue voting).
- Minimize gender disparities in access to voting stations. Consider a rural-urban differentiation since women tend to inhabit rural areas.
- Assess women's situation in the respective country and indicate whether the system is inadequate or unfair to women. Ascertain if women are less likely to vote or to challenge decisions because of the patriarchal systems. Determine how best to guarantee full implementation of rights within the system.
- Make the code user-friendly.

### C. Assistance to Non-Partisan Civic Education Campaigns

#### *AREAF Interventions*

Civic education focuses on the rights and responsibilities of the electorate and on their overall rights within the democratic political system. Non-partisan civic education campaigns are ideal vehicles to ensure that this information is transmitted in an impartial manner, free of propaganda.

Consortium members observed that many voters view elections with a sense of desperation due to a deep-seated concern that the current election may be the last. There is not yet a sense of continuity of the process. To develop a sense of confidence, AREAF has provided assistance to non-partisan civic education campaigns in Eritrea, Madagascar, and Uganda (AAI); and in Guinea and Namibia (IRI). Through the National Endowment Fund, IRI has contributed to the operating expenses of the League of Kenyan Women Voters, whose aim is to increase the knowledge and participation of Kenyan women in the electoral and political process. In Uganda, AAI co-funded a civic education manual, which included a skit that underscored the importance of personal decisionmaking, especially for women.

Civic education programs address the basics: why vote, role of representatives/political parties; and how, when, and why to register. Included is information on the right to associate, right to assemble, right to voice an opinion, right to receive information from an unfettered press, right to vote (registration, verification, appeal; secret ballot), right to be free of intimidation and physical violence in the exercise of one's franchise.

*Issues*

- **Women's value.** Because there is not widespread appreciation of the value of women's political participation, consortium members were quite decisive about the need for a civic education program that addresses women's rights as an integral part of the training. In many cultures (e.g., Burundi), corporate life, or the rights of the group, supersedes the rights of the individual. It is anathema for group members to publicly express an opinion contrary to that of the group. Women, in particular, risk ostracism if they dare to express an individual choice.

There is evidence of the blatant disrespect of women's rights in the exercise of their franchise. In Kenya, for example, charges of intimidation were pervasive. Women's groups were denied licenses to assemble; they were harassed; and their meetings were disrupted with impunity. Women were also prevented from voting because of threats of violence; sexual abuse and rape of women supporters of women candidates were also reported.

- **Donor coordination.** The demand for support from AREAF has been substantial. During the first year of the Project's existence, the partners were involved in more than 40 programs in 30 sub-Saharan African countries. Responses must therefore be prioritized because resources are finite. Other international donors such as SIDA and FINNIDA provide funding for related activities such as legal education, lobbying efforts, research on human rights issues. Timely donor coordination would facilitate the achievement of their respective goals and maximize limited resources.
- **Long-term training.** Once the election is over, however, voters still have an important role to play in monitoring the political process and assessing the transparency and responsiveness of the elected officials. As a result, there is a tremendous need to educate the electorate in the "culture of democracy." That is not to say that civic education with its focus on voting is not relevant in the short term. Rather, long-term training provides voters, both male and female, with the appropriate tools to support and maintain democratization.

*Recommendations*

- Develop civic education programs just for women, which accommodate their time constraints and special needs. Ethiopia, for example, designed a civic education program for women with assistance from NDI; previous activities had included only men.
- Encourage donor coordination in organizing civic education programs. Results could inform AREAF's decision to prioritize limited resources.
- Pursue the possibility of implementing a long-term strategy in educating men and women about democracy, especially the notion of individual rights.

## ELECTORAL STAGE

### I. Voter Education

#### *AREAF Interventions and Issues*

Not much information is available on voter education programs under AREAF. IRI had planned to develop a broadcast voter education program in Guinea-Bissau, but activities there are being re-programmed. While there may be other examples of voter education programs, the one developed by NDI in Namibia in conjunction with the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation is a good model. The components of the Namibia program include the following: information regarding offices under contention, registration and voting procedures; places and dates for registration and voting; where to obtain information about the election process, candidates, and political parties; daily schedules of mobile registration teams; and information on polling stations. Information is transmitted through skits; programs that reflect attitudes of people and problems surrounding the election process from remote areas; and interviews with potential voters. The effectiveness of the design will be enhanced by the positive representation of women in all of the major components of a voter education program.

#### *Recommendations*

- Design curriculum sensitive to socio-cultural differences. Show women in positions of authority and as the source of knowledge.
- Develop multimedia voter education programs. Considering the high rates of illiteracy for African women (Niger, 83 percent), there should not be strict reliance on written materials to educate voters. Incorporate television, radio, video, and theatrical presentations.
- Devise training of trainers programs in order to access the maximum number of voters. Select NGO leaders to deliver information to the remote areas of the country.

### II. Training of Non-partisan Election Monitoring Organizations

#### *AREAF Interventions*

Consortium members have conducted a number of training activities, which include, but are not limited to, the following: training domestic monitors, part of which was a program for conducting a parallel vote tabulation for second-round presidential elections in Ghana; training civic associations and political parties in election monitoring in Cameroon; training political pollwatchers and civic organization members in election monitoring techniques in the CAR; domestic monitor training in Eritrea; support to domestic monitors in Madagascar; and

assistance to Malawian groups in the development and implementation of a referendum monitoring operation for a multiparty referendum. At least two indigenous monitoring organizations with which AREAF works closely are being used to coordinate monitoring activities in an entire region: the Study and Research Group on the Democratization of Social and Economic Development (GERDDES) in West Africa and the National Elections Monitoring Unit (NEMU) in East Africa which is also being deployed in Southern Africa. The Gabon chapter of GERDDES is headed by a woman and NEMU, which was founded by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)-Kenya, is co-chaired by a woman. Non-partisan, domestic monitoring is intended to enhance public confidence and promote popular participation.

Non-partisan monitors represent the entire citizenry as opposed to a particular candidate or political party. They may be affiliated with local NGOs, non-political organizations, and civic, professional, religious, and student groups. Non-partisan, domestic monitors can cover wide territory and do not necessarily congregate in the capital cities. While international monitors do have advantages, domestic monitors have an advantage in that they understand the culture, language, and local conditions and have a better perception for subtleties. Domestic monitors can also maintain a presence in the community before, during, and after an election that international monitors cannot. Domestic monitors also can have a positive and stabilizing effect on the post-election period.

### *Issues*

- **Inclusion of women in training.** Similar to the questions raised for assessment teams, training activities are not mandated to include a certain minimal percentage of women, however, consortium members ascertained that women do participate. The question is how and by whom are participants in training activities chosen and are the organizers of the activities attempting to achieve a certain level of representation by women.
- **Rationale for recruiting women monitors.** There are a few reasons why women's inclusion is crucial and valuable:
  - (a) Women's participation serves as a demonstration that women are as free as men to exercise their civic right to participate in the electoral process. This alone should be ample reason for their inclusion.
  - (b) Women monitors are able to conduct interviews with female voters (as well as male voters) after they have cast their ballot.
  - (c) Women bring a certain perspective to the elections monitoring process that should not be discounted. Just as monitors generally provide a sense of confidence to the public, the involvement of women in the monitoring process provides role models

and a sense of security for other women. Women monitors may also be attuned to 'subtleties' that may not be evident to male observers.<sup>2</sup>

- (d) The training event itself, as a mixed-group forum, can be catalytic; the pollwatcher training in Guinea, inadvertently, gave legitimacy to women whose opinions, men observed, were being taken seriously by the trainers and facilitators.
- **Unbiased monitors.** In a patriarchal society, especially one that is repressive, outside trainers need to be aware that the environment, even in a training activity, may be somewhat hostile to women. The training for domestic monitors could treat the issue of gender-sensitivity as part of the responsibility of taking a non-partisan stance, i.e., the monitor leaves behind his or her biases.
- **A gender-sensitive perspective.** As with the assessment missions, the assumption should not be made that women are more sensitive to women, but rather all domestic monitors, male and female, should be sensitized to the issues. The training could include gender sensitization with specific relevance to monitoring tasks. Monitors could be encouraged to make some general observations of the polling event on elections day that describe and differentiate the voters. Is there any noticeable difference in the proportion of men and women (or in age groups) who show up to vote at the polling station? Do women come with their children or accompanied by their spouses, and do women and men stand in separate lines to vote? Was there any visible tension between the male and female electorate, or were there any signs of pressure on women or men to vote a certain way? Do the illiterate vote in a different manner that could compromise the secrecy of their ballot and is there a preponderance of women among the illiterate voters? Are there agents of the ruling party or the military present and are intimidation tactics being used against women and/or men voters? How do observable proportions of men and women voters differ from one polling station to another? Other observations might pertain to women's participation as electoral officers or polling agents. *Even if the observations conclude nothing more than the fact that both men and women turned up to vote in more or less equal numbers, this piece of information may be more than what is otherwise reported on the impact of gender on the vote.*

### Recommendations

- Develop training of trainers packages with guidelines for a gender-sensitive approach to observing. Training of domestic monitors should be used as an opportunity to forge awareness of gender issues during the electoral process among individuals specifically

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<sup>2</sup>In Kenya, for example, domestic monitors observed several instances of irregularities. Women's votes were manipulated due to their high rates of illiteracy. Queue voting compromised the secrecy of the ballot, and many women did not ultimately vote their choice. Even in the case of direct violence toward women, men may view the behavior in a cultural context (and therefore acceptable) even if the behavior is inimical to full exercise of democratic rights.

charged with reporting their observations of the elections. While elections monitoring is oriented towards the mechanics of free and fair elections, such as vote counting, secrecy of the ballot, the location and opening of polling stations as planned, the issues of "who" is voting and what site-specific factors may influence voters also have implications for free and fair elections. An attempt to observe gender differences on elections day may be a way to focus on the non-technical characteristics of an election. The behavior of the electorate at the polling site can also be a window on how well they were educated on or prepared they were for the elections. The kinds of observations to be made may also help to identify how the voting or polling system itself might have made it difficult for women and/or men to exercise their franchise freely (e.g., accessibility of polling station, queue voting).

### III. Political Party and Pollwatcher Training

#### *AREAF Interventions*

Another form of assistance offered by the AREAF program is training for political parties and civic associations in preparation for the elections. Some of the training is specifically to strengthen political parties which would include developing their organizational structures, campaigning techniques, improving their internal management and external communication with the electorate. Other kinds of training might have to do with the democratization process generally, establishing voter education programs, developing the capabilities for domestic monitoring and setting standards for observing, and learning pollwatcher techniques. Some of the latter kinds of training are not restricted to political party agents but are offered to civic groups. Their training would expose them to electoral laws, the code of conduct, and compliance with the code set by the Electoral Commission.

#### *Issues*

- **Women's participation in political parties.** As with other training activities, women are not excluded but precise numbers on their participation are not available. This begs the question of women's participation, generally, in political parties. In a number of countries assisted by AREAF, women are to be found in a branch or wing of the political party. Consortium members themselves have raised questions about this arrangement. Is it, in fact, a plus or a minus to have male-dominated political parties set up a women's branch? The existence of a women's branch may have the advantage of facilitating training for women but the disadvantage of possibly marginalizing women and women's issues.
- **Quotas for women's political participation.**<sup>3</sup> Uganda is reserving 39 seats for women in the Constituent Assembly without barring women from running for any of the

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<sup>3</sup>The Women's League of the ANC has actually obtained party approval that the party mandate that one-third of the nominations be women.

remaining seats. Tanzania also has some compensatory seats for the October 1994 multiparty elections. The use of quotas is, however, also debatable, on the one hand, guaranteeing opportunities for women, on the other hand, creating tremendous pressure for women to accept a challenge which does not, in all cases, correspond to their aspirations or qualifications. To wit, women are sometimes set up to fail.

- **Women's needs in electoral politics.** Women generally do not have the full panoply of skills to operate effectively and efficiently within the political system. Women who perceive politics as a vehicle for change often need training to acquire leadership skills and even confidence-building, which one African spokeswoman emphasized as women's most urgent need in order to make independent choices. But even as experienced and qualified leaders, women may not have assimilated the techniques of campaigning and running for office.
- **Unknowns.** It is also not clear how much influence a women's branch actually exerts on the political party agenda or, once in power, on decisions made by the executive. No precise information is forthcoming on other aspects of women's participation, such as the proportion of female membership in political parties, the number of women who succeed in becoming political party leaders, or the impact of a women's arm on the lobbying efforts of women's groups not affiliated with the wing.

### *Recommendations*

- Include women in training for political party development, pollwatching and other electoral activities to promote women's participation in the electoral process.
- Monitor through regular training opportunities the differential needs of men and women for other kinds of training. Women's needs are typically more basic and broader than men's in this arena. Admittedly, AREAF's purview is not to provide the whole gamut of training activities, such as leadership skills, but there may be room for consideration of other avenues to accommodate those needs, as AAI has done before in soliciting the League of Women Voters in the U.S. to provide Nigerian women training in campaigning, running for office, and lobbying techniques.

## V. Organizing International Election Monitoring Programs

### *AREAF Interventions*

Consortium members have had considerable experience and opportunity to provide international observer delegations for both legislative and presidential elections. This type of assistance has already been rendered in over ten African countries. The composition of the observer missions is typically diverse in terms of country representation and high profile to enhance public confidence. The terms of reference is often negotiated with the host government but should generally include complete access by observers to election

administrators, polling sites, and counting centers; the opportunity to evaluate all aspects of the election process, including the election law, voter registration, casting ballots, the campaign, handling of electoral complaints, counting and tabulation of votes, and the installation of a new government (Garber and Bjornlund, 1993). The size of the team can vary, probably with size of population and number of polling stations. Generally, though, international observers do not remain at a given polling station through the day, whereas domestic monitors are assigned to a given polling site for the entire day. The gender balance on the teams is not stipulated, as with the assessment missions.

The goals of monitoring exercises have been somewhat diverse. Similar to the domestic monitors, they are there to bolster public confidence and promote participation in an election process, deter electoral fraud in situations where the ruling party controls the government apparatus, avert an outbreak of armed conflict, and provide international legitimization (Garber and Bjornlund, 1993). Their presence can either be symbolic or substantive. The mission's publicized report of the elections further affirms or contests the validity of the elections.

### *Issues*

- **A gender-sensitive perspective.** While the international observers would not be as familiar as the domestic monitors with the culture and the political situation, they should approach the task with the same sensitivity to gender differences and voter behavior as domestic monitors. In fact, as outsiders, their perception of "differences" may result in observations which domestic monitors entrenched in the culture are not apt to make, and vice versa. The objective, of course, would be the same, which would be to use the opportunity of observing to note the impact of gender (or other factors, such as ethnicity) on the vote. It would be essential for international observers and domestic monitors to share their observations.

### *Recommendations*

- Encourage international observers to apply a "gender lens" when monitoring the elections. Consortium members could be responsible for providing guidelines to the team, such as the questions raised in the preceding section on training domestic monitors.

## CONSOLIDATION STAGE

In anticipation of the work which AREAF will be doing in the consolidation phase, certain follow-on activities are in order to assess gender-based voting patterns and voter satisfaction with the election results.

*Recommendations*

- Election results as reported in monitoring assessments tend not to be gender-disaggregated. It would be worth conducting pilot surveys, based on a sample of polling sites, to see how men and women voted (for which political party) and whether the gender-disaggregation differs between rural and urban areas. Other basic questions would include the proportion of women who voted out of the total female population of eligible voters and the male-female ratio of voters.
- Of a more qualitative nature would be an inquiry on why people (men and women) voted the way they did; how prepared or knowledgeable they were about the electoral process; and their perceptions on the fairness of pre-electoral and electoral activities, on the efficacy of male vs. female parties and women's branches of recognized parties, or on the influence of a women's branch on decision making.
- To reinforce democratic values and concepts which may only have been tested at best in the electoral process, it is critical to have a continuing thread of civic education over the long-term. The individual right to choose could be seen as an especially important message that will help women achieve equal status with men.
- AREAF's concern with building the capacity of African indigenous institutions in the consolidation stage could begin with re-evaluating institutions, especially those involved in monitoring, which they supported prior to the elections. Some adjustment may be needed in the role of monitoring and civic organizations to refocus on holding the ruling party accountable and maintaining a dialogical process among various stakeholders. This has direct relevance to women and women's groups who appeared on the platforms of political parties. Women's demands in the areas of legal and constitutional reform are likely to be the first, most immediate concern in the post-election period.

**CONCLUSIONS**

AREAF's purpose to support free and fair elections in sub-Saharan Africa calls for assistance that is both technically rigorous, such as formulating an electoral code of conduct, and complex in terms of the embedded objective to transfer democratic ideals and "assist" in the institutionalization and diffusion of those ideals. AREAF must be able to objectify, decipher and help chart the course of an intricate landscape of power relations - among (and within) political parties; ethnicities; men and women; budding NGOs; civic groups and government; and so on. AREAF's task to promote the participation and freedom of expression of all stakeholders means that it must encourage competition while at the same time instill a democratic order in the process.

One of AREAF's proven challenges is to confront the gender disparity in political participation. No well-defined, discrete activity can really accomplish what is necessary to

mainstream women in the electoral, and longer-term political development, processes. In large part, the meaningful and equitable involvement of African women in a democratic transition requires a sensitivity to gender issues in the routine tasks undertaken by AREAF, i.e., the training activities, pre-electoral assessments, monitoring and observing, pollwatching. The reports which conclude the assessments and elections monitoring consistently omit any reference to gender issues and convey a gender-blindness throughout. No knowledge about the status of women in a respective country or the gender disparities in various areas seems to underlie the observations or assessments that emerge in these reports. Training activities, assessment missions, and international observer missions take an approach of not excluding women while not seeking to specifically include women for the sake of redressing the imbalance. With one or two exceptions, no interventions funded under AREAF are specifically targeted at women.

Other documentation and interviews have attested to the fact that African women are experiencing discrimination based on their sex during different stages of the electoral process, as voters, supporters of women candidates, and aspiring politicians. Women across sub-Saharan Africa live in the confines of a patriarchal society and system of governance but with varying degrees of rigidity and oppression from one culture/country to the next. The manifestations of gender inequities should not go unnoticed or totally unchecked during the process of preparing the way for free and fair elections.

### SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Women constitute 50 percent of the population, a fact which their historical participation in the economic and political development of their respective countries has not represented. It is illusory to think that the democratic ideal through support to free and fair elections can be achieved without deliberate efforts to include women.

*First and foremost, the AREAF program must give the same primacy, in practice, to the inclusion of women in its activities as the other components of its strategy.*

- Consider acquiring an oversight capacity for addressing gender issues and ensuring their implementation as a way to give primacy to the component of targeting women beneficiaries.

AREAF can undertake a number of small steps integral to the functions they routinely perform to accomplish the overriding recommendation, as stated above. The following summarizes and consolidates the most salient recommendations drawn from the preceding section on gender issues in the AREAF program:

- Provide gender-sensitivity training to pre-electoral assessment teams, international observer teams, domestic monitors, as well as to political party members and civic organizations as part of other training activities. Some of the training could come in the form of guiding questions.
- Adopt a targeted approach to including women in all training activities and keep a record of the male-female percentages of participation in training.
- Target groups and individuals as informants for pre-electoral assessments who can speak to issues of gender discrimination, etc., and seek to achieve a cross-section of the population in those consultations.
- Recommend to the host country that women and men designated to form the Electoral Commission not only be non-partisan but gender-sensitive and recommend women, particularly, be included on the Commission.
- Make provisions for the electoral code to accommodate women in view of common sociocultural constraints and women's disadvantaged position.
- Promote continuing or long-term civic education that reinforces positive messages about women's equal participation and individual rights to choose and develop special civic education programs for women, given their constraints and special needs.
- Initiate gender-disaggregated research, quantitative and qualitative, in the consolidation stage, as specified in the body of this report.
- Assist post-election "democratic institutions" to shift into their new role vis-a-vis the newly-elected government, to make claims of campaign promises; this should include demands from women and women's groups.

ANNEX  
LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Stony Cooks	African American Institute
Mary Curtain	National Democratic Institute
Maureen Harrington	International Republican Institute
Wacuka Ikua	Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
Ned McMahon	National Democratic Institute
Mumbi Mathangani	Harvard University Law School
Esther Mayambala	Georgetown University Law Center
Regina Mutyaba	Georgetown University Law Center
Greg Simpkins	International Republican Institute
Ed Stuart	International Republican Institute