



Ethiopia Pre-Election Assessment Report

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ACRONYMS

AAPO	All Amhara Peoples Organization
AIDWO	African Initiative for Democratic World Order
APAP	Action Professionals' Association for the People
AEUP	All Ethiopian Unity Party
AU	African Union
CAPDE	Center for the Advancement of Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia
CEG	Civic/Voter Education Group
CLCBS	Center for Local Capacity Building and Studies
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEG	Donor Election Group
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EWLA	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
FES	Freidrich Ebert Stiftung
FSS	Forum for Social Studies
GGF	Good Governance Forum
GONGOS	Governmental NGOs
NEB	National Electoral Board
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
ONC	Oromo National Congress
RCCHE	Research Center for Civic and Human Rights Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From July 12–23, 2004, an IFES team conducted an assessment mission to Ethiopia to evaluate the electoral environment ahead of the upcoming national and regional elections anticipated for May 2005 and local elections in 2006. The objective of the mission was to present USAID with a series of recommendations to support the electoral process, paying particular attention to civil society, media, women's political participation and long-term capacity building.

The team heard two very different analyses of contemporary Ethiopian politics. One suggests that the ruling Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is undertaking a far-reaching effort to introduce pluralism into the country's political culture, despite a number of factors that complicate this task. A diametrically opposing view holds that EPRDF dominance does not enable any real political alternatives.

The report describes the political, electoral, civil society and media environments that reflect this dichotomy. With less than 10 months remaining, important issues related to the elections remain unresolved. Some opposition parties are threatening to boycott the 2005 elections. Civil society is mobilizing to provide civic/voter education and possibly election monitoring while continuing to operate in a difficult environment. As a highly controversial press law is in the draft stages, relations between the private press and the government continue to be strained. Private radio stations may be licensed for the first time in the coming months, although many uncertainties remain.

A key lesson taught by previous elections is that donor assistance must be timely in order to have a positive effect. With this in mind, the IFES report makes a series of recommendations. They include the following:

- support civic/voter education through civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in the *ad hoc* Civic Education Group (CEG);
- fund domestic and international pre-election and election monitoring;
- provide training for political party poll watchers;
- organize candidate fora and media monitoring; and
- promote electoral conflict resolution

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of IFES' mission was to present USAID with a series of recommendations that would support the electoral process, paying particular attention to civil society, media, women's political participation and long-term capacity building. The Terms of Reference are included as Appendix One.

During its two-week visit to Addis Ababa, the IFES team, composed of elections and civil society experts Edward McMahon and Stephen Beale and IFES Staff Genet Menelik-Swanson, conducted a series of interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. Interviewees included government officials, opposition political parties, private and state media, international and local nongovernmental organizations, and international donors supporting the elections. A complete list of interviews conducted is provided in Appendix Two.

IFES would like to thank all individuals and groups who met with the team and to extend its sincere appreciation to USAID, whose support made this assessment mission possible.

2. CONTEXT

"Politics and electricity should be handled from afar." (Amhara proverb)

The 2002 "Action Plan for Useful Donor Involvement in Ethiopia's 2005 National Elections" was prepared to capture lessons for donors from previous electoral cycles. It states:

"The picture which emerges from a survey of a decade of donor involvement in Ethiopia's elections is one of: a government with a strong paper commitment to democratic elections whose actions, or in-actions, often seem at variance with this; of a government highly sensitive to external interference; rapid and sustained improvement of electoral administration, with useful donor assistance both technical and material; of a dominant party system; of an opposition badly in need of capacity building but not very responsive to attempts to do it; and government with at best an ambivalent attitude about civil society."¹

This statement continues to have considerable validity, as is reflected in the following discussion of Ethiopia's politics.

2.1 Political Environment

The team heard two very different analyses of contemporary Ethiopian politics. To summarize, one view suggests that the ruling EPRDF is undertaking a far-reaching effort to introduce pluralism into the country's political culture. This view holds that democracy takes time to develop, especially in Ethiopia, where there has been no prior experience with democracy, only autocratic imperial rule and the horrific experience of the Marxist

¹ James Polhemus, *Action Plan for Useful Donor Involvement in Ethiopia's 2005 National Elections* (2002), p. 39.

Derg dictatorship that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 until 1991. From this perspective, the country's low level of per capita income, lack of a significant middle class, fractious ethnic make-up, weak civil society and frail political opposition—which lacks a democratic political culture—are all factors that complicate the challenge of democratic development. In an international environment where challenges such as terrorism can affect the integrity of the Ethiopian state, the ruling party is moving ahead with all due speed to promote political pluralism.

People who hold this perspective argue that there is more pluralism now than ever in the history of the country. They point to statements from international and local observers that “the 2000 national elections generally were free and fair in most areas.”² They also emphasize the existence of political parties, a growing civil society, an independent press and even the promised imminent advent of independent FM radio stations.

While the government has stated its intention to permit independent radio stations, it has not made clear when or how they will be allowed to operate. In addition, while the government allows political parties and civic organizations to function, many leaders complain vociferously of government intimidation and harassment (especially outside of Addis Ababa, where complaints are often substantiated by independent observers).

2.2 Election Environment

Ethiopia is preparing for its third national election since the defeat of the Derg in 1991. Numerous election cycles have since followed, including, *inter alia*, elections for kebele officials (1992), a constituent assembly (1994), national and regional officials (1995), and national officials again (2000). Amid allegations from opposition parties and civil society that serious irregularities occurred, the government declared the 2000 elections as “free and fair.” Regional elections in 2001 were marred by killings, candidate harassment, voter intimidation and allegations of ballot box stuffing. Complaints from opposition parties of unequal access to media, biased election officials, lack of transparent procedures, a flawed election law and a partisan National Electoral Board (NEB) have continued. Within this contentious environment, the government, civil society and opposition parties are preparing for the 2005 elections.

There have been recent demands by opposition parties for electoral reforms and a “leveling of the playing field” however it is unlikely that the electoral law and the composition of the NEB would remain unchanged for the 2005 elections.³ Predictably, a number of vocal opposition parties have threatened to boycott the upcoming elections, declaring that democratic elections cannot be held under the prevailing conditions.

On a more promising note, the government has welcomed the participation of civil society in observing the electoral process. While the importance of a domestic civil society observation program is widely acknowledged, questions linger about the capacity of Ethiopian civil society to mount a consolidated, coordinated approach needed to observe the electoral process.

The status of international election observers is unclear. While the government has indicated that foreigners will be allowed to observe the elections, it is not clear under

² US Department of State, *Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices* (2003).

³ Annual Report of H.E. Meles Zenawi to the House of Peoples' Representatives (July 9, 2004).

what conditions. Nonetheless, some inter-governmental bodies, including the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU), may consider fielding observer missions if invited to do so.

2.3 Civil Society

The health of civil society in Ethiopia appears to be improving, although it is still weak. A large and increasing number of CSOs are active. There is increased recognition of the need for interaction and possible cooperation between “relief and development” organizations and “rights-based” CSOs, for example through the establishment of the Good Governance Forum (GGF)⁴ spearheaded by the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA). A Civic/Voter Education Group (CEG) has begun to function well ahead of the elections and has submitted funding proposals to donors.

CSOs in general, however, continue to be reluctant to energetically discuss issues and advocate policies that may bring them into conflict with the government. There seems to be little or no movement towards indigenous sustainability in this sector. The team heard people voice suspicions that CSOs existed simply to receive international assistance or that some CSOs hold overtly partisan and anti-government positions. Others, although officially nonpartisan, are creations of the EPRDF and thus can be considered “GONGOs” or governmental nongovernmental organizations (i.e., NGOs that are not truly independent of the government). Some professional organizations, such as the journalists’ association, have experienced problems that many believe have been inspired, at least in part, by the government. The enabling environment includes a draft nongovernmental organization (NGO) law that includes a provision permitting the government to arbitrarily close NGOs at any time; this draft law is opposed by much of the civil society sector. Some CSOs, such as HUNDEE and the Mecha and Tulema Welfare Association, both active in politically sensitive Oromia, have had difficulty operating or were closed down by the government. Due to the many bureaucratic requirements for registration, some groups have had to wait years to register although some undertake activities during the waiting period.

2.4 Media

The press is dominated by the state-owned electronic media and government-oriented newspapers. Opposition and civic organizations bitterly criticized slanted news coverage. The government has officially pledged that opposition parties will receive fair coverage during the upcoming elections but again the process is not clear. A number of privately owned newspapers exist, but they struggle to remain financially viable and also face intermittent harassment. Some independent papers have, at times, taken extreme and inflammatory positions. A draft press law has been widely criticized as further chilling the press environment.

The government announced in 1999 that private FM radio stations would be permitted. The stations would have a range of approximately 150 kilometers around Addis Ababa.

⁴ The goal of the GGF includes mobilizing groups to participate in the political, social and economic life of the country. The GGF organizes trainings/workshops/seminars on good governance, peace building and mediation mechanisms.

Though licenses are due to be issued in August 2004, they may be delayed. Even if this is not the case, it remains to be seen how many licenses will be issued and who will receive them. Even if some stations are authorized in the coming months, the need to purchase transmitters, train staff and prepare start-up operations means that the stations would likely not begin transmitting much before the elections. In addition, the government has said it will not waive duty fees for equipment imports, which makes the ownership and operation of stations more expensive.

Under the draft press law, cross ownership of newspapers and FM stations would not be permitted and this provision has drawn criticism from the independent media

3. FINDINGS

The findings and recommendations contained herein reflect the view that democratic progress in Ethiopia is possible and that civil society has a key role to play in order to ensure transparency and to pry open the system.

Given the critical importance of the 2005 national elections, we believe that assistance during that period should be emphasized. Given the level of attention paid by Ethiopians to national elections, it is easier to mobilize Ethiopian civic groups for national elections. Also, the importance and relevance of the 2006 elections will, in large part, be a function of how the 2005 polls transpire. Long-term capacity building, however, is also extremely important. Programming developed at the currently available USAID funding level should be viewed as "seed money" that enables Ethiopian CSOs to undertake effective democracy-related programming and could possibly result in additional donor funding to support the 2006 elections.

The experience CSOs gain (when they undertake projects such as civic education or election observation), in itself, builds their capacity and could provide a solid foundation for subsequent activities. In addition, broader civic education themes cut across development topics and can bridge the divide between "relief" and "rights-based" CSOs over the long-term. In the Ethiopian context, for example, advocacy for land rights enables the population both to express itself politically and to promote economic development.

The issue of women's political empowerment and participation is critical if Ethiopia is to adapt its traditional and hidebound political culture and undertake sustained development. Key issues that need to be addressed include those related to inheritance rights, marriage and divorce as well as the elimination of all forms of legal and traditionally sanctioned discrimination against women and harmful traditional practices.

The team believes that gender considerations should be mainstreamed into all of the recommendations found in Section 4 of this report. Rights-based education, including the dissemination of information on advocacy and the political inclusion of women, is very important. These themes form an integral part of civic education. The empowerment of women could also be promoted by their participation in a domestic monitoring effort; women's groups such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), PANOS and grassroots organizations could make a significant contribution to such an initiative.

Women's issues could also be a focal point of themes addressed by the recommended media public policy fora.

The team has considered the question of geographic focus and has concluded that programmatic activity should target particular regions of the country, including Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara and the Southern Region. This decision is based on the limited funding available, which requires the prioritization of both possible activities and their geographic scope. The team recommends that activities focus on areas in which there is the most potential for political pluralism to further develop.

The international donor community in Ethiopia has pledged considerable financial and material resources in support of the 2005 election process. In order to synchronize efforts, avoid overlap and decrease "cherry-picking," a donor subgroup on elections has been formed (henceforth referred to as the DEG in this report).⁵ All principal donors in Ethiopia are members of the DEG and meet regularly to coordinate interventions, identify funding gaps and assess proposals. The majority of donors in the DEG contribute to a pooled financing mechanism managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This "basket" fund will primarily support activities of the NEB and the CEG. Other interventions may also be supported. The DEG is in the process of selecting an international consulting firm to design and implement the program.

While "basket" fund support to the NEB is a relatively uncomplicated procedure, modalities for funding the CEG are less developed. These procedures are still being discussed by the DEG, and it is unclear whether donors will support individual members bilaterally or collectively. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Supported individually, CEG members may roll out civic education activities only in select locations rather than nationally. Depending on donor cash flows and preferences, critical electoral regions may be neglected. If, on the other hand, donors choose to support the group collectively—therefore increasing the potential for greater impact and wider national coverage—issues of expediency, project oversight, financial accountability and absorptive capacity will be paramount. Whichever method is used, the CEG is approaching take off and will require significant additional donor support shortly if project objectives are to be achieved.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

We begin with the basic question of whether USAID should plan to devote significant resources to the 2005 national and 2006 local elections. Our response is definitely yes. These elections need to be approached with the utmost seriousness. Ethnic tensions and anger over poor economic conditions combined with anti-democratic tendencies revealed by polls could contribute to instability and civil unrest.

Despite all problems, these elections represent both a critical step in the country's political development and a prime opportunity to help civil society communicate more broadly with its constituencies, work together and advocate more effectively—all key elements in long-term capacity-building.

⁵ The DEG is made of the following donors: Italy, Norway, UK, European Commission, Sweden, the UNDP, Finland, Netherlands, Ireland, Canada and the US.

The team has been asked to prioritize its recommendations. This is necessary because all recommended activities could cost more than the currently available funding. This is a difficult task as we believe that all components are of considerable importance therefore the team has made some additional, less elaborated suggestions. Media training to cover elections and long-term democratic development and training for political parties on campaigning, message development and internal party democracy would also be very useful however both of these topics are currently being addressed, to a limited extent, by other donors.

The prioritization of these recommendations is based on several assumptions. We list civic and voter education first because, as with election observation, it is a subject of critical importance to a legitimate and meaningful electoral process. In addition, because it has the potential for long-term capacity building, it was assigned a slightly higher priority. Unlike a domestic election observation mission, where time would be required to persuade Ethiopian CSOs to work together, civic/voter education already benefits from coordination among CSOs. Thus, targeted assistance can be rapidly absorbed and utilized. On the other hand, we have assigned media-related activities a slightly lower priority simply because the public policy fora may not be covered by the state media, and dissemination through independent media might reach only a small segment of the population. However, given the small amount of funding required for these activities, we believe that this is a chance worth taking. Similarly, we recommend offering support to political party poll watchers, even though concerns over available resources and the breadth of recommended activities lead us to assign this a lower priority.

The team underlines the importance of the 2002 "Action Plan for Useful Donor Involvement in Ethiopia's 2005 National Elections" as a reference document. Many of its insights and recommendations remain valid. The following recommendations, for example, are congruent with the Action Plan's Recommendations 3.1.6 (civic and voter education), 3.5.2 (media monitoring), 3.6.2 (political party poll-watcher training), and 3.6.3 (domestic election observer monitoring). The team also found the June 2004 "Needs Assessment Mission for Upcoming 2005 Elections in Ethiopia" useful as a complementary document although its recommendations were targeted more directly at the NEB.

The recommendations below would require the identification of an international implementing organization with the required substantive and administrative expertise.

4.1 Civic/Voter Education

The Civic/Voter Education Group (CEG)

There are significant obstacles to delivering effective civic/voter education in Ethiopia. These include low levels of literacy, a limited number of rights-based CSOs, ineffective coordination (at times), varying levels of capacity and intermittent donor funding. The country also consists of large regions with a population that is dispersed and mainly rural. In addition, there is a lack of trust between the state and the CSO sector.

Another challenge is that the country has no history of competitive elections. Under the Derg, people were forced to vote, and for many, the concept of elections carries with it

notions of coercion. To date, there have been no elections that offered the possibility of real political alternatives. Thus, at the most basic level, Ethiopians must be convinced that there is a meaningful reason to vote freely.

A network of approximately 20 civic education organizations has come together to form the *ad hoc* CEG in order to promote public awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and voters. They have developed a program as well as common educational materials and a means to disseminate this information. The CEG program is designed to:

- inform citizens of their rights, duties and responsibilities;
- enable citizens to act properly in an emerging democracy;
- encourage citizens to participate effectively and deliberately in governance;
- assist citizens to develop the skills needed to make thoughtful judgments about government behavior and public policy;
- enable citizens to understand the methods and procedures of free and fair elections; and
- encourage citizens to participate in the 2005 elections.

The program involves 1) creating common civic/voter education material; 2) identifying areas of regional coverage by member organizations; and 3) implementing a monitoring and evaluation (M & E) plan. The program targets 11.7 million voters (35% of the electorate) and will provide information about the democratic process, human and constitutional rights, gender issues, and concepts and procedures for free and fair elections. The program is also designed to be relevant to post-election civic education initiatives.

According to the CEG, this initiative provides information in seven languages about citizens' rights, elections, voting laws and procedures, key NEB provisions, a guide for trainers and a pictorial kit that includes posters and leaflets. It is tailored to suit particular target audiences, such as disadvantaged groups, women, the disabled and pastoralists. It also contains material appropriate for illiterate voters. A map showing distribution and program roll out has been developed to ensure optimum coverage across the country and to avoid duplication. A total of 2.1 million birr has already been provided by some donors for the preparation of materials.

According to the CEG's timeline, the civic/voter education program is behind schedule. The initial preparation of materials (which had been planned for the first half of 2004) is now underway. Individual proposals by CEG member organizations to implement the civic/voter education have been submitted to the DEG. CEG groups stated that they began to submit proposals to the DEG at the end of February 2004 and still have not received funding.

As of late July 2004, a consensus had not emerged within the DEG regarding the extent to which CEG member proposals would be adjudicated on a bilateral or common basis by donors. If a common basis, the project would involve an, as yet unidentified, international implementing organization that would evaluate the proposals and make recommendations to donors, in theory within several weeks. In addition, with donor funding held in a common pool, this organization would serve to coordinate donor actions.⁶

⁶ While it is understandable that it may take time for donor coordination mechanisms to be developed, the DEG should move very expeditiously.

An additional issue relates to the common training of trainers, scheduled to be in Addis Ababa. This cost has not been included in the already-funded proposal for material development and thus would need to be paid for from individual proposals.

In the opinion of the team, there is a clear need for civic /voter education training. Many, if not all, of the organizations are dedicated and prepared to undertake the work. A number of them have previous related experience. The members of the CEG have been working together for more than a year and have done significant work, which should be recognized and supported. However, it should also be recognized that time is short, and the undertaking is highly complicated from an organizational point of view. The CEG took a long time to organize itself and develop materials. In addition, there was a change in leadership and problems with the treasurer, who was replaced. While some civic groups do have contacts in the field, it could be helpful for CEG to tap into the CRDA/GGF networks to help disseminate information.

Relationships within the CEG and between the CEG and donors are complex and time consuming. Some organizations, such as the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), are already dealing directly with separate NGOs. USAID could make decisions individually, but one lesson learned from previous elections is that donors need to move in a coordinated fashion, both in terms of programs and the time line. However, the past offers one potentially contradictory lesson, which is that donors (and CSOs, at times) move too slowly. The greater the scope of fully coordinated activities, such as pooled funding, the more likely that the process will move at the pace of the slowest member.

Regarding individual CEG proposals, it will be necessary in the near future to carefully evaluate how realistic proposed activities are. Can Addis Ababa-based groups operate in places where they don't ordinarily work? How long will it take for them to produce the civic /voter education materials? Such preparations include translation, pictures, printing - all of which take time. In addition, the contents of an M & E plan are still being discussed. It is the team's understanding that these issues will be considered by the international implementing organization selected by the DEG.

In sum, the CEG appears to be preparing for the 2005 elections in a reasonably coherent and proactive fashion. However, both Ethiopians and the donor community must take action in the coming weeks to move this delicate process forward.

Recommendation: Based on available resources, USAID should fund two or three CSOs for civic /voter education and capacity building. These groups would be selected on the basis of credibility, the ability to undertake proposed activities, and the capacity to grow. Based on our initial assessment, the following groups should be considered in greater depth:

- Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce,
- Action Professionals' Association for the People (APAP),
- Center for the Advancement of Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAPDE),
- African Initiative for Democratic World Order (AIDWO),
- Eneweyay,
- Center for Local Capacity Building and Studies (CLCBS), and
- Research Center for Civic and Human Rights Education (RCCHE)

4.2 Election Observation

The importance of observing the entire 2005 Ethiopian election cycle has been recognized by civil society, the donor community and inter-governmental organizations. In order to produce credible statements and assessments of the electoral process, domestic and international observers should monitor candidate nomination, voter registration, campaigning, polling, post-election discrepancies and contested/fresh elections. The NEB has indicated that the election calendar will begin in September/October 2004 with the nomination of candidates.

The team has identified three categories of election observers to offer support and/or capacity building to: domestic observers, international observers and political party poll watchers.

- Domestic Observers

Strengthening domestic observation capacity for the 2005 elections has been emphasized repeatedly by Ethiopian civil society and political parties. Experience from the 2000 elections, during which a small number of CSOs observed the process,⁷ suggests that early planning is essential to maximize the efforts of domestic election observers.

Several Ethiopian CSOs, including organizations with previous experience, are at the early stages of conceptualizing strategies for observing the 2005 elections. However, the impact of a domestic observer network will depend to a large extent on structural arrangements, coordination, standardized methodology and the availability of donor resources.

During the course of this assessment, at least three organizations indicated their intentions to mobilize domestic election observers, either independently or within networks, including the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), the CLCBS and the GGF (the latter under the auspices of the CRDA). While there are obvious advantages to forming networks and consortiums, there is also the potential for structural deficiencies, lack of common objectives and (most importantly) inconsistent assessments of election "freeness and fairness." Nonetheless, a cohesive network of like-minded CSOs helps ensure representative, national coverage of the electoral process. Additionally, donors traditionally prefer to support networks and/or consortiums.

While it is premature to determine the exact nature of Ethiopian civil society organization for 2005 elections observation, the following are possible scenarios:

1. A small network of CSOs—coordinated by AIDWO, APAP⁸ and/or the CLCBS—will emerge from the CEG. While these coordinating organizations have relevant experience in civic/voter education and a commitment to election observation, there are questions regarding their capacity to mobilize, train and deploy a suitably large number of observers while simultaneously rolling out a civic/voter education program.

⁷ EHRCO coordinated this effort and deployed approximately 110 observers to 11 election zones. From its limited observation, EHRCO concluded that the May 2000 national election was "neither free nor fair."

⁸ AIDWO and APAP were part of a consortium of five NGOs (Ad-Net/Elections 95) that observed the 1995 elections.

2. A nationwide network of CSOs will operate under the umbrella of CRDA/GGF. While the CRDA has outreach capability (with 230 local/international members), proven institutional capacity and constructive relations with the NEB, the organization has no previous experience in election observation.⁹ Additionally, the GGF (with 65 CSO members) is a relatively new and inexperienced body. A number of independent organizations interviewed during this assessment expressed skepticism about the intentions and capacity of the CRDA/GGF to manage a national election observation program.

3. Various *ad hoc* networks and individual CSOs will conduct independent election assessments. EHRCO, which monitored the 2000 national elections, stated that it would do the same in 2005, with or without a network.

A combination of the first two scenarios, which match voter education/election observation experience with national outreach and proven organizational and management skills, would be most effective. Some CSOs have welcomed this idea. However, issues of structure, coordination, impartiality and mutual suspicion would have to be addressed.

Although the government and the NEB have repeatedly stated that civil society will be encouraged to observe the election process, there are indications that conditions will be attached to this invitation.¹⁰ It would be wise for any organization(s) planning to observe the election to make their intentions public and clear to the NEB early in the process.

Recommendations: USAID should consider funding the following series of activities with respect to domestic observation:

1. Assess the capacity of targeted CSOs (AIDWO, APAP, CLCBS) to develop suitable methodology and training materials for a national observation program. Simultaneously, assess CRDA's ability to provide organizational oversight, financial management and community outreach. In addition, explore a suitable bridging mechanism between the parties.
2. Based on the conclusions of the assessment, develop and implement a comprehensive domestic observer program. The selected international implementing organization would provide the required technical assistance and at least some operational funding.
3. Sponsor a study tour for key program designers and administrators to regional countries (e.g. Kenya, Uganda, South Africa) to benefit from recent experiences in domestic election observer networks.

⁹ In 2000, CRDA prepared a proposal for election observation; however, it did not receive donor support and/or a decision was taken by CRDA not to engage in activities of a political nature.

¹⁰ EHRCO, for example, recently received a letter from the NEB stating that election observer reports must be discussed with them prior to being released to the public. The NEB confirmed this during a meeting with the assessment team and implied that all domestic observer groups would face the same conditions.

- International Observers

The extent to which international observers will participate in the 2005 national elections remains unclear. While the Prime Minister has stated that “the Government has no objections if foreigners were to observe the election,”¹¹ official invitations have not been issued nor clarification provided on whether conditions will apply (such as restricting international observers to resident diplomatic staff). Given that foreign capitals require sufficient lead time to consider such requests and the relatively short time remaining, it is essential that the diplomatic community requests clarification on this matter. In a promising development, the EU is considering sending a pre-election exploratory mission to Ethiopia in late 2004, for which an official invitation is not required. In the event that the EU fields an observer mission, it is unlikely that monitoring activities would commence prior to early 2005.

Recommendations: USAID should consider funding the following series of activities with respect to international observation:

1. The selected international implementing organization should undertake a long-term, ongoing analysis of the pre-election period. Its assessments would be supplemented by several visits from small teams of international experts to monitor various aspects of the pre-election environment, such as candidate and voter registration, media access, political party campaigning, and election administration. Some of these experts could return to observe the elections. Reporting throughout the pre-election period could identify and help resolve problems. It could also serve as input into overall post-election assessments.
2. Based on cost constraints, short-term observers should be kept to a minimum. To dispel the often-heard criticism that short-term observers are “political tourists” lacking local knowledge, it is suggested that the majority be drawn from the diplomatic core and NGO community in Ethiopia (who have at least one year in-country experience) and be provided with thorough training by the international implementing organization. Consideration should also be given to including a high-profile observation delegation leader.

- Political Party Poll Watchers

“The role of political party workers in the observation of elections is potentially the most important check on the possible fraudulent practices that may be perpetrated on the electoral process.”¹² The capacity of Ethiopian opposition parties to finance, train and deploy poll watchers for the 2005 election, however, remains unclear. This is an area that requires additional investigation. While a number of opposition parties interviewed during this assessment claimed to have deployed poll watchers during previous elections, some complained that their presence was ineffective in addressing concerns about the conduct of the poll.

USAID has previously funded activities to develop and strengthen Ethiopian political parties. However, more can be done to promote political party development, notably

¹¹ Annual Report of H.E. Meles Zenawi to the House of Peoples’ Representatives, July 9, 2004.

¹² *The Future of International Electoral Observation – Conference Report*, International IDEA, 1999.

within the opposition. During the 1990s, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) provided some training and technical assistance for political party poll watchers. For the most part, however, political party election observation is an area that has been neglected by donors. While the importance of political party observers in the electoral process cannot be disputed, it is nonetheless incumbent on parties to ensure that their “eyes and ears” are effectively supported, trained and equipped to undertake this potentially sensitive task. Given the funding constraints that most parties face in Ethiopia, though, the potential for widespread deployment of opposition party observers is limited.

Recommendation: USAID should consider supporting the following activity with respect to political party poll watchers:

1. Funding should be provided for political party poll watcher training. This funding should cover development of training methodology and materials, production of a party poll watcher manual and financial support for selective deployment of party agents during the electoral process. Cost-sharing arrangements with other donors may have to be explored for the latter option and/or opposition parties should be encouraged to use the potential “political party campaign fund” established under NEB with pooled donor funds.¹³ This fund could potentially be coordinated with domestic observer training.

4.3 Media

The media plays a critical role in ensuring a legitimate, participatory and transparent electoral process. There appears to be little balance in news or election/campaign coverage and the limited audience for the printed press is also a key factor.

Incremental progress may be possible. Emphasis could be placed on providing opportunities for greater expression of various political viewpoints, disseminating voter information and independent monitoring of the media.

Recommendations: USAID should consider supporting the following activities with respect to media:

1. *Candidate Fora:* Political discourse in Ethiopia needs to be more policy-oriented. The objective of policy-based dialogue before the campaign would be to help steer political discourse towards specific public policy topics that need debate. Some of these could include land policy, methods of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, gender issues, the economy and federalism. The Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce has expressed an interest in sponsoring candidate fora. EWLA and the Forum for Social Studies (FSS) are other organizations that could sponsor debates and candidate fora. However, in encouraging them to do so there is a risk that these activities would not receive adequate coverage.

2. *Media Monitoring:* A qualitative and quantitative analysis of media coverage during the election period would help to assess coverage of the election by state-

¹³ The NEB established a similar fund in 2000.

owned and private media and would help identify whether state-owned institutions gave equal access to all parties and candidates. A weekly series of analyses could inform and positively impact the pre-election environment. In 2000, a media analysis report was prepared, but it was not published until after the election. There are a number of civic organizations that could be involved in these activities. For example, the FSS sponsored the 2000 media analysis.

While the Addis Ababa University School of Journalism is new, it might be prepared to participate in either activity. Other Addis Ababa-based civic organizations, including several members of CEG, could be approached in either regard.

Considerations for Capacity Building

Program support to Ethiopian civil society through the interventions recommended herewith offer potential building blocks for long-term, sustainable capacity building. For example, support provided for domestic observation of the 2005 elections has the potential to foster organizational capacity for monitoring future elections and training additional observers. It is not inconceivable that a permanent national network of domestic election observers, who are easily mobilized when needed, could be developed through program support. Civic education provides another example. Ethiopian CSOs have bemoaned the fact that donors only provide support during election periods. However civic education should not end after an election but should be a continual, flexible process that changes with the times. Following the 2005 elections, an evaluation of the civic education and domestic observation programs should be conducted. Conclusions drawn from this exercise will provide donors with direction for continued support, expansion of activities or alternative strategies and will give participating CSOs a benchmark to evaluate future performance.

An Ethiopian journalist that the team met described capacity building as “attending meetings.” While slightly jaded, this view tells us something about recent experiences in Ethiopia and the abundance of “capacity building” programs supported by NGOs, donors and the government. However, this does not suggest that such efforts are in vain; rather, it implies that appropriate interventions are required in order to build sustainable capacity. Genuine capacity building is a long-term process, often taking years, and it requires obligations from both donors and development partners. USAID’s commitment to this process will help to ensure that civil society continues to play a vital role in Ethiopia’s democratic development.

5. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Establishment of a Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Past election cycles in Ethiopia have been “marred by intermittent violence, killings, disappearances, voter intimidation, harassment and unlawful detentions of opposition

party supporters.”¹⁴ Given the potential for similar occurrences during the 2005 election period, the NEB, as well as civil society stakeholders, has identified the need for a mechanism to prevent, manage and resolve conflict.

Dispute prevention can be achieved through the following mechanisms:

- A widely disseminated electoral Code of Conduct, endorsed by stakeholders;
- A national conflict management strategy and implementation body;
- Consultation with political parties and other stakeholders;
- Unambiguous and clear legal instruments; and
- Voter and civic education.

Dispute resolution can be achieved through:

- Effective enforcement of the electoral Code of Conduct;
- Inclusive stakeholder committees/bodies at national and lower levels; and
- A cadre of neutral mediators trained in conflict management and resolution skills strategically deployed during the election cycle.

Given the relatively short time left before the elections, creation of an entirely new mechanism to address election conflict is likely not feasible. Suitable existing mechanisms should therefore be revitalized and/or tailored to meet the needs of the current environment.

A recent attempt by the NEB to mobilize dispute resolution bodies at the woreda level, involving political parties, was a worthwhile but not entirely successful initiative. Recognizing the need for a new approach to pre-empting and diffusing election conflict, the NEB has indicated an interest in revising these local mechanisms prior to the 2005 elections. Fostering local capacity by identifying and managing a methodological approach to reconciliation efforts is therefore suggested.

Recommendation: USAID should consider supporting the following activity with respect to conflict resolution:

1. To address the specific issues related to election cycle conflict in Ethiopia, contract a local organization/institute with relevant experience to conduct a rapid situational analysis.¹⁵ Based on these findings, a suitable program (under the auspices of the NEB and/or in partnership with an experienced NGO) can be developed. However, supporting and tailoring existing mechanisms may be the only choice for an effective conflict resolution strategy for the 2005 elections.

5.2 Political Mediation

Most civil society groups were timid concerning their involvement in promoting direct dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition. They did not address the important question of whether there is anything they or other NGOs could do to forestall an impasse

¹⁴ US Department of State, *Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices* (2003), page 19.

¹⁵ Various local NGOs have had experience in conflict management, including the Peace and Development Committee, Eneweyay and the GGF.

or otherwise promote understanding between political parties. Given the potential for a widespread opposition boycott, an opportunity may exist for CSOs to play the role of mediator.

Recommendation: USAID should consider supporting the following activity with respect to political mediation:

1. In the eventuality that opposition parties appeared to be headed towards a boycott of the 2005 elections, USAID should consider providing support that will encourage civil society to facilitate a dialogue between government and opposition parties. Confidence building measures between government and opposition could include: a process bringing together senior party members to agree to an election code of conduct. This could be facilitated by civil society and could include an eminent African statesperson from the AU or NEPAD.

6. CONCLUSION

Time is passing, and election-related assistance must move ahead rapidly. It is critical to establish a healthy pre-election environment, and the donor community is not starting from scratch; it benefits from both previous experience in Ethiopia and lessons learned in similar contexts. Both indigenous organizations and donors have accrued an impressive body of experience and knowledge (although the latter are hampered somewhat by personnel rotations and their impact on institutional knowledge).

On the part of the donor community, there must be a sustained process of engagement, which has not occurred in the past. While it is unlikely that this election cycle will result in far-reaching improvements in the democratic process in Ethiopia, it could prove to be a critical building block. Conversely, serious potential for social unrest exists if Ethiopians do not perceive significant improvements have been made.

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Appendix One: Terms of Reference

1. The Assessment Mission will examine and report on the following issues:

- What kinds of elections support to civil society might enable USAID to achieve maximum impact in increasing public debate and citizenship on key issues? Should the Mission work through the existing Civic Education Network Group? How many Ethiopian organizations can USAID optimally support given the anticipated budget levels for election support? Is support to private media (differentiated by type, such as print, electronic, etc) likely to yield any significant results given the current operating environment?
- How can USAID election support increase women's political participation? Should this be a stand-alone sub-component or integrated into all activities? Are there any specific targets of opportunity that USAID should capitalize on?
- What can USAID do to support election-related activities while strengthening civil society? What is feasible given the short timeframe (approximately nine months) in which the activities must be implemented.
- What modalities/mechanisms should the Mission consider to achieve its multiple goals of improving the quality and quantity of political debate, increasing citizen engagement and strengthening civil society organizations?
- What is a reasonable geographic area of focus for USAID's elections support in order to achieve the greatest impact? Should support be concentrated in regional capitals? In a broader range of urban areas? Is it possible to reach rural populations? How?
- How can USAID support civil society organizations during the prelude to elections in a manner that lays the groundwork for future Mission support to the civil society sector and that will focus on increasing their capacity to engage the government in policy formulation, debate and advocacy?
- How can USAID support the training of domestic election observers, specifically local village elders, in targeted zones?

Appendix Two – Interview List

Government of Ethiopia

Independent MP:	Bedru Adem
Ministry of Information:	Bereket Simon, Information Minister
Women’s Affairs Committee, Parliament:	Dr. Ethiopia Beyene, Vice Chairperson Meseret Mamo, Committee Member Ato Mohamed, Committee Member
Women’s Affairs Office, Office of the PM:	Gifti Abasiya
National Electoral Board (NEB):	Assefa Birru, Secretary of the Board

Opposition Political Parties

All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP):	Professor Ayenew Ijigu Abayneh Birhanu, VP
All Amhara Peoples Organization (APO):	Dr. Asrat Haile, 1 st VP Eskinder Nega, 2 nd VP
Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP):	Dr. Hailu Araya, Vice Chairman Isaac Kifle, Foreign Secretary
Oromo National Congress:	Dr. Merera Gudina, Chairman
Southern Ethiopia People’s Democratic Congress:	Dr. Beyene Petros, Chairman

Media

The Reporter:	Amare Aregawi, Editor-In-Chief
Tobia:	Arega Gebre Kiros Atnafu Alemayehu
Radio Ethiopia:	Fekade Yemru, Manager

NGOs and Associations

Panos/Ethiopia:	Melaku Tegegn, Director
Civic Education Network Group:	Acting Director Aberra Haile Mariam (Action Professionals Associations for the People (APAP))
Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association:	Yetnayet Andarge, Communications Officer
PACT/Ethiopia:	Leslie Mitchell, Director Aster Birke, Program Manager
Christian Relief & Development: Association (CRDA)	Akalewold Bantigru, Deputy Executive Director / Policy
Center for Local Capacity Building & Studies:	Saheleselasie Abebe, Executive Director
Hundee:	Zegeye Asfaw
Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO):	Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Chairman
Freidrich Ebert Stiftung:	Dr. Hartmus Hess, Resident Representative Dr. Mandefro Eshete, Project Manager
Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute:	Berhanu Nega, Executive Director
Network of Ethiopian Women Association:	Saba Gebre Medhin, Director

Private Sector

Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce:	Haile Meskal, Deputy Secretary General
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International / Donor Community

USAID/Ethiopia:	William Hammink, Director Karen Freeman, Deputy Director Douglass Arbuckle, Executive Officer Getahun Dendir, Civil Society Program Coordinator
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US Embassy:

Ambassador Aurelia Brazeal
Bill Flens, Political Officer
Robert Domaingue, Information
Officer / Press Attaché

UNDP:

Antonius Broek, Dep. Resident Rep.

EC:

Ambassador Clarke

Donor Election Group:

EC
UNDP
UK Embassy
USAID