

CEPPS/IRI Quarterly Report: January 1-March 31, 2005

**ETHIOPIA: ELECTIONS SUPPORT ACTIVITY
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. 663-A-00-04-00437-00**

Project dates: September 1, 2004-July 31, 2006
Total budget: \$532,518 Expenses to date: \$40,160.23

I. SUMMARY

The initiative is enforced by the need to support the work of the election commission and increase vital participation in the electoral process through coordination with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). IRI and their CEPPS partners IFES and National Democratic Institute (NDI) continued efforts to gain registration in accordance with the legal and procedural terms of reference from the Government of Ethiopia (GOE). This process was abruptly terminated by the GOE in March. IRI had recently launched its pollwatcher trainings, but the GOE's decision has jeopardized critical electoral support that is needed for free and fair parliamentary elections to take place in Ethiopia on May 15th.

II. BACKGROUND

The government of Ethiopia has made some progress towards democratic reform as evidenced by improved administrative preparation for elections, increased public debate around political issues, and other minor concessions to opposition demands, such as increased access to state-owned media. However, implementation of reforms has been inconsistent. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi continues to state his government's commitment to democratization. The Ethiopian constitution, considered by many to be one of the most progressive in Africa, guarantees a democratic order and respect for human and democratic rights. Many in the international community see the 2005 national and regional elections as a critical litmus test of whether the government's actions will match its rhetoric.

In early 2005 IRI was able to establish close working relationships with partners IFES and NDI, as well as the NEBE who partnered with UK-based Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS). International donor groups made a concentrated effort to avoid replications of electoral support activities and maximize resources for civic education and electoral observance in all eleven regions of Ethiopia.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Office Set-up

IRI was able to establish a ground presence in Addis Ababa to serve as the base for programming activities. A smooth transition between the interim and permanent IRI-Ethiopia consultants in the first week of March set the stage for the inaugural trainings. There was also a local program assistant hired within that first week to manage program logistics and financial accounts. IRI had difficulty with the registration process at the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Addis Ababa to secure legal work authorization. The process of registration was frustrated by different instructions given by officials at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington DC and officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice in Addis Ababa. The inability of the CEPPS partners to complete this registration process was eventually used to justify the expulsion of the partners from Ethiopia. This was and continues to be a time-consuming crisis that derailed the implementation of several election-support activities amidst the Government of Ethiopia's stated commitment to conduct a free and fair election.

A series of program and work-plan modifications occurred in late February and early March to facilitate cooperation amongst international and domestic observers. IRI incorporated a financial management and accountability workshop to assist sub-grantees with the financial budgeting and reconciliations. With the May elections quickly approaching, a focus was placed on the timely deployment of trained observers to adequately monitor an estimated 30,000 polling stations.

Training of Trainers

IRI conducted an inaugural training for civil society observers and regional officials under the auspices of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) on the 22nd and 23rd of March. In this initial training were thirty-three participants in attendance from three organizations; African Initiatives for a Democratic World Order, Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia (ESCE-NET Secretariat, a network of 28 NGOs), and regional officials from the NEBE. This training, held with the guidance of ERIS, and with both technical and financial assistance from the international donors, focused on the design and production of training materials. The substance of the training consisted of: how to devise and deliver a training plan, training methods, polling day observer activities, and observer reporting. The participants were surprised at the level of personal engagement required in the trainings, compared to the lecture style of learning that they were used to. IRI Ethiopia and DC staffs worked on contracts to train 3,000 members of these organizations, roughly two-thirds from ESCE-NET, which are expected to deploy three to five Election Day monitors to all 30,000 polling stations.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objectives:

- 1. To increase the capability of Ethiopian organizations (civic and political) to observe the electoral process.*

IRI's activities this quarter focused almost solely on observing the electoral process. Although our training programs were ultimately interrupted, we began a "training of trainers" program as described in Section III above to work with the NEBE and Ethiopian civil society groups on election monitoring and reporting. Our initial rounds of training successfully equipped Ethiopian participants to train other observers in the future; subsequent rounds of training have continued with IRI's former local staff under ERIS supervision since our departure from Ethiopia.

2. *To increase the ability of Ethiopian organizations to use observation results to expand dialogue regarding the electoral process among stakeholders from civil society, political parties and relevant governmental bodies.*

One aspect of the "training of trainers" program described above was the focus on observer reporting. The goal of this focus was to help the participants translate their election observation reporting into action that galvanizes debate in Ethiopia about how best to improve the electoral process. IRI's departure from Ethiopia prior to the elections prevents complete assessment of the success of this aspect of our training.

V. EVALUATION

IRI was able to significantly expand its target regions through coordination with other international donors, which allowed IRI consultants and staff to focus planning and resources on the trainings and workshops. IRI reported exceptional working relationships, coordination and support among international and domestic donors that enabled the organization of very ambitious electoral preparations and support activities. The first training exposed the need for thorough and holistic observer training, as none of the participants, including the delegates of NEBE, had ever worked in or observed an Ethiopian polling station.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

IRI departed from Ethiopia on March 31st as a result of the expulsion of CEPPS partners, IRI, NDI and IFES, by the Government of Ethiopia. All the following week's arrangements for the *Training of Trainers-Candidate Representatives*, for members of thirty-two political parties, were cancelled before departure. CEPPS partners are currently in the process of discussion and potential resolution. Due to the uncertainties this entails, there are no future activities to report.