



Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections(CECOE)



Assessment of NEBE's Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020 and Assessments on Election observation of the Sixth General Elections of Ethiopia

June 2022



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Part I

Assessment of NEBE's Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020

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Executive Summary

The Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) is a coalition of over 175 civil society organizations across Ethiopia. It was established to support and promote inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability in Ethiopia's elections through non-partisan election observation, voter and civic education, monitoring, advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building activities.

The CECO E was the first civil society coalition to observe the 2019 Sidama Referendum. Similarly, the CECO E recruited and trained over 300 election observers to observe the pre-election, election day, and post-election phases of Ethiopia's Sixth National Election held in June and September 2021. The CECO E's Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) in Addis Ababa also monitored the media landscape, misinformation, and hate speech in five local languages. In addition, as part of its voter education intervention, the CECO E launched the I-Vote campaign, a comprehensive media platform that provided information and guidance on polling locations, voting procedures, and safety tips on peaceful voting, in four local languages via social and mainstream media advertisements. Through the I-Vote campaign, the CECO E reached over 40 million Ethiopians by running 1040 advertisements on 36 different television and radio channels.

This research is intended to provide insights on the components of the NEBE's Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct, Directive No. 5/2020. The research specifies the requirements for each of the components required for local election observation accreditation. The research then unpacks the legal and practical difficulties in implementing the NEBE's directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct. Lastly, the research suggests various practical and legal recommendations for the NEBE and other stakeholders to consider.

The research aims to contribute to the potential uniformity, applicability, and flexibility of the NEBE's laws. It is also meant to help both those who review election laws and those who draft election-related documents at the national level.

According to the findings, it is critical to align Ethiopia's election observation rules with best international practices to achieve the needed efficiency and flexibility. Legal frameworks for local election observers should provide explicit and objective criteria for certifying, rejecting, or revoking observer accreditation. In relation to clarity, it is crucial to ensure that the legislation describes practical details such as the time and place of accreditation. Some of the recommendations that require short-medium term legal and institutional change include, increasing the institutional diversity and modus operandi of observer organizations, allowing the most disadvantaged groups to participate in observation, supervising the planning and execution capacities of observers, decentralizing the NEBE's centralized observation-related tasks to regional offices, establishing a special unit of the NEBE in charge of election observation, increasing the accessibility of election legislation, and ensuring the safety of observers.

Chapter One

Introduction

Citizen election observation is critical to ensuring the integrity and legitimacy of elections. Citizen election observation fosters transparency and contributes to the security of the overall election process by checking that the processes adhere to legal standards. Citizen election observation is not a one-time activity confined to election days; rather, it is an essential part of building a democratic political order.¹

Since the early 2000s, the presence of domestic election observers has become a familiar sight at elections in Africa. In view of the growing demand for domestic observer or monitoring missions and the relatively limited expertise in this field in Ethiopia, there is an increasing need for empirical research on the issues involved in domestic election monitoring in Ethiopia. Arguably, properly outlining the state of domestic election observation in Ethiopia requires unpacking the legal environment of election observation in Ethiopia. The rationale of this research is to promote insights into the recurrent problems and eventual solutions to matters of domestic election observation in Ethiopia.

This research assesses the NEBE's directive on Domestic Election Observation.² In doing so, it details the national legal regimes governing election observation, particularly focusing on the requirements and standards for accreditation of domestic civil society organizations (CSOs). The research also spells out the legal and practical difficulties in implementing the NEBE's directive. Finally, the research proffers suggestions to enhance the domestic election observation regulatory regime so that it encourages citizens, domestic CSOs, and other stakeholders to actively participate in the election processes.

The research begins by outlining the conceptual tropes of domestic election observation. It then discusses local, regional, and international legal standards for domestic election observation. The next chapter delves into Ethiopia's domestic election observation rules, paying special emphasis on NEBE's Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct, Directive Number 5/2020. The research finally provides suggestions and recommendations for NEBE and other stakeholders.

Research Objectives

General objective

The main objective of this research is to examine the legal and practical challenges associated with domestic election observation in Ethiopia, with a focus on the NEBE's directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020.

Specific objectives

- To assess the directive's relevance and applicability in domestic election observation.
- To assess the directive's conformity with the principles of universal human rights, civil and political rights, and other applicable documents.

¹ Electoral Knowledge Network (ACE), "Citizen Electoral Observation by the Electoral Knowledge Network." N.D. Last accessed 3/6/2022. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/focus/citizen-electoral-observation#_edn1

² The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), "Directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct," Directive no. 5/2020. Last accessed 3/6/2022, <https://nebe.org.et/en/election-laws>



To examine the utility of the directive from the perspective of the underrepresented section of society.
To identify best practices in election observation that could be implemented in Ethiopia.
To examine requirements for accreditation of CSOs in election observation.

Research methods

The research employed primary and secondary data collection techniques. Selected in-depth interviews were conducted with NEBE's legal experts, other independent scholars, and key informants. Officials of local CSOs that participated during Ethiopia's six national elections were consulted. The research also utilized extensive online and offline sources on election observation.

Organization of the research

This research assessment, entitled: Assessment of NEBE's Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020 assesses the domestic legal frameworks governing local election observation in Ethiopia. The first chapter of this research begins with a brief introduction to the research topic and subsequently provides details on the objectives and methodologies of the research. Chapter two discusses the conceptual foundations of election observation. The chapter delves into various legal regimes that govern election observation at international, regional, and local levels. Chapter three discusses the findings of the research. The chapter unpacks the legal and practical challenges associated with election observation in Ethiopia. The findings also put forward recommendations and best practices to tackle the challenges identified.

Chapter two: Literature Review

This section of the paper outlines the concept of domestic election observation. The chapter then highlights the major international, regional, and local principles and laws that regulate and govern elections in general and election observation in particular.

Defining domestic election observation

Election observation could be defined as the observation and monitoring of an election process by impartial observers in accordance with international standards and national legislation. Independent, non-partisan citizen election observation is a mechanism for citizens to ensure that their right to genuine and credible elections is upheld. Election observation is one defining feature of democracy and human rights. In that, the work and contribution of observers to the electoral process and to the broader democratic framework can go much deeper.

Many international human rights norms consider election observation as a quintessential element of democracy. In this respect, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) consider election observation as a process that contributes to the path of democratization. The UDHR proclaims that “[t]he will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this ‘will’ shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”³ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also emphasizes citizen observers’ fundamental rights to participate in the election process.⁴ The ICCPR in its General Comment, Number 25 declared that “there should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process... so that electors have confidence in the security of the ballot and the counting of votes.”⁵

Recognizing the paramount role of citizens’ observation of elections, the former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, stated that “the most important force for elections with integrity is citizen pressure.”⁶ In line with Annan’s remarks, ACE Encyclopedia⁷ contends that “active oversight and supervision ensures that participants in an election process are held accountable, promotes transparency, establishes the credibility of the electoral process, and helps ensure compliance with the legal framework.”⁸

Election observers serve as impartial watchdogs who can assess whether the results of an election truly reflect the will of the people. On the other hand, observers give elected leaders political legitimacy and a base from which to rule, which makes it harder for non-democratic people to try to take power. Independent, non-partisan citizen observation involves recruiting and training volunteer observers from different parts of the country. The next stage is deploying the observers and carefully gathering observation reports. The final stage is sharing findings and recommendations with the public, political parties, electoral authorities, and other election stakeholders.

3 UNGA. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).” (1948) G.A. Res. 217, U.N. GAOR, 3rd Session.

4 UNGA. “The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).” (1966) G.A. Res 2200A. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> [16 February 2022]

5 UN Human Rights Committee. “CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote), The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service.” (1996). Article 25 (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fc22.html>) [16 February 2022]

6 Kofi Anann Foundation. “Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, Deepening Democracy: A Strategy for Improving the Integrity of Elections Worldwide.” (September 2012). <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/deepening-democracy-strategy-improving-integrity-elections-worldwide>. [May 29, 2022]

7 Electoral Knowledge Network (ACE), <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ei/eib/default>

8 ACE Project, “ACE Encyclopedia” “Electoral Integrity”, p. 10. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en>. [May 29, 2022].



Historically, the 1980's saw a rise in the acceptance of the critical role of citizens in election observation missions. The practice has gained more traction in the 2000's across many states, allowing millions to participate and ensure the legitimacy, accountability, and integrity of elections.⁹

Arguably, domestic, non-partisan observers, such as the CECOE, are not interested in the outcome of the election. Rather, they are more interested in the electoral processes and need to follow prescribed rules to preserve their impartiality and professionalism. Domestic observers are also expected to have an in-depth understanding of the general context within which elections are held.

Why Independent, non-partisan citizen election observation?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) identified five main advantages of including national observers in electoral processes.¹⁰

- Contribute to legitimizing the electoral process.
- It helps to build confidence in the electoral process.
- It can contribute to democratization.
- Enhance the electoral process.
- Contribute to reducing or preventing conflict.

Others argue that independent and non-partisan citizen observation can provide constructive recommendations to electoral authorities, relevant government bodies, political parties, the public and other actors.

To summarize, citizen election observation is critical to the quality and electoral integrity of a particular election. Observation can help promote and protect the civil and political rights of election participants. It can lead to the correction of errors or weak practices, even while an election process is still under way. Furthermore, citizen election observation deters manipulation and fraud or exposes such problems if they do occur. When observers release constructive reports, it builds trust in state society relations and boosts the legitimacy of the government formed after the election. Election observation by domestic groups encourages civic involvement in the political process. In relation to this, election observation is a way of supporting citizens' political empowerment by amplifying their voices at all stages of the election process. Lastly, following elections, reports and recommendations by observer groups promote changes and improvements in national law and practice.

Domestic election observation under international legal instruments

The development of an international legal framework for democratic elections began in 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Other international and region-specific legal instruments were adopted in the years that followed. The post-cold war period witnessed a universal consensus on the standards of democratic elections. Such values of democratic elections have been enshrined in a variety of international agreements and declarations. International organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

⁹ The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors "Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Observation and Monitoring of Elections by Citizen Organizations" (2012) Preamble. http://www.eods.eu/library/Declaration_of_Global_Principles_0.pdf. [5 June 2022].

¹⁰ International IDEA, "Code of Conduct for the Ethical and Professional Observation of Elections." (1997).

Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), and international associations of electoral practitioners and election monitoring organizations, have all codified guidelines on standards for democratic elections and best electoral practices. The following section outlines the main international legal standards for elections.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR)

The UDHR outlines key democratic principles, including the central role of credible elections in conferring legitimacy to the government. Such principles are detailed in Article 21¹¹, which reads:

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be held by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot or by the equivalent free voting procedures.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Electoral rights were further developed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted in 1966. Article 25 reads:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity:

- 1) to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- 2) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.
- 3) to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

However, such a formal provision might be of little use in terms of practical application and substantive impact, were it not for the political and campaign rights that are essential for a meaningful election process (European Commission, 2002, 9–15). The right of political participation presupposes adherence to fundamental freedoms, including those of expression, movement, peaceful assembly, and association. Articles 12, 19, 21 and 22 of the ICCPR declare those rights.

In addition to providing a standard for democratic elections, Article 25 of the ICCPR implicitly implies the importance of citizen election observation. However, scholars contend that short-term observation in an election process (i.e. observation activity that only covers polling activity) is insufficient and that the thrust of observation must be of a long-term nature.¹²

Other relevant legal instruments adopted within the UN system include the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); and the General Assembly Resolution on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Principle of Periodic and Genuine Elections (17 December 1991).

11 UNGA. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)." (1948) G.A. Res. 217, U.N. GAOR, 3rd Session.

12 Markku Suksi, 'The Electoral Cycle: on the Right to Participate in the Electoral Process', Election Elements: On the International Standards of Electoral Participation. Åbo: Institute for Human Rights, 2002



Recently, the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, IDEA, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union came up with detailed guidelines for good electoral practice, including codes of conduct for international observers.

Regional legal frameworks for election observation

Outside the framework of the UN, there are other regional instruments adopted by regional actors. For instance, article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) upholds the commitment “to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.” Likewise, in 1990, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) adopted the ‘Copenhagen Document’, which included a set of election standards that all 55 OSCE participating states committed to implementing.¹³

The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948) and the American Convention on Human Rights (1969) are the main legal instruments applicable to the American Continents.¹⁴ Article 23, sub-article 1, of the latter establishes universal suffrage rights of all citizens through a secret ballot.

In Africa, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter) was the first international human rights instrument adopted to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms in the African continent. Article 13, sub article 1 of the charter reads¹⁵, “every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.” Active participation of citizens is reiterated in Article 3 (7) of the charter. The charter requires member states to commit themselves to promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. It also makes sure that people have basic freedoms and human rights, which are universal, interdependent, and can’t be broken up.¹⁶

Furthermore, as part of Africa’s drive towards democratization, Africa’s heads of states at the 38th ordinary session of the OAU/AU in 2002, recognized the importance of election observation and monitoring by adopting the Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa. This African instrument reaffirms the universal principles of democratic election stipulated in the UDHR. It also says that AU member states have to promote democracy by putting in place the right institutions and creating a conducive environment for democracy.

It also specifies the obligation of AU member states to promote democracy through the establishment of relevant institutions and the creation of a democratic environment.¹⁷ Moreover, the declaration gave way to the promulgation of African Union Election Observation Manual.

Other African declarations that established universal suffrage include: the Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1994) and the Harare Declaration (the Commonwealth, 1991).

¹³ Participating states of the OSCE, the provisions of the Copenhagen Document apply to the United States of America and Canada.

¹⁴ Paragraph 5.4 of the OSCE Copenhagen Document makes specific reference on citizen observers, and as such can be considered as an election standard

¹⁵ Organization of African Unity. the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981)

¹⁶ Ibid pp. 20

¹⁷ Africa Union. Election Observation Manual (2013). <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/au2014EOMmanual.pdf> [June 3, 2022]

Domestic legal frameworks for domestic election observation in Ethiopia

The FDRE Constitution

The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established a parliamentary system of government, with the federal House of People's Representative (HPR) and Regional State Councils acting as the highest legislative organs. Since the ratification of the FDRE constitution in 1995, Ethiopia has held six general elections, following the first-past-the-post electoral system.¹⁸ Ethiopia's elections have been governed by a variety of laws, including constitutional provisions, proclamations, directives, and other legislative instruments.¹⁹

The preamble of the constitution envisions a democratic order, with a firm commitment to the full respect of individuals' and people's fundamental freedoms and rights.²⁰ The Constitution enshrines fundamental political rights such as the right to equality and non-discrimination²¹, freedom of thought, opinion, and expression²², the right to assembly, demonstration and petition²³, and freedom of association.²⁴ Article 38 of the constitution recognizes the right to vote, to be elected and to take part in public affairs directly or through freely chosen representatives. The article also recognizes the right to be a member of a political organization, association and trade union. Also, the constitution says that ratified international human rights standards can be made into local laws.²⁵

The FDRE Constitution, under Article 38, stipulates political rights, specifically the voting rights of citizens. Art. 38(1) of the constitution reads:

1. Every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on color, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or other status, has the following rights:
 - a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely chosen representatives.
 - b) On the attainment of 18 years of age, to vote in accordance with the law.
 - c) To vote and to be elected at periodic elections to any office at any level of government; elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.
2. The right of everyone to be a member of his own will in a political organization, labor union, trade organization, or employers' or professional association shall be respected, if he or she meets the special and general requirements stipulated by such organization.
3. Elections to positions of responsibility within any of the organizations referred to under sub-Article 2 of this Article shall be conducted in a free and democratic manner.
4. The provisions of sub-articles 2 and 3 of this article shall apply to civic organizations which significantly affect the public interest.²⁶

¹⁸ The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution, Proclamation no. 1 (1995). The Constitution was adopted December 1994 and came into force on the 21st day of August 1995.

¹⁹ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, (1995) (FDRE Constitution), Article 54.

²⁰ The FDRE Constitution, Preamble, paragraphs 1, 2 and 5.

²¹ Ibid, Articles 25 and 35(2) and (3).

²² Ibid, Article 29

²³ Ibid Article 30

²⁴ Ibid Constitution, Article 31

²⁵ Ibid, articles 9(4) and 13(2)

²⁶ Ibid, Article 38



Article 102 of the Constitution also established the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia as an independent election management body tasked with conducting free and fair elections in the Federal and Regional constituencies. Article 102 elaborates on:

1. There shall be established a National Election Board, independent of any influence, to conduct in an impartial manner, free and fair elections in Federal and State constituencies.
2. Members of the Board shall be appointed by the House of People's Representatives upon recommendation of the Prime Minister. Particulars shall be determined by law.²⁷

Proclamation for the Establishment of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1133/2019

This proclamation contains detailed sections on the powers and functions of the NEBE, the appointment of board members, and the code of conduct. Article 7 (2) of the proclamation states that one of the powers and duties of the board is to grant permission, follow up and supervise civil society organizations providing voter education²⁸, and issue licenses and follow up on election observers.²⁹ The proclamation also authorizes the NEBE to issue directives to carry out its missions properly.³⁰

The Ethiopian Electoral Law (Proclamation No. 1162/2019)

The law governing election registration and related conduct of political parties is called the "Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Electoral Code of Conduct No. 1162/2019." The law was enacted in August 2019 by combining three separate laws; the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 532/2007, Political Parties Registration Proclamation No. 573/2008 and Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties Proclamation No. 662/2009.³¹

According to the preamble of the proclamation, the law aims to ensure the participation of all Ethiopians in all-inclusive, fair, and free elections at all levels of government structure. The law also aims to encourage political parties with different views to participate in and compete in elections in a peaceful manner. Furthermore, the legislation tries to govern the institutions and processes for resolving administrative and judicial conflicts during election processes. At the grass root level, the law seeks to empower citizens by encouraging them to exercise their free expression and free will through informed decisions.³²

The law is divided into sections that focus on principles of elections, political parties, election observers, voter education, grievances and disputes arising in elections and elections codes of conduct. The proclamation defines and specifies who an observer is. Accordingly, a local election observer is a legally registered impartial, nonprofit non-governmental local civil society organization that the board has authorized, based on the organization's request to participate in election through its own representatives.³³ The fifth chapter of the proclamation details the responsibilities and rights of election observers.

²⁷ Ibid, Article 102

²⁸ Proclamation for the establishment of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (2019). Proclamation number, 1162. Article 7(2) of proclamation 1133/2019

²⁹ Article 7(7) of proclamation 1133/2019

³⁰ Article 7 (11) proclamation 1133/2019

³¹ The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election Code of Conduct Proclamation (2019) Proclamation number 1162/2019. <https://nebe.org.et/en/election-laws>

³² Directive on Local election observers' accreditation, working procedure and code of conduct. (2020) Proclamation number 5/2019

³³ Article 2(1) of directive no.5/2020

Directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct, directive no. 5/2020

Recognizing the paramount role of local election observers in free and fair elections, the NEBE passed the directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020, in February 2020. The NEBE came up with this directive based on the authority granted to it by Articles 114 to 117 of the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election Code of Conduct Proclamation Number 1162 and Articles 7(7) and 8(1) of the National Electoral Board Establishment Proclamation No 1133/2019.

The directive is organized into five chapters plus a preamble that explains the directive's goal and purpose. Chapter one gives the overall sketch of the proclamation and defines key terminologies. Chapter 2 of the directive describes procedures for accreditation, applications, and procedures. Chapter 3 outlines the rights and responsibilities of local observers. Chapter 4 discusses the code of conduct for local observers. The final chapter covers the circumstances under which accreditation can be revoked or suspended.

Other legislation governing elections in Ethiopia

In addition to the constitutional provisions governing elections in Ethiopia, there are various legal instruments declared for the proper conduct and execution of elections in Ethiopia. Notables are the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia Establishment Proclamation (No 1133/2019) and the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation (No. 1162/2019), commonly referred to as the Electoral Law.

There are also other directives approved by the NEBE to facilitate the electoral process. In this respect, Local Election Observers Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive no. 5/2020, Directive on Accreditation, Working Procedures and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, Directive on Candidate Registration, Collection of Endorsement Signatures and Selection of Symbols, Directive on Meeting Procedures of the Management Board of National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, Directive on Recruitment of National Election Board of Ethiopia's Regional Branch Office Heads, directive on the Obligations of Registered National and Regional Political Parties, Voter Education Accreditation and Code of Conduct Directive No. 4/2020, Directive on Re-election Procedures, directive on Voting, Counting and Announcement of Results, Election Reporting Code of Conduct of the Media and Journalists, Directive on COVID- 19 Mitigation During Elections are the major directives ratified by the NEBE for the peaceful and democratic completion of election.



Chapter 3: Findings

This section discusses the strengths and challenges associated with the implementation of the NEBE's Directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020. The chapter also proffers suggestions to overcome the challenges discussed.

Strengths of the NEBE's directive on election observation

Legal experts and researchers who were interviewed agreed that the accreditation, working procedure, and code of conduct for local election observers are compatible with international principles on domestic election observation. Similarly, the research found a difference between the new electoral law and directives on local observers. In a detour to the previous directive, the new directive allows CSOs to observe elections and to engage in civic and voter education. The new directive defines the roles, rights, and responsibilities of CSO observers. The bulk of the rights and responsibilities of election observers declared in the directive are in accordance with international norms. Another important change in the new electoral law is that local CSOs whose applications for accreditation were turned down by the NEBE can now appeal to the Federal Court within 14 days.³⁴

In addition to the relaxation and simplification of the directive on election observers, the opening of the civil space following the amendments introduced in 2020 to the legislation governing the establishment, operation, and funding of non-governmental organizations significantly eased restrictions in place since 2013. Prior to 2020, the "draconian" law barred Ethiopian CSOs from receiving funding from foreign sources and engaging in the promotion or protection of democracy, governance, and human rights.³⁵

The NEBE's directive on election observation: challenges and recommendations

I. Accreditation of local election observers

Accreditation is the process by which the NEBE verifies and formally authorizes organizations to participate in election observation activities. Accreditation confers official recognition that observers meet the requirements of the NEBE. After getting accreditation, observers are allowed to access venues of voter registration, candidate registration, election campaigning, voting, counting, tallying, and announcement. The accreditation of the observer organization and its observers (agents) is a significant step towards the success of election observation. The following are the major legal challenges that have been identified as impediments for CSOs and other stakeholders who were deployed as election observers.

1) Eligibility for accreditation

Only local CSOs are qualified to apply for accreditation to observe elections, according to the NEBE's establishing proclamation³⁶ on the electoral law and the directive for local election observation. According

³⁴ Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation (2019). Proclamation Number 1162/2019, Article 115(2)

³⁵ NDI IRI "Joint Lemoe report on Ethiopia's June 2021 elections" (2021) https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/leome_report_of_the_june_21_elections_final_final.pdf

³⁶ Article 7 and the definitional article that only allow local civil society organizations to observe elections



to the directive, local election observers are :

A legally registered, impartial, not-for-profit, non-governmental local civil society Organization which has been established by Ethiopians and includes non-government organizations, professional associations, mass-based societies and consortiums, which the Board has authorized, based on the organization's request to observe elections through its representatives.³⁷

On the other hand, the Ethiopian Charity and Civil Society Proclamation defines local civil society organizations as:

a non-governmental, non-partisan, no- for- profit entity established at least by two or more persons on voluntary basis and registered to carry out any lawful purpose and includes non-government organizations, professional associations, mass-based societies and consortiums.³⁸

Contrary to Ethiopia's laws that limit accreditation to only local CSOs, different countries permit other organizations other than local CSOs to apply for accreditation. For instance, the Kenyan electoral act allows government bodies, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations to observe elections.³⁹ Similarly, the Electoral Act of Zambia states that "any juristic person may apply for accreditation."⁴⁰

Interviewees and scholars suggested that the NEBE should allow accreditation for various stakeholders rather than limit it to local CSOs. In line with this, a participant from the ECES legal department⁴¹ told the panel during the CECO E's consultation with legal experts and local CSOs working on domestic election observation that the Ethiopian Inter-Religious Council was interested to conduct observation during the 2019 Sidama Referendum. Participants in the proceedings also emphasized the importance of considering the role of higher educational institutions and rights bodies in election observation and monitoring, such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Apparently, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) showed an interest to observe the human rights situation of the 2021 election, despite the disagreement with the NEBE over accreditation for election observation and monitoring activities.⁴² During the consultation, a representative from the NEBE's legal department stated that⁴³ efforts were ongoing to include faith-based organizations and trade unions as election observers.

Overall, this research found that a variety of organizations were interested to observe elections. Therefore, the authors of this research suggest that the NEBE should include local rights bodies and other governmental organizations that have a direct or indirect bearing on the conduct of electoral activities, as long as they have a legal personality. Furthermore, for the successful inclusion of other legitimate election observers, this paper recommends revising the directive's provision that prohibits⁴⁴ non-CSO organizations from obtaining accreditation to observe an election. Finally, it goes without saying that the NEBE should glean best practices in election observation and accreditation requirements from other countries.

II. When and where to apply for accreditation?

There is no detail in the electoral law or in the Directive for Accreditation and Code of Conduct for Local Election Observers' that specifies where and when to apply for accreditation. There should be a

37 Article 2(1) of directive no.5/2020

38 The organization of civil societies proclamation (2019). Proclamation No 1113/2019. Article 2(1).

39 Independent and electoral boundaries commission. (N.D) "General election Handbook for observers" <https://www.iebc.or.ke/uploads/resources/UETwRPuWGo.pdf>.

40 The Electoral process act of Zambia (2016). Act No. 35. Article 77(1)

41 Interview with Ayitew Debe, legal expert at ECES Ethiopia office

42 BBC Amharic Report: "ምርጫ 2013፡ የኢትዮጵያ ሰብአዊ መብቶች ኮሚሽን በምርጫ ወቅት የሰብአዊ መብት ጉዳዮችን እንዳይታዘቡ ተከለከለ" (June 17, 2021). <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/news-57513616>

43 Wongel Abate, legal expert from the NEBE

44 The Ethiopian electoral proclamation (2019) Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 115(1 (B))



section that specifies dates, places, venues, and other basic information so that organizations applying for observer status can save time and money, that could otherwise be spent on seeking information and dealing with bureaucratic red tape.

III. Deployment plan of observer organizations as a prerequisite for accreditation

There are no provisions in Ethiopia's electoral legislation or any other pertinent laws requiring election observers to submit their plans for observer deployment prior to the election. This research suggests that the NEBE should request observer organizations to submit their plans and execution methodology prior to the election. Many CSOs that had been given permission to observe the 2021 general elections were not able to do so on election day because they hadn't planned well enough for logistics and coordination.

In line with this, reports from observer organizations indicated that despite the large number of CSOs certified to observe Ethiopia's election held in June 2021, barely half of them were able to mobilize resources and financing to do so.⁴⁵ This significant gap between accreditation and actual observation points to the need for the NEBE to assess observers' organizational capacity and deployment plans prior to granting accreditation for observation. That would help to identify local observer groups that are really committed and prepared to conduct election observation activities.

IV. Centralized role of the NEBE

According to Ethiopia's electoral laws and other related directives, the NEBE has the sole mandate⁴⁶ and power to accredit, oversee, and follow up the overall electoral activities of the CSOs engaged in local election observation. During the Six National Election, the NEBE faced difficulties in monitoring and supervising observers from CSOs, given the large number of CSOs engaged in the different phases of electoral activities. This research suggests the NEBE to decentralize and delegate some of its centralized role to its regional offices. Delegating some operational responsibilities to regional offices could speed up the process of overseeing and managing domestic election observers. The laws and directives should be revised to that effect.

V. Establishing an accreditation center

The NEBE does not have a dedicated unit, department, or center in charge of domestic election monitoring duties under its existing institutional setup. Considering the volume and intensity of the task loads, this research recommends that the NEBE set up an "Election Observers Accreditation Centre," with a sufficient number of experts and skilled manpower.

VI. The importance of distinguishing local civil society organizations, coalitions, and networks

The Charity and Civil Society Law should set a clear distinction between local organizations, networks, and coalitions. The law should specifically outline their duties, actions, and relationships with member organizations. Detailed provisions on sources of finance and mobilization should also be included for the

45 NDI IRI "Joint Lemoe report on Ethiopia's June 2021 elections" (2021) https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/leome_report_of_the_june_21_elections_final_final.pdf

46 The NEBE's establishing proclamation and FDRE constitution and other relevant laws

sake of clarity. Similarly, the NEBE should prepare a special arrangement for coalitions and networks of civil society organizations to participate in election observation.

VII. Inclusion of election monitors

It is recommended that legal frameworks and other election directives consider independent and impartial election monitoring bodies to monitor the electoral process at various stages. There is a remarkable difference between election observers and monitors. The mandate and the activities of election observers are limited to gathering information and making an informed judgment. Unlike election observers, election monitoring bodies have the authority to observe election processes and to intervene in any stage if relevant laws or standard procedures are violated or ignored.

VIII. Inclusion of observers from underrepresented groups

The directive and the electoral law should consider including people with disabilities (PWD), internally displaced people (IDPs), women, and other marginalized sections of society in domestic election observation activities. Specifically, the research found that the NEBE's legislation is criticized for neglecting PWDs in different stages of the election process. In other countries, PWD engage in election observation after taking the proper training. This research suggests the involvement of subaltern groups in election observation activities, as it maximizes the representativeness and inclusiveness of the overall election process.

IX. The safety and security of domestic election observers

In the NEBE's directive on observers' accreditation, there is no legal provision to ensure the safety and security of domestic election observers throughout their election observation activities. Of course, the law allows election observers to get cooperation from government officials at different levels.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, just stating the rights of observers without setting an enforcing mechanism may not mean much. To take an example from Kenya, the Kenya's Electoral Act ensures the safety and security of election observers by deploying a separate police force that protects the observers from any harm.⁴⁸ This research recommends the NEBE to consider the safety and security of election observers, as the insecurity of observers negatively impacts the wellbeing of the observers and the credibility of the election.

Accessibility of electoral legislations

The research found that the NEBE's legislations are hard to access online and offline. Despite the NEBE's efforts to upload some of the directives on its website, it remains incomplete. It should be stated that the NEBE's efforts to make the laws more accessible is commendable. According to the NEBE's legal officer, the NEBE is organizing various electoral laws into a single compendium. Nevertheless, as proclamations were prepared in five distinct local languages, it was hard for the NEBE to keep laws consistent and keep an eye on quality. The findings of this research suggest that the NEBE should increase its efforts to make its laws and directives more widely available and easier to access. Access to a variety of legislations may raise stakeholders' understanding of election observation and related topics. In addition to the public's right to know the laws, we argue that the NEBE should implement maximum disclosure in practice, since members of the public may contribute feedback to the laws.

⁴⁷ Directive on Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct. (2020) Proclamation number 5/2019. Article 12 of the directive

⁴⁸ Independent electoral and boundary commission act of Kenya (2011). <https://www.iebc.or.ke/uploads/resources/8Z5fmROhVD.pdf>.



Conclusion

Democratic elections are the embodiments of fundamental human rights. Election observation is a prerequisite for democratic elections as it ensures the transparency and credibility of the election. Effective laws and regulations that govern the activities of election observation are one of the defining features of a free and fair election.

NEBE has various laws that govern elections, including legislation on election observers. This research identified the legal and practical challenges of election observation in Ethiopia. The research also proffered suggestions to the NEBE to curb practical and legal problems faced by election observers.

The research suggests that adapting Ethiopia's election observation laws to international best practices is important to gain the needed flexibility. Also, legal frameworks for local election observers should provide clear and objective standards for registering, accrediting, denying, or revoking observer status. Moreover, ensuring the clarity of the laws by specifying practical information such as time and venue of accreditation is important. Increasing the institutional diversity and modus operandi of observers, allowing the most underprivileged groups to participate in observation, supervising the planning and execution capacities of observer organizations, decentralization of NEBE's tasks to regional offices, establishing a special unit in charge of election observation, increasing the accessibility of election laws, and ensuring the safety of observers are some of the recommendations forwarded that the NEBE should consider.

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Part II

Assessments on Election observation of the Sixth General Elections of Ethiopia

Contributors:

Eyuel Zelealem, Amanuel Solomon and Bizuneh Welde



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
June 2022

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List of Acronyms

AU- African Union

CECOE- Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections

CSOs- Civil Society Organizations

ECES- European Center for Electoral Support

EPRDF-Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

ID card- Identification Card

IDEA- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

LTOs- Long Term Observers

NDI- National Democratic Institute

NEBE- National Electoral Board of Ethiopia

NGOs- Non-governmental organizations

PwDs- Persons with disabilities

RFPs- Regional Focal Persons

SNNPR- Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region

STOs- Short-term observers

UN- United Nations

VRO- Voter Registration Observers

ZCs- Zonal Coordinators

List of Tables

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Table 2 - Plan vs. Implementation of deployed observers

List of Participants

Governmental Organization

- NEBE

Partner Organizations

- ECES
- NDI

CECOE Secretariat

CECOE Member Organizations

- Addis Hiyot Center of the Blind (AHCB)
- Health and Wholeness Ethiopia /HAWE/
- Borderless Charity association
- Center for Democracy and Human Rights
- Consortium for Networking and Development (COND)
- Future Generation Hope for Vulnerable Children Organization
- Mushroom Integrated Development
- Hopeful Generation for Development
- Center of Concern
- Community Sustainable Development Aid (COSTIDA)
- Resurrection and Life Development
- Southwest teachers association
- Dire Dawa Civil Society Network (DDCSN)
- Stand for Integrated Development Ethiopia (Harar)
- Synergy for Community Development
- Network for action children, Girls and young women Empowerment (NAGWE)

Executive Summary

Election observation is a process in which numerous stakeholders in the electoral process, such as political parties, candidates, citizens, and independent organizations deploy observers to observe elections. Observation of elections has been conducted by international and local election observer groups in countries across the world where elections have been taking place. Citizen election observation is one form of election observation by national citizen groups. It has become more popular because it makes the voting process more open and accountable. The United Nations (UN) Declaration of Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring, Citizen Organizations, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance recognized citizen election observation.

Similar to the international and regional recognition of citizen election observation, the Ethiopian election legal framework recognizes election observation and outlines different requirements that must be met in election observation. In Ethiopia, citizen election observation is governed by the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019 and Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive no. 5/2020. These laws contain principles, requirements, and codes of conduct that must be adhered to and fulfilled by citizen election observation groups and observers.

The proclamation defines who local and international election observers are and what they do. These observers must get an accreditation badge from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), upon which they get the right to observe polling stations. The observers are required to obey the code of conduct for local election observers and operate in an impartial and non-partisan manner. Local observation groups that receive accreditation to observe elections from the NEBE are required to make sure that the individual observers that they recruit and deploy are observing elections impartially.

The CECOE implemented the comprehensive citizen election observation project by recruiting, accrediting, training, deploying, and collecting reports from the deployed observers. The CECOE also communicated its findings to the public through press statements that it issued at each electoral phase. The CECOE planned to recruit 250, 5000, and 250 observers in the pre-election, election day, and post-election phases respectively. Accordingly, the CECOE was able to recruit 190 pre-election, 5176 election day, and 148 post-election observers. Though the achievement of the plan is commendable, gaps have been identified regarding the efficient use of observers database, full compliance with recruitment standards, communications with regional structures, and the assurance of inclusion, participation, and representation during observation processes.

The CECOE has disseminated 3180 accreditation badges to observers that it has received from the NEBE. Apparently, the NEBE is in charge of the accreditation process. However, the CECOE provided the NEBE with a list of observers that it had recruited. The NEBE provided accreditation badges to the CECOE, after processing the names and producing accreditation badges. However, the delivery of the accreditation badges was delayed and the credentials were not distributed until a few days before the election. The delay made it very hard to organize accreditation badges that need to be given to observers at each training site. This was more challenging during the June phase of the election, since the sorting of badges got significant improvements in the September phase of the election.

With regards to observers' deployment, the plan for deployment was to deploy observers proportionally based on the number of polling stations in each administrative division of Ethiopia. Accordingly, the Oromia Regional State was the bench mark for the proportional deployment. However, this deployment



was not fully carried out due to the inability to recruit the intended number of observers in the Oromia Regional State as a result of security concerns. The CECO E was compelled to resort to a hybrid deployment methodology that included stationery, convenience, and mobile observers. In total, the CECO E deployed more than 3494 observers in both the June and September phases of the elections.

This assessment evaluates the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the election observation project. The assessment revealed that the objectives of the election observation project are still valid as the Sixth General Election has not been held in constituencies located in Benishangul Gumuz, Amhara, Oromia, Afar, Tigray, and Somali regions. These elections require citizen election observation, maintaining the project's relevancy. Additionally, local elections and referendums that will be conducted will also necessitate domestic election observation. The CECO E's activity on the election observation project was successful because it helped it achieve one of its core objectives. The CECO E was able to achieve its goal because of what was done in the areas of recruitment, accreditation, training, deployment, and reporting. Despite the internal and external challenges that the CECO E faced, it was able to implement all activities on time. Due to missing deadlines, no activity was left unimplemented due to missing deadlines. Even though the activities were completed on time, there is still room for improvement in terms of enhancing the quality of training, observers, implementation of planned deployment methods, quality of data, and timely payment.

The first systematic and technology based citizen election observation in Ethiopia's election history was marred by volatile security situations and a shifting election schedule. Despite all the challenges, the CECO E, with its novel techniques of implementing election projects, exerted considerable effort to utilize its extensive organizational base in citizen observation. In that, the CECO E widely deployed election observers across all regions of Ethiopia. Utilizing a technology-based reporting mechanism allowed the CECO E to obtain reports from the polling station instantly. This was significant because the CECO E provided valuable information to the public and the NEBE for some incidents that required their intervention.

The CECO E's observation activities during the September 2021 phase of the Sixth General Election of Ethiopia exhibited significant improvements in terms of planning, coordination, and implementation, as a result of lessons learned from the June 2021 election. This report recommends that the CECO E enhance its planning, coordination, and communication with regional structures in recruitment, training, and deployment; develop and implement a comprehensive citizen election observation guideline in which standard operating procedures for each activity are described; raise the capacity of the CECO E's regional structures by providing capacity building training on recruitment, coordination, and communication; prepare separate training manuals for member organizations, observers, and regional structures (RFPs and ZCs); increase the number of days to a minimum of two training days for training that will be provided to master trainers and training of trainers, and cascading the training given for master trainers; enhance its planning of observation activities in different situations to ensure that all gaps caused by a delay or change in calendar or schedule are averted and mitigated



Introduction

Election observation is a process where numerous stakeholders in the electoral process, ranging from political parties, candidates, and citizen groups to independent organizations deploy observers to observe elections.¹ Observation of elections has been conducted by international and local election observer groups in countries across the world where elections have been taking place.² Citizen election observation as one form of election observation by national citizen groups has expanded in its usage with the aim of ensuring integrity and promoting the accountability of the electoral process.³ Citizen observation has been recognized by the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations.⁴ This observation type is distinct in its employment of systematic and consolidated methodology.⁵ This has contributed to the improvement of national democratic support. The Declaration of principles defines citizen election observation as:

“Independent, systematic, and comprehensive evaluation of legal frameworks, institutions, processes, and the political environment related to elections; impartial, accurate, and timely analysis of findings; the characterization of the findings based on the highest ethical standards for impartiality and accuracy; the offering of appropriate recommendations for obtaining genuine democratic elections; and advocating for improvements in legal frameworks for elections, their implementation through electoral related administration and removal of impediments to full citizen participation in electoral and political processes.”⁶

According to the Declaration of principles, election observation is carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs). The definition from the Declaration of principles provides a broad overview of the roles involved in citizen election observation and the guiding principles for citizen election observation. Additionally, this definition provides the methodology that the activity of citizen election observation should take. From the ideas stipulated in the definition given by the Declaration of principles, two more important practical concepts could be gleaned. One, citizen election observation means observing the whole electoral process, not just the day of the election. Second, citizen election observation is conducted by citizens of a country. This is different from supervising or monitoring elections, which can include foreigners.

Citizen election observation has gained acceptance in many countries, including some in Africa.⁷ In this respect, the African Union’s General Assembly passed the legally binding African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. This binding instrument of the AU remarks that “election observation is important for the transparency and the impartiality of national monitoring or observation mechanisms.” Other sub-regional instruments have also recognized election observation and its key role in promoting

1 European Union. “Citizen Observers Guide for Citizen Observers on Electoral Reform.” [media4democracy.eu](http://media4democracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guide-for-Citizen-Observers-on-Electoral-reform.pdf). Accessed June 10, 2022. <http://media4democracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guide-for-Citizen-Observers-on-Electoral-reform.pdf>

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7 Leandro Nagore, and Domenico Tuccinardi. “Citizen Electoral Observation.” The Electoral Knowledge Network. Accessed June 17, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3v8KOoZ>

democracy and enhancing the credibility and transparency of elections.⁸ For instance, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has found that citizen election observation contributes to legitimizing the electoral process, building confidence in electoral processes, advancing the democratization process, improving the electoral process and reducing and preventing conflicts.⁹

Similar to the international and regional recognition of citizen election observation, the Ethiopian election legal framework recognizes election observation and outlines different requirements that need to be fulfilled in election observation. The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019 and the Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct Directive no. 5/2020 are the governing national legislative frameworks for citizen election observation in Ethiopia. These laws contain principles, requirements, and codes of conduct that must be adhered to and fulfilled by citizen election observation groups and observers.

The Proclamation on Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Elections Code of Conduct defines who local and international election observers are and what they do. These observers must get an accreditation badge from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), upon which they get the right to observe polling stations. The observers are required to obey the code of conduct for local election observers and operate in an impartial and non-partisan manner. Local observation groups that receive accreditation to observe elections from the NEBE are required to make sure that the individual observers that they recruit and deploy are observing elections impartially.

Following the Proclamation, the NEBE issued the directive on voter education. The directive details the requirements and procedures that local observer groups should follow. Pursuant to the directive, before acquiring the accreditation for election observation from the NEBE, a local NGO or not-for-profit organization should submit the signatures of observers that it seeks to deploy, two-passport sized photographs of each observer, and a copy of observers' identification card or other means of proving identity. Additionally, "agents," as addressed in the directive, must be at least 21 years old and Ethiopian. The directive prohibits accrediting a person as an election observer whose right to vote and be elected is restricted by law. Similarly, persons registered as candidates for political parties, persons with unethical behavior, and persons suspended by the NEBE in previous election observations are prohibited from getting accreditation badges.

Election observation is a practice that requires careful planning that takes into account the legislative framework, political landscape, election administration, media environment, women's participation, national minorities, and the overall election observation environment.¹⁰ Among other things, the success or failure of election observation depends on how well it is planned and executed.¹¹ Planning and execution of election observation involves planning activities and sub-activities that fall under recruitment, accreditation, training, deployment, and collecting reports from observers.¹²

This assessment report is a report of an assessment that was conducted on CECOE's Comprehensive Citizen Election Observation Project. It provides a summary of activities that were implemented under the project, presents the opportunities and challenges encountered by the CECOE throughout the implementation of each activity, and concludes with recommendations.

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11 Ibid

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Background

The Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE), was established on May 20, 2019, with the objectives of engaging in voter and civic education, election monitoring, and observations to prevent, mitigate, and manage election-related violence and conflicts. The CECOE is a broad-based coalition of more than 175 civil society organizations (CSOs). The CECOE's operational area covers all regions of Ethiopia.

The CECOE has been implementing several activities related to elections in Ethiopia since its establishment in 2019. Following the preparation of its comprehensive Elections Strategic Plan 2020-2022, the CECOE has implemented activities related to voter and civic education, election observation, and monitoring, advocacy, stakeholder engagement, research, and building the capacity of its members.

During the Sixth General Election, the CECOE implemented a citizen election observation project in all regions except for the Tigray Regional State and some constituencies in the Amhara, Oromia, Afar, and Benishangul Gumuz Regions. The CECOE was able to recruit, train, accredit, deploy, and collect reports from observers in constituencies where elections were held.

As part of a discussion on election observation for the Six General Election, there are a few contextual factors that need to be mentioned. First, it should be noted that the Sixth General Election was held amidst a global pandemic outbreak, which had various consequences for the election.¹³ Second, the Sixth General Election was conducted after the reconfiguration of the ruling party's political status quo, which had serious implications for the introduction and implementation of political, legislative, and institutional reforms.¹⁴ This was consequential for the reestablishment of the Electoral Management Body of Ethiopia, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, the re-registration of all political parties¹⁵, and the emergence of a new ruling political party, the Prosperity Party, from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).¹⁶ Third, the Sixth General Elections were fraught with security challenges, compelling the NEBE to hold elections in two phases.¹⁷ All of the regions except the Somali, Tigray, and Harari regions held the June phase of elections.¹⁸ Also, elections in constituencies in the Amhara, Oromia Benishangul, Harari region as a whole, and some constituencies in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) regions were postponed to September 2021, due to logistical, security challenges and court orders for reelection.¹⁹ The Sixth General Election's September round was held in Somali, Harari, and most of the constituencies in the Wolaita Zone of SNNPR.²⁰ Additionally, a referendum vote for the regional statehood of the Southwestern People also took place in the September phases of the election.²¹

13 The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "Election Preparedness DREF: Final Report Ethiopia," May 0, 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-election-preparedness-final-report-dref-operation-n-mdret025>

14 Yohannes, Gedamu. "Here's How Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed Rose to Power to Bring Change in the East African Country." CNBC Africa, February 4, 2019. <https://bit.ly/367OSgK>

15 BBC News, "Ethiopia's election 2021, A quick guide", June 15, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57102189>

16 Ephrem, Sileshi. "Exclusive: As the Formation of Prosperity Party Gains Momentum Here Is Its Program." Addis Standard, November 28, 2019. <https://bit.ly/3jvy1rd>

17 The Conversation. "Ethiopia's Election: The Stakes Are High amid Fear, Mistrust and Violence." The Conversation, June 16, 2021. <https://bit.ly/364cEtR>

18 International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI). "Ethiopia June 21, 2021 National Elections Report," August 5, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3AB7qAx>

19 Ayenat Mersie. "Ethiopians in Three Regions Vote in Delayed Election." Reuters, September 30, 2021. <https://reut.rs/3KzcQAw>

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

Objectives

The overall objective of this assessment report is:

To gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses that the CECO identified in the implementation of election observation activities.

The election observation assessment has the following specific objectives:

- To assess the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the implementation of the election observation project.
- To broaden the knowledge base of the CECO so that it can continue to pursue its strengths and improve its weaknesses in future elections that it will observe.

Methodology of the Study

This research employed a variety of data collection tools to collect data from different actors. Structured and unstructured interviews were held with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the European Center for Electoral Support (ECES), all of which have provided significant financial and technical assistance to the CECO election observation activities.

In addition to the interview questions, the researchers also administered surveys to citizen observers and member CSOs of the CECO. The questionnaires were designed to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the activities that were implemented during the CECO's comprehensive election observation project for the June and September 2021 elections.

As the CECO led the implementation of the election observation project, this assessment collected data from the CECO through a focus group discussion (FGD) with the CECO's election observation project management team. With regards to the sampling methods, the assessment employed a purposive sampling method to select respondents for data collection through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Responses and data from 90 observers, 15 member organizations in the CECO, 6 trainers, and 2 international partners were collected and analyzed.



Findings of the Assessment

This section of the assessment looks at what was planned and what has been done in recruiting observers, accrediting observers, training observers, preparing and implementing manuals and documents, deploying observers, and reporting. Each subsection goes into detail about the initial plan for each activity, the task that was done according to the plan, and the gaps and problems that were found when putting those plans into action.

Observers' recruitment plan

In any citizen election observation, recruiting observers is an important step that plays a significant role in the overall election observation.²² Recruitment is considered as the initial stage of election observation, which, if successful, smoothens the totality of the observation exercise.²³ Observer groups that seek to observe elections are required to recruit observers who observe elections on election day and submit observation reports.²⁴ To secure the needed number of observers, observer groups are usually formed through coalitions and networks. This lets the groups get many observers to observe the elections systematically and comprehensively.²⁵ Recruitment can also be done through pre-existing organizations with a large member base.²⁶ After publicizing the recruitment and approaching existing civic organizations, observer groups may convene meetings with observers to communicate requirements and other important information.²⁷

According to the CECO E's project proposal, the CECO E planned to recruit a total of 250 long term observers (LTOs) for the first phase of the election observation exercise (pre-election observation). The regional focal persons (RFPs), who would be trained on how to recruit observers, were supposed to be in charge of recruiting observers. During the pre-election period, the observers would keep an eye on the preparatory activities of the NEBE, including the development of relevant directives for the conduct of elections. In addition, they were supposed to observe other pre-election environment activities, such as campaign activities of political parties (rallies, disruption, violence, accessibility of polling stations, speeches, policy issues, etc.), voter education carried out by the NEBE and civil society actors, election security, issues of inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups in the electoral process, and violence against women during elections.

The CECO E planned to recruit 2750 short-term observers for election day from its member organizations based on kebeles where polling stations would be located. Of the 2750 observers, the CECO E planned to deploy around 2500 observers as stationary observers. The remaining 250 newly recruited observers, along with the 250 LTOs, were planned to be deployed as mobile observers.

22 National Democratic Institute. "A Field Guide for Domestic Election Monitoring Groups in the Southern African Development Community." Accessed June 17, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3uyFHPR>

23 Ibid

24 Ibid

25 Ibid

26 Ibid

27 Ibid

Implementation of observers' recruitment activity

Coming to the implementation of the plan, the CECO was engaged in the recruitment of observers who would receive training, accreditation, and later, deployed to observe the electoral environment during pre-election, election day, and post-election periods.

Table 1: Plan Vs Implementation of recruited observers

	Plan	Implementation
Pre-election	250	190
Election day	5000	5176
Post-election	250	148

The CECO tried to follow the NEBE's rule on recruiting observers or agents. The NEBE directive no. 05/ 2020 on Local Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure, and Code of Conduct outlines the requirements that must be fulfilled by local observer groups when they recruit "agents." Agents are defined as persons who are deployed by an organization that is authorized and accredited by the NEBE to observe elections. Article 8 of the Directive states agents must be at least 21 years old and Ethiopian. The directive prohibits accrediting a person as an election observer whose right to vote and be elected is restricted by law. Similarly, persons registered as candidates for political parties, persons with unethical behavior, and persons suspended by the NEBE in previous election observations are prohibited from getting accreditation badges.

With regards to the quality of observers, especially educational quality, the CECO's recruitment strategy requires observers' recruitment to take into consideration the ability of observers to at least read and write. However, the CECO secretariat reported that there were gaps in the quality of observers, particularly with regards to their educational background.

To achieve its recruitment objectives, the CECO adopted a structure that allows it to collaborate with its member organizations during the implementation of the comprehensive election observation project. Regional and Zonal structures including, regional focal persons (RFPs) and zonal coordinators (ZCs) were created with specific duties and responsibilities. Training was provided by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to the CECO secretariat, regional focal persons (RFPs), Zonal coordinators (ZCs), and desk officers to facilitate the recruitment of observers. The NDI offered these training leaning on its recruitment strategy it developed for its partners in Ethiopia that are engaged in domestic citizens' election observation. The document included necessary recruitment procedures and requirements that the CECO needs to implement. Additionally, the strategy required the establishment of a database for RFPs and observers to maintain long term contact with observers.

Although this was the proposal, the recruitment of observers was done in a way that didn't fit with the plan. The CEOCE was able to easily recruit more than 140 observers across regions for the June election. However, the process of recruiting observers for the election day in June overlapped with the data entry of observation reports from the voter registration observation group. This, in conjunction with other challenges, posed serious obstacles that forced the recruitment process to counter the plan. One of the biggest problems with the recruitment was that member organizations didn't recruit observers according to the requirements that the CEOCE gave. Also, the delay in adding a new budget line in the form of basket funding from international partners, which was a good thing in and of itself, led to new interests in increasing the number of observers from the original goal.



Furthermore, although member civil society organizations of the CECO E had large and diverse presence across Ethiopia, it was hard to recruit observers from every part of Ethiopia due to the absence of a comprehensive database containing information on the distribution of member organizations by region, zone, woreda, and constituency. This made it difficult for the CECO E to recruit the desired number of observers. Moreover, the challenge compelled the CECO E to recruit most observers from urban areas.

During a focus group discussion with the CECO E Secretariat, these problems and other issues were brought up. In this respect, the problem of getting complete relevant information from observers was raised as one challenge. For instance, the CECO E requested the phone numbers of its observers to be utilized for reporting purposes, however, getting a stable phone number from some observers was difficult.

Due to problems of communication and following up, information from observers was not gathered accurately. Also, essential information for further training, deployment, and reporting, such as the precise location of each observer and their educational background, was not captured precisely. This has hindered the execution of the project in its final stages, such as reporting and payment, during the election process in June. During the September phase of the election, however, many advances were achieved because most of the candidates were recruited by gathering all the essential information. This was made possible by the CECO E's planning and execution efforts, as well as its close collaboration with its regional entities. The September rounds were not, however, executed in accordance with the established recruitment plan.

Finally, this research gathered data from observers recruited by member organizations of the CECO E to examine the relationship between observers and member organizations and check if the recruitment process met the requirements of the CECO E and the NEBE. 68.8 % of observers said that they are members of the recruiting organization, while 12.5% of respondents said that they are staff of the recruiting organization. This shows that the recruitment was conducted in line with the communication that CECO E made to member organizations.

Plan for accreditation of observers

The Ethiopian Election Proclamation and Directive No. 05 on Local Observers' Licensing, Procedure, and Code of Conduct require domestic election observer groups to submit requests to NEBE to obtain accreditation.²⁸ The proclamation requires domestic observers, more specifically domestic civil society organizations, to have legal personality, be non-partisan, non-profit, and non-governmental, and have leaders and board members who are not affiliated with political parties.²⁹ The CSOs must also verify the capability and impartiality of the individuals to be deployed as election observers.³⁰ The Proclamation also says that organizations and their respective representatives must sign election observers' code of conduct to show that they agree with it.³¹

28 The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. "Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020." nebe.org.et. 2019. <https://bit.ly/3E5bgUo>

29 The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. "The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, And Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation." nebe.org.et. Accessed June 17, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3E57HgS>

30 Ibid

31 Ibid

As per Article 8 of the Directive, the NEBE is mandated to issue identification cards to observers.³² The NEBE provides identity cards to local observer organizations in response to the submitted list of names of those recruited for election observation. The CECO submitted the complete list of observers it enlisted for the Six General Election. The agent profile template of the NEBE requires the names, addresses, ages, and educational backgrounds of recruited individuals. Additionally, the NEBE required the submission of identification cards of recruited individuals along with pledge forms. However, NEBE removed the submission of signed pledge forms from the list of requirements in order to enable local observer groups such as CECO to observe the election. This decision by the NEBE has allowed local observer groups, which were non-existent, to acquire accreditation and observe the elections.

Implementation of accreditation of observers

During the June election, the CECO planned to collect all the necessary information that the NEBE needed by using its regional structures and a technology-based database that would allow it to swiftly secure the required information. Be that as it may, the recruitment database that the CECO used had limitations. As a result, the submission of names to the NEBE was disorganized, posing serious challenges. There were problems like duplicate names in the list, failure to collect the phone numbers, addresses, identification cards, and educational background of recruited individuals.

These problems were compounded by the NEBE's inability to provide the CECO with accreditation badges until a few days before the election day. The CECO accepted more than 3000 accreditation badges that were to be distributed to observers on training days. To make matters worse, these badges were not organized in a manner that would have allowed the CECO to correctly pack and send them to the observers all over Ethiopia. This resulted in training delays, created a situation where trained observers were not accredited, and compromised the overall quality of the training.

However, the same challenges were not encountered during the September phase of the election due to improvements that the CECO made in the submission of names, sorting, packing, and delivery of badges. These improvements allowed the CECO to carry out training smoothly, with all observers acquiring badges. Compared to the sorting and distribution of badges in the September and June elections, the CECO Secretariat explained that during the June phase of the election, badges were sorted multiple times with error margins of 30 to 40 percent, whereas during the September phase of the election, badges were sorted in two days with the capacity of three people. This was a major improvement from June, when sorting the badges took the whole CECO team and additional human resources from volunteers.

Training plan

Prior to the training of 3000 STOs, the CECO planned to organize a two-day training of trainers for the CECO's regional focal persons, Addis Ababa secretariat staff, and the desk officers (26 RFPs and 13 Dos, a total of 39 trainees). The CECO planned to train the STOs in regional capitals and big cities such as Asaita, Bahir Dar, Assosa Gambella, Harar, Adama, Jimma, Hawasa, Jigjiga, Mekele, Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa. The CECO also planned to provide the 250 post-election observers with a one-day refresher training that would focus on the checklists and indicators they needed to look for and report on during the two-week observation period. Likewise, before the election day, the CECO planned to provide cascading training to master trainers.

³² The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. "Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive No. 5/2020." [nebe.org.et](https://bit.ly/3E5bgUo). 2019. <https://bit.ly/3E5bgUo>



Implementation of training

To begin with, it was impossible to train more than 3000 observers in just a few days before the election. Prior to the commencement of cascading training, the CECO organized training for master trainers and cascading trainers. The master trainers are composed of selected desk officers from the CECO. The desk officers were trained by senior technical experts from the NDI. These master trainers were further engaged in the training of cascading trainers.

In June, the CECO trained 31 cascading trainers with the help of 7 master trainers, 5 of whom were men and 2 were women. Later, these cascading trainers were supposed to train the recruited observers in 23 training sites in Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambela, Harari, Oromia, Sidama, SNNPR, and Somali. In September, the CECO used 9 master trainers to train 24 cascading trainers. Six of the master trainers were men and three were women. The cascading trainers were supposed to train observers in Harar City, Jigjiga, Dolo Ado, Wolayita Sodo, Jimma, and Hawassa.

Originally, as per information acquired from the CECO secretariat, the CECO planned to provide a two-and-half-day training course to observers that it recruited. However, this was not achieved due to the inability to commence the training earlier before the election day approached. This was because the NEBE delayed accreditation badges. In addition to delays in accreditation badges, the CECO had logistical challenges in setting up hotel rooms, transportation, packing, and delivering bags to training sites. In line with this, observers who filled out questionnaires noted the coordination problems and how they affected the quality of the training.

Due to these challenges, the CECO only gave a one-day training that covered general citizen election observation, observation checklists developed by the CECO, critical incident forms, reporting mechanisms, and simulation exercises. According to the CECO secretariat and NDI resident representative, the purpose of this training was to educate observers with all pertinent information, equipping them to conduct the observation effectively.

Another identified concern is the competence and quality of trainers. The quality of master trainers and cascade trainers is vital for ensuring that the relevant knowledge reaches observers, which in turn influences the quality of observation reports received by CECO. Due to the short period of time in which both the master and cascade teachers were trained, observers noted a lack of coordination skills, delays in beginning training, and difficulties in comprehending questions. This could be attributable to the lack of systems for monitoring and evaluating training at each level, as well as the screening process for trainers.

In the days leading up to election day, the CECO set up a data center to handle all reports. This data center was run by 80 data clerks during the June election and 50 data clerks during the September election. These data clerks were provided with a one-day training in both the June and September phases of the election. During a focus group discussion with the CECO Secretariat, there were concerns about how well the training prepared the data clerks to handle reports from observers on election day.

Plan for the preparation of checklists and other documents

The CECO planned to develop a training manual based on relevant directives of the NEBE. The training manual was supposed to be translated into Amharic, Afar Af, Afaan Oromo, Tigrigna, and Somali languages. The materials were to be printed in 300 copies and distributed to all the observers, regional focal persons,

and other management and secretariat staff of the CECO for the sake of accountability and transparency. Furthermore, the manual was supposed to come with a checklist for the observers to use when they report.

Likewise, the CECO planned to develop a polling day observation checklist and critical incident template for election day observation in Amharic, Oromifa, Tigrina, Somali, and Afar Af languages and distribute them to election day observers. The plan was for stationary observers to use standardized checklist forms, while mobile observers would be provided with different checklists to observe different stages of the polling process, depending on their movements. The observation project planned to duplicate adequate copies of forms and checklists to observe the opening and set up of polling stations, the voting process, and the closing of polling stations, the counting of votes and ballot reconciliation procedures. During the post-election period, the observers will also observe how the winning and losing candidates act, monitor protests or demonstrations that could be organized by political parties or other actors in the days following the elections. Also, observers were supposed to observe the posting or announcement of preliminary results at polling centers, and the collection and announcement of final results at the NEBE's headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Implementation of the distribution of checklists and other documents

The CECO produced, packaged, and distributed several documents. Some of these documents were to be handed and used by observers, while the others were documents that observers were supposed to sign and return to the CECO. Among other documents, observation checklists, and critical incident forms were documents that were supposed to be used for the observation activities. These are the most crucial documents as they contain questions upon which observers will base their reporting. These documents were designed with a specific coding arrangement that enables observers to submit their observation reports via SMS messages. Every question and the corresponding choice were coded with letters and numbers.

Even though this method of reporting was commendable. The checklists had errors in coding, formatting, and translation. These errors caused problems in the reports as observation reports coming from different regions had varying codes.

Similarly, training materials designed to provide election observers with detailed information on election processes were drafted and translated into four native languages of Ethiopia. The guidebook was intended to include detailed information regarding election day processes. However, due to delay in the issuance of the NEBE's directives, the training manuals were unable to provide all pertinent information regarding election day procedures. Similar to the observation checklists, the handbook was poorly translated and did not provide the observers the information that it was supposed to.

Plan for deployment

Prior to deploying LTOs to their assigned Zones, the CECO planned to organize a launching program in which media outlets would be invited to inform the public about its pre-election observation activity. Planned to be deployed for a period of two months, the observers were expected to receive a reporting checklist containing a set of indicators to guide their observation and reporting.



The CECO planned to adopt a two-observer deployment model for the sampled stations. The plan was to deploy 2,500 stationary observers in 1,250 sampled polling stations in pairs, so that each polling station would have two observers throughout the day. The remaining 500 mobile observers will be deployed in the different Zones, and will move from one polling station to another in the Zone. On election day, it was planned for each mobile observer to observe between 5 to 7 polling stations. A Zonal level deployment of observers was planned for post-election observation.

Implementation of the deployment of observers

When it comes to implementation, the CECO planned to adopt a proportional deployment methodology for election- day observation such that its observers would be present in each Zonal administration in Ethiopia. A proportional approach to deploying observers was determined by the number of Zones per region, the number of administrative cities per region, and the number and list of polling stations made available by the NEBE per each region. Initially, the CECO adopted this model in the Oromia Region. However, the CECO couldn't find a sufficient number of observers in the Oromia Region due to security problems.

After getting the accreditation badges, the CECO deployed observers to polling stations and constituencies to observe the pre-election, election day, and post-election phases of the Sixth General Elections of Ethiopia in both the June and September 2021.

Owing to the importance of the pre-election period in the electoral cycle, which includes registration of voters and candidates, the CECO deployed pre-election observers to observe the pre-election environment. The CECO was able to observe only the registration of voters by deploying a total of 117 voter registration observers (VRO) in 8 regions and 2 city administrations. The CECO didn't observe the registration of candidates in both the June and September phases of the election, due to the frequent changes made by NEBE on the electoral calendar.

Each voter registration observer was given a quota of registration stations to observe and report to the CECO. The CECO only provided guidance to its VRO so that each would report once a week. Nonetheless, this deployment mechanism posed serious difficulties for the CECO in keeping track of observers and making sure that they were observing the registration stations appropriately.

The CECO is aware of the deployment of observers into regional constituencies during the June and September rounds of the election. Nevertheless, the CECO is unaware of the exact deployment of election day observers in polling stations situated at the Zonal and Woreda levels. This in part is caused by CECO's decision to let observers observe polling stations located in close proximity to their homes. This has caused gaps in the follow-up of observers, not to mention its potential negative impact on the overall quality of the citizen election observation.

The CECO also deployed 97 and 49 post-election observers in the June and September elections, respectively. The post-election observer teams were deployed to constituencies to observe the post-election environment. The observers were deployed in the constituencies where they reside. This deployment was not accurate in terms of putting the right number of observers in each constituency. Apparently, in some constituencies there were more than one observer.

Table 2: Plan Vs Implementation of deployed observers

	Plan	Implementation
Pre-election	250	190
Election day	5000	5176
Post-election	250	148
Total	5500	5514

The plan for reporting

The way observation findings are communicated or reported by observers is a crucial aspect of election observation. The reporting mechanism also determines how quickly and efficiently observer groups share their findings with the public. During the planning phase for the election observation, the CECO E planned to collect the physical (hard copy) observation reports from its observers and input them into technology-based analytical tools to compile scientific reports.

According to the plan, the reports from LTOs, who were deployed to observe the VRO were to be reported to their respective desk officers at the CECO E Secretariat in Addis Ababa once every week. To send weekly reports, the LTOs were supposed to use telephone. It was planned to use telephone reporting and critical incident reporting templates for that. The plan requires the LTOs to submit all completed paper-based observation checklists, completed telephone reporting forms, completed critical incidents forms, and any other relevant observation documents to their respective regional focal persons once every two weeks. During the two-month deployment period, LTOs were expected to turn in a minimum of 2,000 reports.

The CECO E planned to use telephone reporting for the election day. The plan requires observers to telephone and report their observations to the CECO E's National Election Information Center in Addis Ababa. The CECO E planned to provide observers with a separate telephone reporting form, which they will complete and report on at a predetermined time during the day (on polling station set-up and opening, voting process, closing, and counting). On the election day, they are also expected to report incidents.

The CECO E planned that the observers would submit their completed checklists, all completed incident forms, and telephone reporting forms to their respective regional focal persons the next day after polling. The regional focal persons would assemble all completed checklists and other observation reports from the regions and send them via courier to the CECO E's Secretariat in Addis Ababa. The CECO E decided ahead of time that it would use telephone reports to report on how the elections went during the day, focusing on the most important things that happened and what needed to be fixed right away by the NEBE, security agencies, and other relevant stakeholders.

In the post-election period, the CECO E planned to utilize a similar reporting system as in the pre-election period. Post-election observers will report once every week by telephone directly to their designated desk officers at the CECO E Secretariat in Addis Ababa. A telephone reporting template tailored to the post-election observation, indicators/checklist were planned to be developed. Like the pre-election period observation, the observers are expected to report their general observations on a weekly basis. They are also obliged to report whenever they come across critical incidents that require rapid reporting.



Implementation of reporting and communication activities

During the June election, observers who were observing the voter registration process sent the observation checklist they had to the CECOE via mail. After collecting these reports, they were put into Google Forms, which is a tool for analysis. This way of reporting took more time and energy as data from more than 100 observers had to be entered manually into the analysis tool. This not only took a lot of time and energy, but it also put those tasked with entering the data at risk of making mistakes.

This reporting mechanism was no longer implemented by the CECOE. This is because an SMS reporting mechanism was put in place, which lets observers send their observation reports right away to the CECOE's SMS messaging database. This way of reporting allowed the CECOE to get the results of the observation almost as soon as it happened.

Assessing the reporting mechanism's ease of use showed that 97.8% of respondents found it easy, while 2.2% of the observers deemed it very hard. Other issues that were raised by observers include, not getting SMS delivery reports, difficulties in understanding questions, difficulties in comprehending the coding of questions, and sending reports to the wrong numbers.

The research also evaluated the efficiency and usefulness of the CECOE's data center for observers' reporting. Most observers (84.4%) said that data clerks supported them well, whereas 7.8% of observers reported that the data clerks did not support them at all.

Assessing the Relevance, Effectiveness, and Efficiency of the implementation of the Project

Relevance

The relevance of the implementation of the citizen election observation project is determined based on the extent to which the objectives of the program remain valid, the consistency of the project's activities and outputs, the attainment of its objectives, intended impacts and effects. The objectives of the citizen election observation include, bringing together non-partisan member organizations and independent volunteers to deter manipulation, harassment, intimidation, and possible electoral malpractices, to ensure transparency in all phases of the electoral processes, building confidence and trust in the electoral process among the electorate, political parties, and other stakeholders, and contributing to the democratic transition of the country by supporting the conduct of free, fair, and genuine elections.

These objectives are still valid since the Sixth General Election has not been held in constituencies situated in Benishangul Gumuz, Amhara, Oromia, Afar, Tigray, and Somali regions. These elections require citizen election observation, maintaining the project's validity and applicability. Local elections and referendums that will be conducted will also require domestic election observation. In accordance with the project's overarching objectives and impacts, the CECOE recruited 5493 observers in total, accredited 3180 observers, and provided training to 4052 observers, deployed 3494 observers, and collected 17649

reports. Furthermore, the CECO E confirmed 119 critical incidents in both the June and September phases of the election. This demonstrates that the objectives, outputs, and activities of the CECO E's citizen election observation projects are still valid.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a citizen election observation project is assessed by how well the objectives have been met, or how likely it is that they will be met. The CECO E's activities on the election observation project were effective. The CECO E was able to achieve its goals because of what it did in the areas of recruitment, accreditation, training, deployment, and reporting. The CECO E, as a new coalition to participate in elections, was challenged by the macro environment of the election, including COVID 19, insecurity, logistical and coordination problems. Despite the challenges, the CECO E implemented the project commendably using new skills, ideas, and technology as reported in detail in this and other assessments.

Efficiency

Efficiency is assessed by considering the implementation of activities in a timely manner and the efficiency of the implementation as compared to other alternatives. Despite the internal and external challenges that the CECO E encountered, it was able to implement all the activities on time. For reasons of missing deadlines, no activity was left unimplemented. Even though the activities were done on time, there was room for improvement in the quality of the training, the observers, the way the planned deployment methods were carried out, the quality of the data, and making payments on time.

Summary of Good Practices

During the comprehensive citizen election observation project, the CECO E carried out several initiatives that are exemplary. One good practice was that, despite all the challenges, the CECO E, with its novel techniques of implementing election projects, exerted considerable effort to utilize its extensive organizational base in citizen observation. In that regard, the CECO E widely deployed election observers across all regions of Ethiopia.

Another best practice that the CECO E experienced was the use of a technology-based reporting mechanism that allowed it to grasp reports from the polling station instantly. This was significant because the CECO E provided valuable information to the public and the NEBE for some incidents that required their intervention. The CECO E's quick learning curve in the face of a continuously changing operating environment is an additional strength. The bulk of the planning, coordination, and execution issues that arose during the June 2021 elections were rectified for the September 2021 elections.

Lessons learned and recommendations

The CECO E learned that citizen election observation requires meticulous planning, coordination, communication, and implementation. This assessment report provides the CECO E and other citizen observer organizations with the following recommendations to integrate into the preparation and execution of future citizen election observation plans:

- Enhance the planning, coordination, communication, recruitment, training, and deployment capacity of central and regional structures of the CECO E.





- Develop and implement a comprehensive citizen election observation guideline, with details of standard operating procedures for each activity.
- Raise the capacity of the CECO E's regional structures by providing capacity building training on recruitment, coordination, and communication.
- Prepare separate training manuals for member organizations, observers, and regional structures (RFPs and ZCs).
- Increase the number of training days for master trainers, training of trainers, and cascading trainers to a minimum of two days.
- Raise the capacity of institutions to plan for possible scenarios and irregularities that may occur during election observation.
- Design monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for training offered by the CECO E to master trainers, cascading trainers, and observers.
- Enhance the inclusion and participation of Women and persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of election observation activities.
- Broaden the membership of the CECO E's member organizations located in rural areas to bridge the urban-rural gaps in observation activities.

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