



REGIONAL FORUM ON CIVIL SOCIETY POST-ELECTION FOLLOW-UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND ELECTORAL REFORM ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 29 and 30 June 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Civil Society is one of the key pillars of democratic consolidation and sustenance. Over the past decades civic groups in Africa have exercised their right to participate in public affairs in various forms. Citizen election observation has emerged, in the recent years, as one of the forms of civil society engagement in public affairs. In line with international benchmarks and national legal frameworks for the conduct of non-partisan election observation, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have assessed and reported on elections as a way of contributing to the transparency and integrity of these democracy strengthening processes.

In 2010, networks of CSOs endorsed the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations initiated by the the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). The Declaration calls on non-partisan citizen observer groups to issue recommendations for improving the quality of electoral processes. As part of their applied methodologies, citizen observer groups have offered recommendations based on findings made during a given electoral process.

Recurring challenges around the implementation of recommendations across countries have prompted international and citizen observer groups alike to reflect on the importance of follow-ups on recommendations. Despite the fact that the methodology for citizen election observation has evolved over the years, there remains a gap in the area of monitoring the implementation of observer recommendations. Even though the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring, by Citizen Organizations, provides a sound basis for the conduct of professional and comprehensive citizen election observation, the instrument does not make any reference to follow-up on recommendations. While the election assessment methodology employed by most citizen observer groups spans across the electoral cycle, there remains a gap in the post-election observation phase. Furthermore, there is a need to bridge the gap between CSOs' election

observation role and their advocacy role which can be achieved through post-election follow-up on recommendations.

Whilst the conduct of regular elections on the African continent could be regarded as an indication of progress, their quality has not improved, and the level of democratic consolidation remains weak. Among the reasons for the poor quality of elections are the weakness in post-election follow-up activities and reforms. If recommendations are not addressed, electoral shortcomings and vulnerabilities are likely to persist, and may worsen. Based on the premise that an election is more than a one-day event, citizen election observation will be more beneficial and bring about good quality elections if EOM recommendations are given serious consideration and effectively addressed.

One area of follow-up that CSOs are particularly active in is the review of election legislation for improving the legal and institutional framework for the conduct of elections in support of the election justice system. However, CSOs face several challenges in their initiatives, including, lack of political will for reforms, lack of or weak level of interaction between Civil Society Organizations and parliaments; lack of professional expertise among CSOs to address follow-up on recommendations, lack of financial resources to implement post-election activities, and election stakeholders may consider recommendations unconvincing, insufficiently targeted, or inappropriate to the national context.

As part of its democracy-support programmes implemented throughout the African continent for more than two decades, EISA has initiated and supported the establishment of citizen election observation groups in many countries. The organization supports civil society post-election follow-up initiatives within the framework of its Supporting Transitions and Electoral Processes (STEP) program.

It is against this backdrop that EISA proposes to convene a regional forum with stakeholders to discuss post-election follow-up on observer recommendations and electoral reform advocacy.

2. KEY OBJECTIVES

The overarching objectives of the regional forum are:

- To identify existing trends of civil society post-election follow-up on recommendations and electoral reform advocacy initiatives in Africa.
- To draw lessons from the three (03) STEP program focus countries and beyond for the development of best practices aimed at shaping future direction for civil society post-election follow-up initiatives.
- To discuss the way forward for effective post-election follow-up initiatives.

3. METHODOLOGY

During the two-day event, the above objectives will be met through thematic presentations and a plenary session that will enable participants to share comparative experiences based on select country case studies.

The forum will also provide EISA with an opportunity to present matrices of recommendations issued by Election Observation Missions (EOMs) in Madagascar, Mali and Mozambique for the elections held in 2018 and 2019.

4. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The regional forum will be a platform to brainstorm and discuss the following topics, among others:

- The concept of follow-up on recommendations.
- The link between pre-election assessments, elections observation and follow-ups on recommendations.
- EISA's election follow-up approach and methodology.
- Methodological approach and techniques for Civil Society electoral reform advocacy.

5. EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

The forum will bring together thirty (30) CSOs' executives and technical leadership from a dozen African countries.

6. DATE

The forum will take place on 29 and 30 June 2021.

7. VENUE

The forum will be held at the Pullman Hotel in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

8. EISA's anti Covid-19 measures

Côte d'Ivoire has fared well in handling the pandemic. The country has very low mortality rates and almost no significant social and economic disruption. There has been widespread testing and vaccine access. This allowed it to open up for tourists and event's organizers. Stringent rules to ensure the safety of the population in Côte d'Ivoire encourages us to hold such a regional forum. Côte d'Ivoire requires visitors to have a negative PCR test result. These had to be taken within 72 hours before arrival in the country. And it is rigorously checked at the Abidjan airport.

In addition to the national protocol, EISA has been enforcing a strict protocol since the outbreak of the pandemic. A limited number of participants in EISA's training and other gatherings has made it easy to ensure physical distancing. For instance, during the 2020 presidential election and the 2021 legislative elections EISA deployed long term and short-term observers from all over Africa. Observers' training and debriefing sessions (sometimes up to 3 days) were organized during these elections with EISA staff who monitored and directed the participants.

Face masks, which provide a barrier and keep the coronavirus from spreading are mandatory during all the events we organize. We do temperature checks at entrances, and we provide face masks and hand sanitizers to all participants. We will ensure that the venue provided is large enough to accommodate the 30 people, with enough social distance between the participants.

EISA's handling of the last two elections in Côte d'Ivoire provides lessons worth emulating and we are confident that the forum will not be a risk.

THE PROGRAM

The Supporting Transitions and Electoral Processes (STEP) program is a Leader with Associates (LWA) cooperative agreement between the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with a period of performance of September 27, 2017 - September 26, 2022. The purpose of the STEP program is to achieve more inclusive, transparent, and accountable political and electoral processes in Africa, by drawing on and sharing lessons regionally.