



REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE REVIEW OF EISA'S "BENCHMARKS FOR ENHANCED POLITICAL PARTY PERFORMANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA"

Johannesburg, South Africa, March 29-30, 2022

CONCEPT NOTE

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable democracy in Africa (EISA) is hosting a regional workshop for political parties from Great Lakes region and east and southern Africa to review its "Benchmarks for enhanced political party performance for democratic governance in Africa". The benchmarks were adopted in 2013 and endorsed by many political parties across the continent.¹ This workshop is an activity under The Supporting Transitions and Electoral Processes (STEP) programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The workshop seeks to update the benchmarks bearing in mind the emerging realities faced by political parties.²

The workshop is the second of the kind on the review of EISA's "Benchmarks for enhanced political party performance for democratic governance in Africa". The first event gathered nineteen (19) political party leaders and senior party officials from Central and West Africa.³

1. BACKGROUND TO THE WORKSHOP

Based on a participatory approach, EISA developed in 2011, "Benchmarks for enhanced democratic governance within and between political parties in Africa". These standards seek to enhance the capacity of political parties in Africa not only to be more effective, accountable, responsive, and transparent but also to be internally democratic. Drawn from EISA's experience with political parties in many countries, these benchmarks focus on the political system, and political party institutional and operational capacity. The legal framework governing political party operations and engagements within public institutions and society at large is at the core of the section on the political party system. The section on political party institutional and operational capacity speaks to core values and principles for political party functioning.

The benchmarks posit that well organized and dynamic political parties are a cornerstone of representative democracy. A vibrant democracy hinges on the critical role that political parties ought

¹ The principles are available on <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/par2011benchmarks3.pdf>

² Also see the report on the symposium on the benchmarks on <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/symp10cp.pdf>

³ North Africa, one of the focus regions in the first regional workshop, was to be represented by Tunisia. Select senior party officials canceled their trip owing to recent political developments in Tunisia.

to play as one of the primary suppliers of human resources to public institutions Hence the need to strengthen their capacity.

The regional workshop on the review of EISA’s benchmarks will be held against this background. The review will be both a retrospective and forward-looking exercise eight years after their endorsement by many parties across the continent. Buy-in from political parties is needed for such a process. The workshop is set to pave the way for the development of updated standards mirroring realities of the current political party environment on the continent.

The benchmarks will be revisited in light of resurgent authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, continentwide and worldwide, as evidenced by the recent annual report on *The Freedom in the World*, published March 3, 2021⁴. The report assesses the state of political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories. Findings reveal that 40% of these countries and territories are classified as "Free", 30% as "Partly Free", and 30% as "Not Free". The report also points to a global democratic downturn in 2020 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

The worrisome 2020 trends are further compounded by a noteworthy wave of protests against corruption and authoritarianism witnessed worldwide in 2019. Armed conflicts negatively impacted several countries showing positive signs of democratic progress in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic was also used as a pretext by several countries to quash dissent, consolidate their power base or to impose unjustified lockdowns. Africa, compared to the rest of the world, is not an exception in the global trend, with very few champions, according to the rating of the Freedom House.

2. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The workshop aims at reviewing the “Benchmarks for enhanced political party performance for democratic governance in Africa” eight years after their adoption and endorsement by many political parties across the continent. This workshop also seeks to draw lessons learnt from the implementation of the benchmarks and set the scene for the development of revised benchmarks. The revised standards will be disseminated and implemented for further improved political party functioning.

The workshop’s specific objectives are to:

- Promote experience sharing among political parties across the political divide.
- Assess the implementation of the current benchmarks.
- Suggest areas of improvement for the revision of these benchmarks.

3. EXPECTED RESULTS

- Comprehensive review of the benchmarks to identify gains and challenges related to their implementation
- Plan for dissemination of the reviewed benchmarks among political parties on the continent
- Plan for follow-up actions on the implementation of the reviewed benchmarks

4. WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY

⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-sie>

The workshop will seek to meet the abovementioned objectives through thematic presentations; breakout sessions on the four focus areas of EISA's benchmarks; and plenary sessions during which participants will share comparative experiences.

The benchmarks will be shared with delegates of select political parties ahead of the workshop. Political party representatives are required to submit their comments, suggestions, and recommendations for discussion in the breakout and plenary sessions.

The following questions will inform the discussion:

- What are the internal and external challenges facing political parties in Africa, and how can these be addressed?
- What do you think of the benchmarks under review?
- Which benchmarks did your party apply?
- What are the challenges affecting the implementation of the benchmarks?
- What are the gaps in these benchmarks and what areas of improvement could you propose?

Academics in the field of democratic governance and political party strengthening will share their perspectives on the evolution of the political party systems on the continent over the last decade.

A representative from Afrobarometer will also present comparative data on public attitudes toward and confidence in political parties on the continent.

The benchmarks will be updated based on comments, suggestions and recommendations emanating from the workshop discussion. The revised benchmarks will be disseminated amongst political parties. Follow-up actions will be undertaken to assess the implementation of the updated benchmarks in certain countries.

5. DISCUSSION TOPICS

The regional workshop will serve as a platform for brainstorming and discussion on the following themes:

- Political parties and democracy: theory and practice
- Democratic backsliding and the re-emergence of state-parties
- Political party functioning: leadership, internal democracy, inclusion of women and youth, party leadership succession etc.
- Relevance of political parties faced with the rise of social movements
- Political parties and elections
- Political parties' communication in the era of social medias and network
- Political party and electoral campaign financing

6. PARTICIPANTS

The workshop will bring together about thirty (30) senior party officials from countries identified in the Great Lakes region, and east and southern Africa. The majority of select countries will be represented by two (02) delegates, including one representative from the ruling party and one representative from the main opposition party.

7. DATE

The workshop will take place on **March 29-30, 2022**.

8. VENUE

The workshop will hold at the Radisson Red Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa.

9. EISA'S ANTI COVID-19 MEASURES

Enforcement of stringent protective measures against Covid-19 in South Africa provides EISA with good reason to hold this regional event. Visitors are required to show a negative PCR test result valid for not more than 72 hours from the time of departure from the country of origin to the arrival time in South Africa. The test must be conducted by a certified medical practitioner whose name and signature should be on the PCR test results.

In addition to the state-level protective measures, EISA has been enforcing a strict protocol since the outbreak of the pandemic. Attendance at EISA's events has made physical distancing possible. During the 2020 presidential election and the 2021 legislative elections EISA deployed long term and short-term observers from across Africa. Observers' training and debriefing sessions held up to the three (03) days during these elections were in line with relevant protocols.

EISA held a *Regional forum on civil society post-election follow-up on recommendations and electoral reform advocacy initiatives* and the first *Regional workshop on the review of EISA's "Benchmarks for Enhanced Political Party Performance for Democratic Governance in Africa"*. These regional events were attended respectively by CSO leaders and senior party officials from Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Both events did not record a single case of Covid-19.

EISA provides face masks and hand sanitizers to all event participants. Systematic temperature checks are carried out at venue entrance. Select event venues are set up with enough physical distancing between the participants.

These past EISA events provide lessons which will be emulated during this second regional benchmark review workshop.

THE PROGRAMME

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.