



# Democracy Support Strategies in Africa

Testimony of Rushdi Nackerdien  
Regional Director, Africa, International Foundation for Electoral Systems

House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,  
and International Organizations

May 18, 2016

**Testimony of Rushdi Nackerdien  
Regional Director, Africa, International Foundation for Electoral Systems**

**“Democracy Support Strategies in Africa”**

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organizations**

**May 18, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: on behalf of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), I deeply appreciate this opportunity to discuss U.S. electoral support in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries to support inclusive citizen participation in legitimate, transparent and accountable political processes. IFES empowers the individuals and institutions that consolidate democratic norms and channel citizen desires into effective, representative, and resilient governance. With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and numerous international partners – including the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, Global Affairs Canada, the United Nations Development Programme, and the European Union – IFES currently supports credible, free, and fair electoral processes in 11 Sub-Saharan African countries, and has experience in 21 countries across the sub-region. In many parts of the world, IFES also works with its Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) partners – the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) – under USAID’s Elections and Political Transitions mechanism (EPT) on comprehensive democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) programming. IFES programs deliver expert technical assistance to help all electoral stakeholders participate in, plan for and administer inclusive political processes across the electoral cycle, from legal framework reforms, to voter registration, to civic education, and ultimately the elections themselves.

Our active Sub-Saharan African programs in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe all utilize the generous support of our donors to strengthen both sides of the democracy scale: 1) Supply – in the form of credible political processes, administered by professional and independent institutions; and 2) Demand – in the form of an activated citizenry with protected rights and full access to the systems that impact their lives.

IFES positions itself at the center of this equation, partnering with all electoral stakeholders to strengthen participation, transparency, responsiveness, and ultimately democratic performance. As a rule, the dynamism of all societies produces social and political changes that often outpace the ability of governments to respond in a timely and comprehensive manner. This is perhaps more true in Sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else on earth. As countries

across the sub-continent confront seismic changes in demography (a youth bulge), economics (rapid growth paired with widening inequality), and access to information (mobile phones and other technologies), emerging challenges in other areas like climate change and violent extremism are compounding the stress on many political systems, putting even democratic governments at risk of a crisis of legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens. For example, recent surveys provide evidence that belief in democratic norms is slipping in some pockets of the sub-continent, particularly among youth.<sup>1</sup>

It is for this reason, among many others, that DRG assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa is more important today than ever. With upcoming elections in more than 30 regional countries in the next three years – including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – it is critical that international donors invest resources now to ensure that citizens have an opportunity to participate freely in a credible electoral process. IFES firmly believes that strengthening the institutions that serve as the stewards of democratic governance – election management bodies (EMBs), judiciaries, regulatory agencies, and parliaments, among others – is a valuable and cost-effective method to support inclusive, resilient and democratic societies. IFES also believes that societies with a marriage of widespread citizen engagement and effective, efficient institutions can produce stronger development outcomes across sectors. IFES therefore respectfully recommends that the U.S. Congress maintain and even increase American engagement with democracy and governance programming, with a particular focus on election assistance across the entire electoral cycle.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why is Election Assistance Important?**

The formation or consolidation of state institutions coincides with electoral processes, with elections often serving as a national platform to innovate technological solutions, determine power-sharing, initiate constitutional reform, test new methods of campaigning and participation, and enhance popular political awareness and democratic culture. As the best tool we have for translating political expression into representative, responsive governance, elections are a uniquely important feature of public life. For countries in transition or emerging from periods of instability, they hold the potential to mediate political conflict and promote the consolidation of democratic norms. In other countries, where political institutions are more stable, elections can be a powerful method to distill public opinion into a discrete policy agenda for governing. On a fundamental level, whenever an election occurs, citizens possess the opportunity to initiate a powerful public conversation with their neighbors, community, and broader society that results in a collective choice for the direction of their country. Those choices often have a profound impact on social and economic progress for millions, the extent

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples include an IFES-conducted survey in Kenya and data from other researchers, such as the Democracy in Africa Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2016/04/15/sa-youth-less-supportive-of-democracy-than-their-parents>.

<sup>2</sup> "Effective Electoral Assistance," ACE Electoral Project, <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/focus/focus-on-effective-electoral-assistance/the-electoral-cycle-approach>.

to which human rights are preserved and expanded, and, in some places, the prospects for mitigating violent conflict and extremism – all of which are also priorities for the United States and our allies.

Yet, elections, on their own, are neither guarantors of democracy nor inoculators against illiberal autocracy. To facilitate credible outcomes – the first step toward an accountable form of government – the full political environment preceding and following the election must provide for free and fair participation, with transparent and enforceable rules of the game and widespread access for all groups within a society. This requires, among other things, professional and independent EMBs, strong regulatory frameworks, a nonpartisan judiciary, active civil society and media networks with protected freedoms of assembly and expression, and – perhaps most importantly – an informed and engaged citizenry to ensure that electoral contestants and EMBs respond to the genuine concerns of citizens.

Elections are therefore not singular events, but rather a cycle of political processes on a massive scale, all of which must build upon and reinforce each other to produce democratic outcomes. In Nigeria, the largest country on the continent by population, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) employs more than 12,000 permanent staff to manage the many responsibilities between and during elections. Before the recent 2015 poll, they were responsible for registering and verifying more than 68 million citizens, procuring and preparing equipment for 120,000 polling stations, designing and distributing localized ballots for the more than 7,000 candidates that contested various offices, and recruiting and training more than 700,000 temporary staff to work on Election Day. Along the way, election officials also had to consistently engage with citizens across the country – through voter education, various technological platforms, and citizen hotlines – to ensure high levels of transparency and access.

Despite progress in many Sub-Saharan African countries, elections across the continent continue to encounter challenges at numerous points along the electoral cycle. Wherever these challenges occur, timely assistance from regional or international partners can provide tremendous value, helping national actors both meet the urgent demands of the current cycle and strengthen their institutions in preparation for cycles down the road. Investing resources for electoral assistance in a proactive fashion, tailored for a country's specific challenges along the electoral cycle, accelerates progress toward moving democratic norms from paper to practice; enhancing political stability; and building sustainable expertise to enhance institutional resilience and regional peer-to-peer learning.

### *Activating Democratic Norms: From Paper to Practice*

Countries across Sub-Saharan Africa have adopted, in principle, a rich and progressive collection of democratic values and aspirations, beginning with the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) at the start of the post-colonial era. In replacing the OAU in 2002, the modern-day African Union carries forward these ideals in its own founding charter, as well as in a comprehensive set of treaties that include a continent-wide Charter on Democracy, Elections,

and Governance. Many countries in the sub-region have also ratified constitutions that include human rights and democratic provisions on par with, or even exceeding, international norms.

However, principles on paper sometimes struggle to consolidate into applied practice. Smart, timely and sustained election assistance helps institutionalize these democratic values and counter democratic backsliding. USAID and the broader U.S. foreign policy community acknowledge the importance of election assistance for promoting citizen participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability – each of which contributes to the consolidation of international and regional democratic norms. USAID’s Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, released in 2013, also explicitly links election assistance to the establishment and consolidation of inclusive, accountable democracies that advance freedom, dignity, and development.<sup>3</sup> However, the foundation for democracy and election assistance as a fundamental part of development reaches back even further, to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts the right of all citizens, everywhere, to take part in government and participate in genuine elections.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, partnering with national electoral actors to improve participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability can help solidify the system of checks and balances that limits the excessive accumulation or exploitation of power. Empowering judiciaries, for example, to play a constructive and unbiased role in election dispute resolution not only increases the legitimacy of a particular political process, but also affirms the independence of separate government branches.

### *Enhancing Political Stability*

More than any other region, Sub-Saharan Africa is confronting a confluence of political, demographic, and economic changes that generate opportunities and challenges – but above all, potential instability. The continent’s youth bulge is creating a new generation of active, urban, yet underemployed and often marginalized citizens, many of who may be at risk to anti-democratic influences, extremist ideologies and radicalization. In Kenya and South Africa, for example, recent surveys demonstrate that younger people are often less committed to democratic principles than their elders.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, violent extremism in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region is challenging the normative value of democratic government, and ethnic tensions across the continent can disrupt otherwise stable political systems. Newer developments such as environmental degradation – or innovations such as mobile phone

---

<sup>3</sup> USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG\\_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20(1).pdf).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include an IFES-conducted survey in Kenya and data from other researchers, such as the Democracy in Africa Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2016/04/15/sa-youth-less-supportive-of-democracy-than-their-parents>.

technology – likewise generate complex forces that activate intense citizen demands for change, raising expectations that are ripe for manipulation.

Strong, inclusive electoral institutions can help a society navigate these potentially destabilizing forces. They channel citizen demands into peaceful political processes, which are the most constructive avenue to promote stability and broader development. Elections – and the actions and policies that govern them – are therefore a process through which a country can either enhance such stability or degrade it to the point of fracture. When managed in a professional, independent, and inclusive manner, electoral processes are valuable outlets for all citizens to express their desires, mediate differences, and select leaders. When managed poorly or in a politically biased manner, however, elections can also exacerbate societal conflict, sow distrust in the political system, and potentially destabilize a nation – even those that had shown democratic progress in other areas, such as Kenya before its 2007 electoral crisis, and Nigeria throughout the 2000s. Election assistance can help reinforce a stable and healthy trajectory.

### *Building Sustainable Regional Expertise*

DRG assistance – and election support in particular – is a cost-effective investment that amplifies the impact of foreign assistance across the development arena. The reason is simple, by strengthening institutions to consolidate democratic norms (participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability, among others) and enhance political stability, DRG and election support accomplishes two mutually reinforcing objectives: translating citizen needs into public policy; and developing local expertise to provide peer-to-peer (and thus sustainable) learning and growth.

The latter point holds the potential to set the sub-continent on a sustainable path toward the adoption and consistent administration of democratic processes, free of reliance on international donors. In Kenya, for example, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) received consistent and comprehensive assistance from USAID and other donors following its formation in 2011, and it is now a leading institution within the East Africa region, as well as in the Association of World Election Bodies. Sub-Saharan Africa currently has numerous regional forums and communities that establish democratic principles, integrate standards, and at times deliver assistance; these include the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the East African Community (EAC), among others. Many of these also house their own regional EMB networks to share best practices. These regional bodies are well positioned to normalize democratic standards and practices among their member states. They wield a tremendous amount of influence and, importantly, are permanent fixtures of the political landscape in Africa. Electoral assistance that seeks to strengthen them – focusing on internal governance, technical expertise, integration strategies, and peer-to-peer assistance programs – will produce tremendous returns on investment.

## **How (and where) Does Election Assistance Work?**

### *Evolving Assistance Techniques and Emerging Innovations*

For almost 30 years, IFES has been at the forefront of developments in the field of election assistance and election observation. IFES has moved from the process whereby the partisan-controlled executive branch of government traditionally ran elections in Sub-Saharan Africa, to a model where the independence of EMBs is enshrined constitutionally in many countries. We have moved from the treatment of election management as simply an extension of public administration, to the establishment of norms associated with election management used by observers – whether domestic or international – to measure the credibility of not only the process but also the electoral institution.

In fact, the growth of election observation as a professional endeavor has kept pace with the professional development of election management as a career. No longer do we see election observation being an anecdotal exercise, but rather we see a process driven by references to international human rights and elections instruments, as well as compliance with a country's own laws and policies. We have moved from election authorities operating in a national-only context to regional communities of practice, where regional networks of election practitioners regularly discuss the complexity of managing elections and how to overcome the challenges thereof. The ability to draw on international expertise and lessons learned to tackle new and unforeseen problems is testimony to this growth.

### *Electoral Cycle Approach*

However, as with all institution-building endeavors, these are long-term processes of continuous and consistent investment. One such critical aspect of investment is the adoption of the electoral cycle (see Figure 1) approach, which focuses attention not only on Election Day, but also on the pre-electoral and post-electoral phases. These phases often run longer than the electoral event itself. However, the shift to the electoral cycle approach, though commonplace among the international community today, has only been accepted in the last decade. This shift has seen advocacy from the highest levels for the consistent and early investment in election processes to ensure that they result in credible, free and fair elections. We have seen this language feature in almost all donor documents and approaches, as well as the way in which EMBs themselves advocate for longer-term financial and resource investment in the electoral process.



Figure 1: The Electoral Cycle

This electoral cycle approach moves away from event-based, periodic support to more strategic ongoing support that spans several years in advance of the election date and continues in the period between elections. This approach moves electoral assistance toward the development of the institutional capacity of the EMB and the long-term needs of civil society – including attention to election observation. Such support in between elections can also assist in targeting and promoting the involvement of women, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups that have often been neglected in the implementation of past electoral assistance programs. Consistent, long-term support throughout the electoral cycle also enhances

stability during uncertain democracy building processes.

Furthermore, long-term capacity building of electoral processes, EMBs and ancillary stakeholders provides key entry-points for broader governance efforts such as human rights interventions, gender-responsive programming, judicial independence and inclusive representation, and critical non-state accountability mechanisms such as civil society and free media.

### Matching Tools and Approaches to Specific Country Context

An electoral cycle approach recognizes elections as an ongoing process, rather than as a single, discrete event. This approach also reflects the reality that various interconnected electoral components and stakeholders exist at different points in the cycle and at different stages of an EMB’s development. As such, corresponding technical assistance and other electoral support varies according to a country’s political context, the electoral period, and an EMB’s needs.

To be effective and sustainable, electoral assistance should occur throughout the electoral cycle, with different strategies for addressing short-term needs and achieving long-term results. International work on electoral assistance recognizes that “electoral assistance has to take stock in all steps of the electoral cycle; on this post elections and inter-election periods are as crucial as the build up to the elections themselves, thus requiring regular inter-institutional contact and support activities before, during, and after election periods for the sake of lessons learned and inter-institutional memory aimed at improved electoral processes in beneficiary



countries.”<sup>6</sup> Support for accountable, professional EMBs and other electoral institutions is necessary for ensuring free, fair, and credible elections. Long-term assistance can include institutional strengthening and capacity development: institutional strengthening focuses on establishing structures for electoral bodies, and capacity development strengthens organizational and human capacity over time. While the two are linked, institutional strengthening should begin at the start of a new electoral cycle, and capacity development should continue throughout all electoral periods. Importantly, regular, sustained support to EMBs provides stability throughout an inherently dynamic, and often times unpredictable, democratization process. Foreign assistance in the form of capacity building and institutional strengthening for EMBs can continue even during unstable political transitions to result in enduring democratic institutions. Although short-term, targeted assistance may be appropriate to respond to emerging immediate needs or threats, such as unexpected electoral violence, such support alone is not effective for establishing the credibility or independence of an EMB or sustainable democratic processes.

### *Democracy as Development*

Electoral assistance reinforces democratic resilience and lays the foundation for improved outcomes in other development sectors. Indeed, the USAID DRG Strategy prioritizes integration of DRG into other sectors, including health, economic growth, climate change, and food security.<sup>7</sup> This strategy recognizes that poor governance and weak citizen participation contribute to low human and economic development. Elections, then, are a key entry point for wider democracy assistance projects, including support to civil society and civic participation; access to justice for women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations; reinforcement of the rule of law; and opportunities for political dialogue and political party development. A successful election, for example, will be supported by legitimate institutional frameworks, as well as provide wide political participation and representation of all members of society. Credible elections can also give legitimacy to elected leaders, and transparent mechanisms and processes for holding those leaders accountable contribute to public confidence and citizen engagement. However, while increased accountability between citizens and their leaders has the potential to shift government investment toward local development and reduce corruption, such impact also requires the development of an organized civil society to coordinate interests and mobilize citizens to advocate for improved service delivery and more inclusive government policies. On the other hand, a breakdown at any point in the electoral process, especially in an EMB’s transparency, can damage not only the credibility of an election but also the social, economic and political development of country.

Inclusivity should underpin technical assistance to EMBs throughout the electoral cycle, from strategic planning to electoral integrity management and monitoring and evaluation. Africa

---

<sup>6</sup> European Commission Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance, [http://eeas.europa.eu/eueom/pdf/ec-methodological-guide-on-electoral-assistance\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/eueom/pdf/ec-methodological-guide-on-electoral-assistance_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG\\_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20(1).pdf).

has strong legal frameworks guaranteeing equal rights for women, youth, and other vulnerable populations, including the African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Following these frameworks, EMBs should receive support to ensure inclusive voter registration; safety and security of voters; representation of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups in EMBs and in political parties; and access to civic and voter education for vulnerable populations, among other things. Key to this work is encouraging EMBs to engage more with civil society organizations (CSOs).

For example, in 2013, IFES supported the Women's Network in Côte d'Ivoire to build links with the Independent Elections Commission and Truth and Reconciliation Commission to promote women's leadership and gender issues in decision-making. After identifying shared issues of concern related to women's participation in political and electoral processes, the Women's Network made recommendations on access to information, mechanisms for meaningful participation of women, and gender parity and quotas. IFES then provided training on advocacy techniques for all three bodies to develop skills in negotiation and networking to facilitate implementation of the recommendations.

### **Case Studies: Effective Electoral Assistance**

The following case studies highlight three countries in which sustained technical assistance provided by IFES has led to enhanced results and promoted the long-term sustainability of partner institutions and program initiatives. In each of these country contexts, IFES' longstanding presence has allowed IFES to build deep relationships with local stakeholders, and positioned IFES as a trusted partner, able to not only efficiently support electoral processes in the heat of the electoral period, but also lead lessons-learned initiatives in post-electoral periods, and pilot innovative, country-specific approaches to resolving age-old challenges in the early stages of the pre-electoral period.

#### *Kenya*

The 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya traumatized the country and shocked members of the international community who had viewed the country as a model of stability in the Great Lakes region. The resulting crisis left over 1,500 people dead, between 300,000 and 600,000 people internally displaced, and hindered economic progress that was achieved during the preceding years. The post-election violence exposed significant weaknesses in governance, political parties, civil society and the media, as well as shortcomings in election management. The incremental gains made in the electoral process, which had supported acceptable elections in 2002 and the 2005 referendum, dissipated and spawned a lack of confidence in the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), with 68 percent of Kenyans blaming the ECK for the post-election violence.

In the aftermath of that election violence, the Kenyan government initiated many reforms to address the disputed 2007 poll and the deep divisions within Kenyan society. This reform

process began with the enactment of a new constitution that was supported by nearly 67 percent of participating Kenyans in the peaceful 2010 referendum, followed by the creation of an entirely new legal framework that saw the creation of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) after the ECK was disbanded.

IFES supported this process in 2010 by providing technical support to the Interim Independent Election Commission (IIEC) with the implementation of an electronic results transmission system, which led to the timely, transparent release of by-election and constitutional referendum results.

Subsequently, in May 2011, IFES received a grant from USAID to provide technical assistance to build the capacity and sustainability of the IEBC. This included support for voter registration, voter education and results transmission; oversight of political parties; and development of a dispute resolution mechanism to facilitate the IEBC's role in conducting transparent, credible and violence-free elections.

Through these initiatives, IFES also enhanced the integrity of political party registration procedures by assisting the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) to transition into an autonomous body, developing and deploying the political parties' membership registration system, and providing technical support to institutionalize ORPP internal processes. Furthermore, IFES enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the voter registration process by providing technical assistance in the procurement and deployment of the Biometric Voter Registration system and conducting audits of the voter register before and after the registration exercise. Indeed, IFES assistance strengthened a number of key electoral processes, including the final publication and acceptance of electoral districts, the development and implementation of a national voter education strategy reaching approximately 1.6 million people, the deployment and development of an electronic results transmission and display system and an IEBC dispute resolution rules and case management system.

Together, these initiatives enhanced the credibility and transparency of Kenya's electoral process during a critical period following the 2007 crisis. The IEBC successfully registered more than 14 million Kenyan citizens, participating parties and candidates chose to address complaints through formal electoral dispute resolution mechanisms in the courts, and the process remained largely peaceful throughout the electoral cycle. While IFES was present in Kenya through the failed 2007 elections, and provided technical assistance to the now disbanded ECK, IFES' highly effective support to the IIEC, the IEBC and the 2010 elections benefited immensely from the credibility and trust IFES had built with varied electoral stakeholders over years of sustained activity. Furthermore, such varied, long-term gains would not have been possible without sustained presence in country after the 2007 violence. Indeed, our uninterrupted presence for so many years has also allowed IFES to look beyond individual electoral cycles to pursue innovative approaches, such as developing primary and secondary school civics curricula, aiming for long-term, sustainable impact.

## *Nigeria*

Nigeria has held six national level elections and numerous local elections since transitioning to civilian rule in 1999. While the quality of election management in Nigeria has generally improved over the past 15 years, deficiencies remain in the institutional preparedness and performance of EMBs. Working with Nigeria's Independent National Election Commission (INEC), 36 State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), and other key stakeholders since 1999, IFES has supported the improvement of Nigeria's electoral management capacity while also extending support to other areas, including electoral reform, strategic planning, campaign finance monitoring, election dispute resolution, election violence monitoring and mitigation, and increasing inclusivity of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons with disabilities.

The long-term partnerships developed and trust built over the course of more than 15 years of uninterrupted presence in Nigeria put IFES in a strong position to pursue its current program aimed at strengthening the capacity of the INEC and SIECs in order to improve public confidence in elections and their outcomes, and provide key support to Nigeria's watershed 2015 elections. In the context of this program, IFES has played an instrumental role in institutional capacity-building and decentralization at the INEC. IFES supported the establishment of a training and research institute under the INEC in 2007, known as The Electoral Institute (TEI), which IFES continues to support in its mandate of certifying trainers and training over 700,000 poll workers around the country ahead of elections as well as with its own strategic planning efforts. IFES also supported the INEC to implement operational reforms and reorganization, which resulted in a shift in organizational culture toward decentralization of responsibilities and decision making, and an increase in collaboration between headquarters and state level officials.

Besides TEI, other IFES-suggested innovations adopted by the INEC include Election Operation Support Centers, which during the 2015 general election tracked and monitored electoral operations on a national scale for the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria. IFES also supported the INEC in establishing an in-house graphic design center (which allowed the INEC for the first time to design ballot papers in-house, an important milestone for maintaining the security of the ballot) and a Geographic Information System (GIS) lab that integrated GIS into electoral operations and planning. Moreover, specifically for the 2015 election, IFES conducted a voter education campaign with the INEC that reached over 67 million people, contributed to the inclusiveness of the elections by collaborating with INEC to identify strategies that ensure that IDPs were not disenfranchised in the elections, and supported the INEC in the development of a comprehensive communication timeline with key operational dates and activities.

Despite challenges, including politically motivated violence in parts of the country, the general openness and fairness of the last two general elections have demonstrated INEC's new sense of professionalism and integrity, and the country has made a significant step toward consolidating its democratic gains. The 2015 elections were widely praised as the country's best since returning to civilian rule in 1999 due to the work of the INEC and the candidates' respect of the

election results, and clearly demonstrate the value of long-term and sustained institution building.

## *Guinea*

Following decades of authoritarian rule, Guinea held its first democratic presidential elections in 2010, resulting in the election of Alpha Condé to the presidency. Despite delays, the country ultimately held legislative elections, which marked another step in its democratic transitions. However, not long after the legislative elections concluded, the Ebola crisis paralyzed all administrative and political processes in the country as a result of the high risk of infection. As Guinea recovered from the Ebola epidemic, it also faced the tests of a young democracy as it prepared to hold its second democratic presidential election and its first local elections since 2005.

In the context of this instability and mounting tensions between the ruling and opposition parties, the Independent National Election Commission (*Commission électorale nationale indépendante* [CENI]), as a relatively young institution, continues to lack the capacity and institutional experience, despite marked progress, to manage large-scale elections, and is often criticized by the opposition for its perceived lack of neutrality. Furthermore, Guinean civil society remains hampered in its capacity to effectively engage the citizenry; it lacks both the resources and the political space to function and promote effective political engagement at the grassroots level.

Active in Guinea since well before the turmoil following Lansana Conté's death in 2008, IFES leveraged the credibility it had built over years of in-country presence to provide wide-ranging support to Guinea's EMBs throughout that period. Once established, the CENI continued to benefit from institutional strengthening and in-house capacity building from IFES in an effort to construct a robust and professional EMB. IFES has worked closely with CSOs throughout the country, to develop and implement civic and voter education awareness messaging and programs that operated in line with the electoral process. In its current programming, IFES provides technical assistance to the CENI through targeted, in-person support to several key processes, including training of polling station workers and results transmission agents. Meanwhile, IFES is supporting civic and voter education through its long-time civil society partners that helped the country prepare for its 2015 presidential elections and its upcoming local elections.

Through its programming, IFES has successfully implemented many activities and assisted in reforms that have strengthened the electoral process in Guinea. In its assistance to the CENI, IFES has strengthened various departments by streamlining databases and building the training skills and elections operation knowledge of the staff, which has improved the capacities of the CENI in order to contribute to effectively administering elections. Furthermore, IFES assisted in the implementation of a new department within the CENI to lead the civic and voter outreach component.

The programs' impact is also evident in its support to civil society's work in civic and voter education and citizen engagement. In addition to its work with long-standing civil society partners targeting marginalized populations, IFES worked with the Regional Councils of Civil Society Organizations (*Conseils régionaux des organisations de la société civile*) in order to establish Civic and Voter Education Centers (*Centres d'éducation civique et électorale* [CECEs]). These serve as community locales where citizens can access documents relating to the electoral process, and as a community gathering space to discuss issues of democratic governance and exchange with local leaders. Over 100,000 Guineans have been reached through the civic education activities conducted by the CECEs during the past year alone.

In addition, during the Ebola crisis, IFES leveraged the CECEs to strengthen public education initiatives around the disease, and provided critical infrastructure to coordinate government and NGO responses. This initiative, and indeed the CECEs' sustained existence, would not have been possible without long-term support from IFES, and demonstrates how sustained intervention can enhance the benefits of DRG programming across sectors.

### **Moving Forward: Recommendations for Future Electoral Assistance**

The above case studies demonstrate that consistent, proactive and sustained donor investment, tailored to a country's needs and applied at every stage of the electoral cycle, can produce measurable progress toward free and fair political processes and the consolidation of democratic norms. With further investment from international partners, countries across Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to strengthen their political institutions in a manner that expands access, enhances transparency and deepens credibility.

USAID's Elections and Political Transitions (EPT) Leader with Associates award, held by IFES, IRI, and NDI, is a vehicle through which the U.S. government supports elections and political transitions throughout a period of social and political changes, as discussed above, including the youth bulge, high unemployment, increased access to information and community technology, and violent extremism. A pre-competed mechanism, EPT allows USAID Missions to respond rapidly to urgent needs across the globe. With vehicles such as EPT, the U.S. government can be more proactive when developing democracy assistance programs to provide consistent, long-term support for elections earlier in an electoral cycle. As strong democratic institutions also improve a government's ability to respond to citizen needs, increased support for DRG initiatives, especially across sectors, is necessary for achieving the U.S. government's foreign policy objectives related to peace, security, and global development. On the African continent, both regional economic communities and EMB networks, as well as CSOs, will continue to play major roles in democracy building. As such, U.S. government support to these entities will enable election professionals to share best practices throughout the sub-region and with CSOs to more effectively mobilize citizens around emerging priorities. IFES therefore recommends that the U.S. Congress, USAID, and other international donors commit to supporting the following areas, each of which strengthen free, fair and credible political processes:

### *DRG Amplification, Not DRG Dissolution*

International donors, and USAID in particular, have smartly refined their development strategies to recognize the intersection of DRG work and broader development, and to recommend ways to integrate fields in a mutually reinforcing way. However, in recent years, DRG funding has either been redirected toward other priorities, or has been increasingly divided into smaller sub-parts, leaving decreasing investments for election and political process programming. IFES believes that the U.S. government should reverse this trend, amplifying investments in election assistance as a cost-effective way to pursue additional development objectives, as we have described above.

### *Full Electoral Cycle Support*

Election day is not an isolated event. The political processes and operational demands that both precede and follow an election are interdependent, and a failure or shortcoming at a single point may have significant repercussions at multiple stages of the cycle. Moreover, if electoral shortcomings accumulate and cause citizens to lose faith in the credibility of the election results, broader development objectives may also suffer. It is paramount for international donors to recognize the value of full electoral cycle support in order to proactively invest resources in advance of elections and at sufficient levels to engage local partners in a consistent fashion – and with sufficient time to help them with their urgent *and* longer-term needs. This does not imply huge investments in many stable countries, but rather sustained capacity building and technical assistance

### *Regional Integration and Institution Strengthening*

The regional and global networking among election professionals is one of the major ways in which elections transcend national borders in the post-cold war context, the other being the role of foreign technical assistance from donor governments and international organizations. The regionalization of economic and development communities lends to regional networks among election professionals. The development of networks such as the Association of Election Authorities (AAEA) has stemmed from the work of organizations like IFES that brought together election professionals in the early 1990s in places like Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. Since the establishment of the AAEA, we have seen further EMB networks grow, such as the:

- Southern Africa Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC (covering southern Africa)
- ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (covering West Africa)
- EAC Forum of National Election Commissions (covering East Africa)
- Network of Election Commissions of Central Africa (*Réseau des Commissions et Administrations électorales de l'Afrique Centrale*) (covering Central Africa)
- A new EMB network is currently being established to cover North Africa and the Middle East under the auspices of the League of Arab States

These associations or communities of practice place a high level of importance on (1) the development of professional electoral officials with high integrity; (2) a strong sense of public service, knowledge, and experience of electoral processes; and (3) a commitment to democratic elections. Such communities of practice must be energized to give impetus to the activities associated with democratic elections. The challenge of elections requires the pooling of all the skills and the development of a real synergy at both the regional and continental scale. These networks, however, continue to remain weak in the absence of funding that is regionally focused and a strict country-based approach to technical assistance by donors. With instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance that speak strongly to cooperation on matters regarding elections, democracy and governance, a renewed vibrancy and investment is required to craft a higher standard of professional election management on the African continent.

### *Empowering Civil Society to Play a More Active Role*

Civil society plays an important role in the electoral cycle not only for carrying out civic and voter education activities but also for holding governments and electoral institutions accountable. Through our work with CSOs, IFES empowers citizens to drive democratic change and socioeconomic development. Part of this process includes educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, as well as the role of the government in service delivery across sectors, such as health and education. Elections in particular are an opportunity for citizens to engage in their political systems. Through civic and voter education, CSOs can reach women, youth, and other vulnerable populations to encourage informed participation in elections. To ensure that elected leaders are responsive to constituent needs, CSOs can work with citizens to make connections between political party platforms and their own priorities and create space for more constructive multi-stakeholder dialogues. With a stronger understanding of government planning and spending, citizens will also be better prepared to consolidate their priorities, mobilize around them, and advocate for greater government accountability to public interests.

### **Conclusion: Renewing Our Commitment to a Democratic Africa**

In 2016 and 2017, critical elections are tentatively planned in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia. While IFES recognizes the constraints of today's budget environment, we again respectfully recommend that the United States government prioritize electoral assistance that is locally contextualized; is inclusive of women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and other underrepresented groups; develops local expertise for sustainable learning and growth; and consistently invests early and throughout the electoral cycle. Such assistance will not only facilitate Sub-Saharan Africa's navigation of potentially destabilizing political, demographic and economic forces, but may prove foundational to improved development outcomes in women's empowerment, health, economic growth, climate change and food security.



Mr. Chairman, thank you again for this opportunity to testify. On behalf of IFES, we are honored to partner with the U.S. government and Congress, international aid organizations, our CEPPS partners, and, of course, the people of Africa in support of a more democratic and prosperous Africa.



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.  
Sustainable Democracy.