

CEPPS Gender Assessment Report: Ethiopia

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CEPPS Ethiopia Gender Assessment Report

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Executive Summary

Summary of Program Background and Assessment Purpose

The purpose of this gender assessment is to inform CEPPS program strategies on how to further promote the full and active participation of diverse groups of women in Ethiopia's 2021 election cycle and beyond. CEPPS is conducting a three-year program to strengthen democratic institutions and processes that will advance reform and safeguard democratic principles in Ethiopia. The Ethiopia Elections and Political Processes Program (EPPPP) is working toward the objectives of: promoting meaningful participation of all citizens in their political systems including women, youth and other traditionally marginalized groups; promoting the integrity of elections to peacefully and democratically select leaders; harnessing the comparative advantages of media and technology to promote citizen understanding and transparent political competition; and promoting competitive and representative multiparty political systems. At the outset of the program, using CEPPS's inclusive gender assessment framework, CEPPS partners conducted a coordinated gender assessment to look at three primary focus areas, gender and elections, civil society and political parties, with each partner taking the lead on assessing the opportunities and barriers for gender equality and women's participation within their primary program areas. CEPPS partners used tested, rigorous data collection tools and politically-informed analysis to assess the status of women's participation in the electoral process as voters, candidates and election administrators, as well as to provide the following evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the gender responsive, inclusive nature of the election cycle and beyond. CEPPS partners utilized an inductive, mixed-methods approach through desk-based review, followed by in-country interviews, focus-group discussions and other methods of qualitative research.

CEPPS has designed an inclusive monitoring, evaluation and learning (IMEL) approach to better ensure that an inclusion lens is integrated into all aspects of these processes. As a multi-dimensional, systematic approach utilized across all aspects of the program lifecycle, inclusion creates more responsive, representative and accountable social and political structures in which all individuals,

*CEPPS's technical approach to inclusion requires thinking about our **Partners, Processes, and Products** and asking key questions about:*

- ➔ *Who is included and excluded in the work we do?*
 - ➔ *What barriers exist that exclude or limit access for different groups or individuals?*
 - ➔ *How do we eliminate or mitigate barriers and increase access, participation, and representation in our work?*
 - ➔ *How could we increase access and inclusivity in our planned products/activities/deliverables? What products/activities/deliverables would increase access, inclusion, and participation?*
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regardless of identity, are able to fully enjoy their human rights and exercise their rights as citizens. CEPPS employs a multi-faceted technical approach to inclusion that includes the following elements:

- 1) Integrating an inclusive gender analysis into all aspects of program design, implementation and evaluation that fully considers the ways in which individuals with multiple marginalized identities are uniquely impacted and how this affects both their access and barriers to participation in electoral and political processes;

- 2) Pursuing a dual track programming approach in which gender equality and social inclusion are both mainstreamed across all activities **and** specific activities targeting a particular marginalized group(s) are undertaken; and
- 3) Throughout the project lifecycle, key inclusion questions are consistently asked in the context of the 3 Ps of Inclusion - *partners, processes, and products*.

An IMEL approach, therefore, is grounded in the important questions and issues that should be addressed from an inclusion perspective throughout the program lifecycle, beginning with gender and baseline assessments. This IMEL approach informs both the design of the gender assessment as well as the recommendations contained within.

Summary of the Status of Women and Women’s Political Participation in Ethiopia

The status of women in Ethiopia and the opportunities available to them have seen improvements in recent years with the opening up of civil society and the political space. However, persistent patriarchal cultural norms, ethnic and political conflict and harmful traditional practices continue to create barriers to women’s equitable and active participation in society and public life. While Ethiopia recently appointed its first female president, and half of all ministerial positions are now occupied by women, women are still underrepresented in politics at the parliamentary, regional and community levels. They have low representation in leadership positions across different institutions, government departments and agencies at the national and subnational levels, and are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. The newly opened political space following the appointment of reform-minded Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy has also seen an increase in ethnic tensions and hate speech. This has created higher levels of generalized insecurity and will impact the levels of women’s political and electoral participation in 2021 and beyond.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Category: Socio-Cultural Climate and Gender Norms

Finding 1-1: A significant number of interviewees reported persistent and pervasive patriarchal gender norms throughout Ethiopian culture driving women’s exclusion from public life, including politics. These patriarchal gender norms, including responsibility for unpaid domestic labor, significantly restrict women’s time and ability to engage in politics as elected officials, party members and voters.

Recommendation 1-1: *Women’s rights organizations, particularly those with a regional focus and reach at the rural level, need capacity building to provide targeted civic education to women both in terms of the importance of their vote and to address the socio-cultural norms that may prevent women from voting.*

Category: Gender-Based Violence

Finding 2-1: Widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) nationwide are likely to act as significant barriers to women’s participation throughout the election cycle, with particular regard to accessing polling places on election day. This is further compounded by ongoing ethnically-based conflict and generalized violence in the Oromo regions, where according to Network of Ethiopian Women’s Associations (NEWA), “women are used as instruments of conflict” and are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

Recommendation 2-1: Monitoring violence against women in elections (VAW-E) and encouraging authorities to put in place mechanisms for women’s safe participation in electoral processes as voters, candidates and election officials, remains an essential priority.

Category: Political Parties

Finding 3-1: While Ethiopia’s proportion of women in parliament (38.8 percent) is above the regional average (24.1 percent), this is likely due to a voluntary party gender quota of the ruling party rather than because of a gender quota codified in the legal or regulatory framework. Historically, and for the upcoming elections, there are no legislated gender quotas for any level of government, and gender quotas for women’s participation and leadership in political parties are voluntary.

Finding 3-2: Though women have reached parity at the ministerial level and represent 38.8 percent of parliamentarians, many women in political parties, including the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and newer opposition parties, still face marginalization and disempowerment.¹ Negative societal attitudes toward women and their role in both political processes and leadership positions remain the greatest obstacle to elevating the status of women and increasing their meaningful civic and political participation.

Recommendation 3-1: In order to ensure that the current rates of women in parliament do not decrease as a result of the 2021 election, political parties should be encouraged and supported to adopt voluntary gender quotas.

Recommendation 3-2: Political parties should review and develop foundational documents, regulations, policies and intra-party procedures (e.g. strategic plans, codes of conduct, etc.) to directly support women’s meaningful participation and leadership within the party and as candidates.

Category: Civil Society

Finding 4-1: The March 2019 Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation maintained the space available for civil society to participate in political and election-related activities, including monitoring and mitigating VAW-E.² Multiple women’s rights and other CSOs reported that they will need significant time, effort, and inputs to support strategic planning, scaling up their scope and reach, and resource mobilization to be able to conduct these activities in a robust way at a national level.

Finding 4-2: While there was no consensus from CSO stakeholders on the most urgent priorities regarding what needs to change in order for women to more actively participate in political and civic spheres, social norm change and capacity building for women leaders ranked high.

Recommendation 4-1: The international community, including CEPPS partners, should provide technical and financial assistance to women-focused CSOs to build a greater network of civic organizations that specifically focus on women’s political participation and needs in the election cycle and beyond.

Category: Civic and Voter Education

Finding 5-1: Interviewees identified civic education to be the initiative that will best mitigate the disparity in political participation by women.

¹ CEPPS partners reference EPRDF throughout this document as they were still the ruling coalition in place during data collection. However, at the date of drafting, the EPRDF has been dissolved and the ruling coalition for 2020 and beyond is the newly-formed Prosperity Party.

² *Government of Ethiopia (GOE)*, 2019.

Recommendation 5-1: Voter and civic education messaging should be both targeted and inclusive, with key messages focusing on the importance of the vote, the secrecy of the ballot and the ability of elections and voting to act as an accountability mechanism for current government, party actors and policy outcomes.

Recommendation 5-2: CSOs and other electoral stakeholders should ensure that their outreach strategies are targeted and inclusive of issue areas that are specific to the needs and priorities of different groups of women.

Category: Media

Finding 6-1: Women, especially in rural areas, have less access to reliable, non-partisan news and information related to politics and elections compared to men due to men’s greater access to media platforms and social networks. Even when news about elections, parties and candidates is shared via television or radio, patriarchal gender norms at the household level significantly limit women’s time and space to engage.

Sub-Finding 6-1A: Of the media platforms that women are able to access, interviewees identified radio and word of mouth as the most accessible mediums to get information.

Recommendation 6-1: Engagement and capacity building with media actors should monitor and assess residual state media’s national reach within and beyond Addis. Additionally, state media monitoring is necessary to address gender-bias in reporting and ensure adherence to rules of nonpartisanship.

Category: Voter Registration and Voters List

Finding 7-1: Certain aspects of the voter registration process as laid out in the new electoral law may provide pathways to make registering more accessible to women, including locating registration centers close to communities and ensuring no photo requirements for voter identification. However, capacity at the local level to implement national policy, as well as the requirement for voters to re-register ahead of the 2021 elections will continue to disproportionately affect women’s and other marginalized populations’ ability to register to vote.

Recommendation 7-1: Ensure a robust, inclusive voter information campaign about the registration process.

Category: Legal Electoral Framework and Domestic Electoral System

Finding 8-1: Ethiopia has made significant strides in ratifying and recognizing international agreements as well as developing its own national policies that broadly affirm women’s equal rights. Specific implementation and enforcement mechanisms to improve women’s meaningful participation in politics remain lacking.

Recommendation 8-1: Set target proportions for women’s representation as election officials as part of a regulatory framework.

Recommendation 8-2: Support increased women’s participation as candidates by introducing regulatory incentives that reduce barriers to participation.

Category: Electoral Management Body and Administration

Finding 9-1: Women are relatively well-represented as National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) staff, but still lack representation in regional office leadership.

Finding 9-2: While there is a gender department within the national secretariat, and regional offices include a gender focal point within their secretariats, the gender department is understaffed and has no budget allocated.

Finding 9-3: While the NEBE has taken some steps forward to facilitate women’s participation in elections, these efforts remain uneven and not codified in electoral regulations.

Finding 9-4: New draft directives on the organization of regional branch offices, constituencies, and polling stations stipulate “gender diversity” as part of difference committees and other bodies, but do not define what “gender diversity” means. This represents the only time “gender” or “women” is mentioned in the new directives.

Recommendation 9-1: *Provide adequate resources for the gender directorate, including an allocated budget, appropriate staffing, and a gender policy with accompanying detailed action plan and the resources to implement it.*

Recommendation 9-2: *Collect and publish gender-disaggregated voter registration and turnout data and include gender considerations in NEBE strategic and operational plans.*

Category: Complaints Adjudication and Electoral Dispute Resolution

Finding 10-1: Because there is a new law governing the electoral process, and operational directives are still being developed, it is too early to tell whether women are equally informed about the complaints process and how to access it. However, the NEBE is aware of the need for robust public awareness-raising through inclusive civic and voter education.

Finding 10-2: While electoral dispute bodies being located at the polling station level will likely make them more accessible to women who wish to file grievances, structural barriers making it more difficult for women to resolve their disputes may still remain.

Sub-Finding 10-2A: The lack of fee or requirement for legal counsel to file complaints should make it easier for women with fewer resources to file grievances.

Finding 10-3: While the new Electoral Proclamation prohibits harassment, violence and hate speech, it is unclear if it will be used to prosecute violations of violence against women in elections.

Recommendation 10-1: *Ensure that Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) bodies provide space to hear and respond to women’s grievances.*

Recommendation 10-2: *Ensure that security, judicial and legal bodies, and poll workers and election officials understand how to report and prosecute instances of violence against women in elections.*

Recommendation 10-3: *Provide robust, inclusive information on the electoral complaints process.*

Category: Cross-cutting

Recommendation 11-1: *Electoral stakeholders, particularly the NEBE and CSOs, need to use localized, gender mainstreamed approaches across their initiatives to encourage greater women’s participation.*