

Final Report
OAU Elections Training Seminar
NED Core Grant 92-4 (2540)

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I. SUMMARY

In early 1992, in an effort to strengthen the capabilities of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim requested that the African American Institute (A.I.) develop a training program for OAU staff. The training program would be designed to prepare the OAU to organize observer missions for elections on the African continent. Given the specific requests pending with the OAU, Ethiopia and elsewhere, Secretary General Salim Salim requested that the seminar be organized as quickly as possible, especially since the OAF is relatively new to the practice of election monitoring.

AAI solicited the assistance of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the program's implementation. In fall 1992, the NDI received Endowment support to fulfill this request.

II. BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the 1990s, most countries on the African continent were characterized as one-party states. Even in those countries where more than one party was tolerated (e.g., Botswana, The Gambia, Senegal, Zimbabwe), there had not been a transition from the ruling party to an opposition party, the ultimate test for any democratic system.

The situation began changing under the impact of events both far and near. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived many African states of both a model and a benefactor. Equally important, the failure of many African governments to meet the demands of the population contributed to reform movements within and outside government circles.

The island nations of Cape Verde and Sao Tome Principe have the distinction of being the first African countries in at least 25 years to replace an incumbent government through an electoral process. The March 1991 elections in Benin achieved a similar result, as did the October 1991 elections in Zambia.

The role of the international community in these efforts has been limited, but significant. Small OAU observer teams were present in Comoros, Cape Verde, Benin and Zambia. International observer teams sponsored by nongovernmental organizations also were present for

the elections in both Benin and Zambia, and technical and material assistance were provided to the election commissions and other monitoring groups in these countries.

At the time, there were more than 30 countries in Africa in the process of transition or seeking to initiate a transition. These countries were looking for assistance from a variety of sources, but particularly from African organizations and institutions. As Secretary General Salim Salim stated in his letter to AAI: “As the premier continental organ for the promotion of cooperation and understanding within and among African states, the OAU has a duty and responsibility to respond positively and effectively to the appeals of its constituent members in the monitoring of elections.

Until the 1990s, the OAU had little experience observing elections outside the decolonization context. It was assumed that election observing in a sovereign country would violate the sacrosanct principle of “noninterference” in the internal affairs of an OAU member state. However, as the report of the five-member OAU observer group in Zambia explains, sending an observer team in response to an invitation issued by the head of government, in this instance from Kenneth Kaunda, a founding member of the organization, does not constitute an act of interference.

Given the novelty of OAU activity in the election observing arena, the OAU team in Zambia was instructed to maintain a low profile. Nonetheless, the team’s presence contributed to the peaceful conditions and public confidence that existed in Zambia at the time of elections. Still, as the OAU team acknowledged in its report, the international monitoring effort was led by teams organized by the Commonwealth nations and by the Carter Center/NDI, two nongovernmental organizations that initiated their efforts months before the election day.

The Secretary General stated in his letter that, “there is an urgent need for the General Secretariat’s capacity to deal with this area to be enhanced. Such capacity building requires training, in this case in the particular field of election monitoring. This training became more urgent in view of the fact that with many elections that were expected to take place in many African countries in the next two years, there was need to ensure that the call made to the OAU to ensure the fairness of the election process was responded to effectively.”

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The seminar, “The Evolving Role of Intergovernmental Organizations in Election Monitoring,” took place from September 14 to 18, 1992 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. More than 50 participants, representing countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa, attended the daily sessions, including several country ambassadors, professional staff and staff directors from the OAU’s political department and other relevant departments, and OAU elected officials.

NDI recruited a seven-member international faculty of experts to conduct lectures, lead panel discussions and facilitate workshops on issues relating to election law and administration, the experiences of and techniques employed by different organizations in monitoring elections, and the future role of the OAU in this field. The international experts comprised: Tessy D. Bakary, adjunct political science professor at Laval University in Quebec, Canada; Chris Bakwesegha, director of the OAU Conflict Management Division and the Political Department; Linda Cohen, executive officer of the United Nation's Department of Administration and Management; Stoney Cooks, founder and president of the North/South Development Group in the United States; Glenn Cowan, a partner in the FMR Group, a Washington-based political consulting firm, and NDI consultant; Larry Garber, NDI senior associate for Electoral Processes; Clara Olsen, managing editor of The News Company of Botswana, former MP and executive secretary of the Botswana Democratic Party; and Jeremy Pope, director of the Legal Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The diverse backgrounds and specific experiences of the faculty were fundamental to the success of the program.

The program was designed to provide seminar participants with the skills necessary to conduct technical assistance assessments, as well as to organize credible election monitoring efforts. At the request of the OAU, the agenda emphasized the latter subject, although several sessions focused on the legal framework for elections, election administration and related matters. Specific questions addressed were:

- When should the OAU accept a request to observe an election?
- Who should be designated to observe an election?
- For how long a period should the observer team be present in-country? How many members should be included on an observer team?
- What standards should be used in evaluating the election campaign, the balloting process and the counting process?
- What role should an OAU observer team play in mediating disputes among the parties regarding the promulgation of the election law or its interpretation?
- What techniques should be used to monitor such issues as intimidation, misuse of government resources, media fairness and the accuracy of the vote count?
- What types of reports should an OAU observer team issue, when should they be issued and to whom?
- How should the OAU coordinate with other international observer missions and with domestic monitoring groups?

Three pedagogical approaches were used during the course of the seminar. Several sessions featured straightforward lectures, followed by short comments by one or two of the other faculty members; in particular, this approach was used to explain the election process and related matters. Other sessions were conducted in the form of panel discussions with faculty members describing the experiences of their respective organizations. This approach was particularly effective with respect to the subjects dealing with monitoring techniques. Finally, five sessions were devoted to solving realistic scenarios that had been distributed at the outset of the seminar.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The seminar represented the first in-depth training program on the subject of election monitoring organized by the OAU. Moreover, the timing of the program was propitious: the OAU has received more than 10 requests from member states to observe elections anticipated during the next 12 months.

Even without considering the possibility of specific follow-up activities, the training program must be considered a success. The OAU, as an institution, has been exposed to the experiences of other intergovernmental (and nongovernmental) organizations involved in election monitoring and more than 50 individuals affiliated with the OAU have discussed issues relating to the activities of election monitors in the field. This should improve the quality of OAU observations.

After the first day, there was little political posturing and considerable interest in the technical aspects of the subjects being discussed. Indeed, on the last day, participants addressed the contentious issue of the appropriate OAU response to a fraudulent election. While there was no unanimity on the matter, the fact that the subject could be discussed amicably symbolized profound progress.

One of the scenarios required the participants to consider six questions relating to future OAU efforts in this field. Five groups were established, each of which presented a brief report at the closing session. The reports were surprisingly specific in responding to the questions asked and should contribute to the quality of the OAU report on the seminar.

APPENDICES

- 1. Agenda (in English)**
- 2. L'Ordre du Jour (in French)**
- 3. Agenda: Supporting Materials**
- 4. Letter from Secretary General Salim Salim (March 26, 1992)**
- 5. Opening Ceremony Remarks by H.E. Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of the OAU (September 14, 1992)**
- 6. Practice scenarios I-V**
- 7. Responsabilités des observateurs le jour des élections (extrait d'un aide mémoire sur l'observation des élections au Paraguay)**
- 8. Closing Session Remarks by Assistant Secretary General Osman on behalf of Secretary General Salim Salim (September 18, 1992)**
- 9. Contact List - OAU Training Program**

Our apologies, but we were unable to make the appendices for this document available for the web.