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EURECS-ETHIOPIA

A EUROPEAN RESPONSE TO ELECTORAL CYCLE SUPPORT
IN ETHIOPIA

Final Report - Midterm evaluation

Contract No. FED/2020/415-432

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In collaboration with :



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List of abbreviations

ACP- African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ADP - Amhara Democratic Party
ADR - Alternative Dispute Resolutions
CBO- Community Based Organization
CCL - Centre for Creative Leadership
CCTV - Closed-Circuit Tele Vision camera
CECOE- Coalition of Civil Society Organization for Elections
CEPPS –Consortium of Elections and Political Processes
CFSP- EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSO - Civil Society Organization
CSP - Charity and Society Proclamation
CVE- Civic and voter education
CVP - Communication and Visibility Plan
DAG - Donors Assistance Group
DIP - Democratic Institutions Program
EAD - UN Electoral Assistance Division
ECES - European Centre for Electoral Support
ECONEC - Electoral Commission Network of the Economic Community
ECOWAS- Economic Community of West African States
EDF - European Development Funds
EDR - Electoral Dispute Resolution
EEAS - European Union External Action
EEM - Election Expert Mission
EISA - Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMB - Electoral Management Body
EMS-Election Monitoring System
EPEA - Electoral Political Economy Analysis
EPRDF - Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU-CSF - European Union Civil Society Fund
EUD - European Union Delegation
EU-EOM - European Union Election Observation Mission
EURECS -European Response to Electoral Cycle Support
EU-SDGN - EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria
FoF - Forum of Federation
GIS - Geographic Information System
IcSP-FPI - Instrument for contributing to stability and peace
International IDEA - International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFES - International Foundation for Electoral System
IRI - International Republican Institute
IDP - Internally Displaced Person
IOCC - International Orthodox Christian Charity
HINGO - Humanitarian International Non-Governmental Organization

HR - Human Resources
HPR - The House of Peoples' Representatives
JEOC - Joint Election Operations Centre
KFW - German Development Bank
LEAD - Leadership and Conflict Management Skills for Electoral Stakeholders
MEPA - Master program in Electoral Policy and Administration
MoU - Memorandum of Understanding
NAM - Needs Assessment Mission
NDI - National Democratic Institute
NEBE - National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
NIMD - Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
NISS - National Intelligence and Security Service
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
OLF - Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF - Ogaden National Liberation Front
PCU - Project Coordination Unit
PEV-Ethiopia - Preventing Election-related Conflict and Violence in Ethiopia
PRAG - Procedures and Practical Guide
PS - Police Station
PWC – PricewaterhouseCoopers
R-JEOC - Regional - Joint Electoral Support Center
SADC - Southern Africa Development Community
SC - Steering Committee
SOP - Standard Operating Procedure
SQL - Software Quantum Language
ToT - Training of Trainers
ToR - Terms of Reference
UNDP - United Nations Development Program
UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
USAID - US Agency for International Development
VAWIE - Violence against Women in Elections
WPE - Workers Party of Ethiopia
VR - Voter Registration

1. Executive summary

1.1. Purpose of the evaluation

Systematic and timely evaluation of its programmes and activities is an established priority of the European Commission and it is conducted by independent consultants.

In line with the established priority of the European Commission, its interventions are systematically evaluated on the quality and the results of actions in the context of an evolving cooperation policy ensuring a specific focus on results-oriented approaches and the contribution towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In March 2021, three months before the parliamentary elections (now postponed to the 5 June 2021 and most likely further), an external midterm evaluation of the project is required. This exercise is imperative to identify

any difficulties encountered during the first months of the Project's implementation that may need to be addressed, if any, but also to collect evidence of the first positive results and to discover whether, why and how the positive results achieved so far are linked to the EU intervention.

To some extent, although it is too early to measure the results of the Action, the mid-term evaluation provides preliminary indicators to assess the extent to which the election board has been sufficiently equipped by the project in terms of capacity in recent months to contribute to the organisation of credible elections.

This is in the awareness that the objective of the project goes well beyond these elections and that the project responds to a logic of sustainable capacity development that will be achieved over a 36-month period.

The evaluation therefore provides an overview of the success of the intervention and examine the cause and effects between the inputs and activities, and outputs and impacts.

This report aims to provide ECES, the European Union Delegation to Ethiopia as well as the partner institutions and relevant stakeholders, with an analysis resulting from the interventions of the Project to support the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and other key electoral stakeholders.

1.2. Specific Objectives

The main objective of this evaluation is to provide an overall independent assessment of the performance of the Project European Response to Electoral Cycle Support in Ethiopia (EURECS Ethiopia), paying particular attention to its results measured against its objectives and expected results.

Specifically, this evaluation will provide:

- An overall independent assessment of the added values and comparative advantages the implementing methodology “A European Response to Electoral Cycle Approach — EURECS”, with regards to cost effectiveness (funds dedicated to activities compared to human resource/management costs).
- A set of recommendations based on the lessons learned and best practices that may inform future similar activities and future actions in the field of electoral and democratic development support.

1.3. Scope of the evaluation

This midterm Evaluation exercise was developed based on requirements of the section 2. 1.15 of the Technical and administrative Conditions of the grant contract signed between the EU Delegation to Ethiopia as the Contracting Authority and the European Centre for Electoral support on 30 March 2020.

It foresees the conduct of a midterm evaluation of the Project called “European Response to Electoral Cycle Support in Ethiopia (EURECS Ethiopia) to provide objective verification of results, technical advice, and big picture perspectives to the activity management, and feed into activity review processes.

Systematic and timely evaluation of its programmes and activities is an established priority of the European Commission and it is conducted by independent consultants. Accordingly, the Terms of Reference of this evaluation (TOR) were prepared by ECES.

The Midterm evaluation covered a period of implementation of EURECS Project from the 01/10/2019 until the 18/05/2021.

1.4. Methodological approach

The evaluation has been carried out in accordance with the DEVCO Evaluation methodology for projects/programmes as set out on the website <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/71165>.

It has been conducted by one expert who has a solid expertise in the field of elections and Projects management. She was responsible for data collection and analyses and for the evaluation report, including the formulation of value judgements and the drafting of conclusions and recommendations. The expert used a mixed method approach based on qualitative and quantitative data. The expert was responsible for the delivery of the main deliverables in English (Inception report, preliminary findings, draft and final reports) and will report to ECES consortium.

1.5. Data analysis and collection methods

The evaluation used both primary and secondary data and a variety of data collection methods to gather the information needed to conduct the work. This included: desk review and analysis of the Project and secondary data; in person interviews in Addis Ababa and Skype and/or e-mail interviews for any key actors or former Project Staff who were in other locations. The expert reviewed available documents before, during and after the field work as needed. She spent ten days in the country to collect and discuss findings and to review the data collected from the field.

Statistical data, public opinion surveys and analytical reports have been used where available to gain supplemental information on electoral and political attitudes, practices, and knowledge.

The expert reviewed the most pertinent documents related to the electoral process and administration in Ethiopia, which included the observer reports from the 2015 elections; political analyses; public opinion polling data on electoral processes and voter participation; NEBE strategic plan; Government development plan; United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); and available project progress reports such as the first interim narrative report covering up to September 30,2020.

The data collected through interviews, observation and review of documents were processed, and the main findings were extrapolated and listed against the intended outcome areas of the Project. The expert synthesized those findings into the main points that were to be discussed in the Evaluation Report with ECES. The evaluation expert maintained an impartial and professional view towards developing its findings and based them on the evidence found and against the anticipated outcomes according to the Project Document.

In addition, the Evaluation Report is not identifying individual responses unless it has consent from that individual to use the information publicly. The Evaluation Report is following EU standards for independent evaluation reporting.

1.6. Difficulties encountered.

The evaluation was subject to time and security constraints. Hence, for this midterm evaluation it has not been possible to carry out visits outside the capital even if the project is also deployed in the regions.

The geographical coverage of data collection has been Addis Ababa.

To rationalize the time in an efficient manner, the project team in Addis facilitated all contacts beforehand between the evaluator, the EU services, and external stakeholders. It resulted from the field mission that no specific difficulty was encountered.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Officer arranged all appointments and facilitated the field visits. I would like to thank her and the EURECS teams in Addis Ababa for their continuous support.

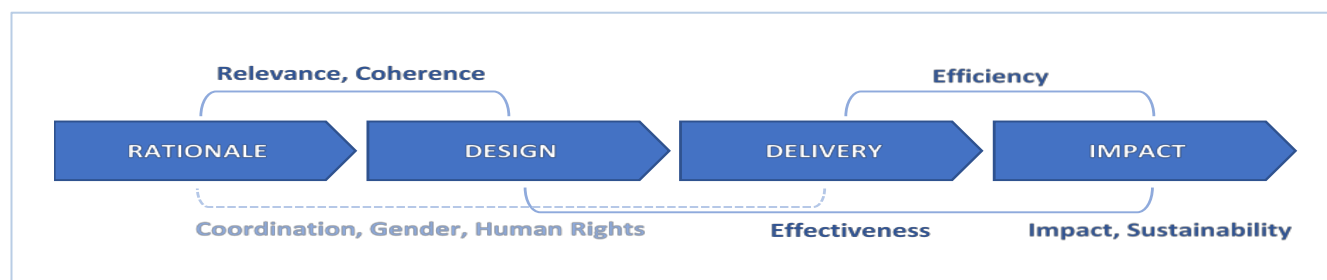
1.7. Evaluation framework of the action

The overall purpose of this evaluation is to undertake a critical assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, as well as the sustainability and impact so far achieved by the EURECS in Ethiopia since the launching of the project in October 2020.

In addition to the five standard DAC criteria, the evaluation will analyse whether cross cutting issues such as gender Equity¹, Human Rights, good governance and environmental sustainability were considered in the identification/formulation documents and the extent to which they have been reflected in the implementation of the Action and its monitoring.

As well, under the criteria “efficiency” the evaluation will put a spotlight on the notion of value for money (VFM) to provide analysis (as far it is possible) on whether the monetary investment and other resources in the interventions conducted by ECES and its partners represents sensible value for money, in comparison with previous EU- funded projects in support to democratic process in Ethiopia.

FIGURE 1: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK OF THE ACTION



1.8. Main conclusions / Overall assessment

Relevance

The overall design is aligned with the objectives and priorities of the government of Ethiopia and particularly with the democratic reform process which started immediately after the appointment of the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2018.

Measures to strengthen the independence, impartiality and capacity of democratic institutions are clearly outlined in the reform program called” Ethiopia: A New Horizon of Hope”.

The design is in line with the EU's policy and strategic objectives of supporting Ethiopia's reform process, to strengthen the democratic process.

The overall design of the project is aligned with the institutional needs of the beneficiary institution (NEBE) to strengthen its independence and credibility after the reform process.

To a certain extent, the design of the project underestimated the operational needs of the electoral board to organize elections while the project design was built around the idea of capacity building.

So far, the project has managed to adapt to most of the requirements of the beneficiary institution, but this requires a lot of flexibility from EURECS which can adjust up to a certain limit.

The Logical framework matrix presents objectively Measurable, Attainable, and action-oriented indicators with baselines to measure the progress but some of the indicators could be more specific. It has been updated to adjust to the changing circumstances.

The overall design remains very valid to support and particularly the activities are relevant to support the electoral board delivering its mandate and building the image of the institution as a credible Electoral management Body.

¹ Gender Equity definition: “Process of being fair to women and men, including using measures to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent men and women from operating on a level playing field. “- CIDA 1997.

There is evidence that in the thematic areas of democratic governance, the project addresses the critical needs of the electoral process in Ethiopia.

Effectiveness

Relationships between the project and NEBE at the very beginning of the implementation were received with mixed feelings of appreciation. The institutional environment that operated in support of the elections in Ethiopia proved to be rather complex.

In the first months of its implementation, the project had to adapt quickly to a new electoral calendar and a new delivery method due to the pandemic. The covid period was an opportunity for ECES to provide online training on the Master of Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) for key NEBE staff.

This has been an entry point of sorts for broader support for NEBE and building stronger relationships with the electoral board.

Since the announcements of the elections scheduled in June 2021, relationships between ECES & NEBE have been marked by a growing confidence. This facilitates the implementation of the project activities.

The overall level of effectiveness is quite significant. In this pre-election period, the implementation of EURECS is marked by an important operational support to the electoral operations and the deliveries are highly relevant in the current context.

As well, many trainings were supported by the ECES, including CSOs' trainings, training in candidate registration, logistics, voter education, and election observation amongst others.

There is evidence that the project is providing a tremendous support to accompany the NEBE in organizing the upcoming elections that have recently been postponed from 05 June 2021 (and most likely beyond) and the implementation of the project is aligned with the existing work, priorities and systems of the beneficiary institution. NEBE acknowledges the support provided by the project.

The project is required to deliver very often in a noticeably short period of time and some of the requests were not initially foreseen into the project document.

It is difficult for the project to adjust to the NEBE continuously and it affects the implementation.

These factors are currently the main challenges of the project implementation.

One of the factors that facilitated the successful implementation of EURECS was the excellent relationship between the project and the EU delegation. The EUD has taken a very flexible and committed approach to facilitating the performance of the project.

On March 17, 2021, expenditures reached 4 812 047 euros. It represents 29,16 % of the of the overall budget after 18 months implementation. The project is currently implementing a large number of weekly activities and expenditure figures are increasing rapidly, in comparison with the first months of implementation.

Efficiency

The implementation of the project started in a context where EURECS activities were to be pre-financed by ECES for a period of 7 months. This was an opportunity to reflect on the sharing of administrative costs with another EU funded project called "Prevention, Mitigation and Management of Election-related Conflicts and Potential Violence (PEV-Ethiopia).

Therefore, there is a lot of cost sharing between the two projects led by ECES in Ethiopia (EURECS and PEV). A management structure has been set up to ensure a coordination mechanism between the two projects and the sharing of running costs. These provisions between EURECS and the PEV are efficient.

The budget and arrangements mechanisms between PEV, EURECS have been designed to ensure the best possible value for money and ratio costs/activities.

Although there are possible synergies between the two other EU-funded projects implemented by NIMD and International IDEA, the synergies with these two other ongoing Democratic Package support initiatives have not been developed to the extent that was initially expected.

Sharing of tasks between ECES, FOF and GO Innovation is based on organizational excellence and reputation to complement each other. It is working well.

For a better coordination of the international support to the NEBE, a code of conduct and an electoral dashboard were established at the early stage of the electoral process to support the division of tasks between the EU (ECES), UNDP and USAID (IFES).

While it seems acknowledged that at the beginning of the implementation of the project, there might have been institutional competition between the three NEBE partners, it is important to stress that at individual level, the EURECS project management maintain good interpersonal relations with the UNDP program management as well with IFES.

This factor also facilitates the sharing of tasks and the implementation of joint activities among the three partners who are currently supporting NEBE in the conduct of its electoral operations.

The technical coordination meetings are ensured through an “election sub-group.” Less coordination meetings took place in the last weeks at the technical level. The human resources recruited by the project are valued for their dedication to the activities, competence and professionalism.

The Covid-19 crisis had a negative impact on the retention of the human resources initially recruited. However, immediate solutions were found by ECES, which mobilized replacement experts within noticeably short timeframes.

The most vulnerable aspect of the project's implementation comes from the administrative and financial department, which is suffering from a heavy workload in this pre-electoral period despite ongoing support from ECES HQ on administrative and financial issues. This is due to the important change of nature of the EURECS, from a long-term capacity development to a fully fledged operational, financial and logistical support project to NEBE electoral activities for which ECES need to adapt to the different requests of NEBE in coordination with UNDP and IFES. The situation is expected to last until the 2021 elections, that were postponed by the government on 15 May 2021 following delays in the opening of polling stations and voter registration. Whilst a new date has not yet been announced, NEBE indicated in a press statement that it does not foresee a delay of more than 3 weeks.

Evidence suggests that the purchase and deliveries of the project such as the vehicles and furniture's for NEBE were done in a cost-effective manner, in line with ECES SOP (and the EU PRAG).

Evidence suggests as well that the project is run with efficiency.

Germany considers the partnership with the EU and ECES valuable and has recently² increased its financial contribution by EUR 4 million for the development of a project called "EURECS + via an additional contribution from KfW.

The European Union Support to Electoral Cycle in Ethiopia – Plus (EURECS+) therefore became part of the EU democratic package implemented in Ethiopia by ECES in April 2021.

² April 2021

In Ethiopia, issues of visibility are extremely sensitive when linked to the electoral process. NEBE seems reluctant to make the project's actions highly visible. For the European Union delegation, given the uncertainties of the elections and the high level of European involvement in the electoral process, this issue of minimal visibility presents at the moment some advantages. It limits the reputational risk in this context of political uncertainties.

The choice of ECES to implement the Action in the partners' country presents several added values for the EU delegation including the opportunity to be closer to NEBE in the decision-making process.

Sustainability

Substantial on-site support is currently being provided by the project to transfer technical capacity to national beneficiaries working for NEBE and many of the tools provided by the project are sustainable elements such as manuals, guides, toolkits.

It is expected that the equipment's purchased for the NEBE will be used for future elections, in a sustainable approach.

The local team recruited for the project is acquiring a great deal of electoral knowledge by being integrated into a team of qualified international experts. EURECS is working with an approach of local staff empowerment.

There is preliminary evidence that the project has many sustainable elements and that NEBEs and the beneficiaries of the interventions, including the project's national experts, will be able to sustain the results of the action after the project had ended.

Many people interviewed during this evaluation process consider that the added value of the ECES is the expertise provided by the project through international experts with an effective transfer of skills and sustainability of actions.

Impacts

Several activities conducted by the projects such as the MEPA trainings had a positive impact on NEBE staff because it created an appetite for learning and enhanced knowledge on election management and electoral operations. This is an important achievement in terms of leadership and technical capacity. It was one of the specific objectives of the project.

It should be noted that it is too early to measure the impacts of the action through its overall objective, as one of the main outcomes will be measured after the elections have taken place and the results are announced and accepted by the population as free, fair and transparent elections.

The outcome of the elections is quite uncertain currently given the cumulative delays of the NEBE.

However, in less than 18 months, the project has succeeded in establishing itself as a key partner in the electoral process in Ethiopia, with increased confidence from donors and the main beneficiary, NEBE.

This growing confidence must be considered as an entry point for the project to pursue partnership with NEBE in the post electoral period and support its restructuring process. This performance was one of the expectations of the donors vis-à-vis the project.

At the moment, it is questionable if NEBE fully understands the level of capability in ECES project³ and what it can provide in terms of capacity building support with respect to the high level of expertise mobilized.

While the current focus of the project is to support NEBE in the organization of elections, the post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to reflect on the lessons learned during the electoral process.

Gender and human right

Based on lessons learned and analysis of previous electoral processes, the EURECS project design document suggests that electoral processes in Ethiopia do not fully include vulnerable groups, including youth and people with disabilities.

EURECS project interventions address the needs of vulnerable groups (women, youth, and people with disabilities) through the activities of Project 1.6 and 1.7: “Mainstreaming gender concerns within the NEBE policies and programs.”

At the implementation level, it is noticeable that the project gives importance to the empowerment of women, youth, and to some extent PWD to increase their democratic rights in the Ethiopian society. Most of the activities to support the participation of vulnerable groups into the electoral process were conducted under NEBE’s liaison and in collaboration with other international partners – UN Women, Embassy of Canada, IFES, & UNDP.

2. Introduction of the project

2.1 Political background and context

Ethiopia which is Africa's second most populous nation with some 110 million citizens, is currently at an important moment in its democratic history. The country is undergoing a democratic transition.

As a cultural mosaic composed of more than 80 different ethnic groups, interethnic tensions, power dynamics, and historical context are essential to understanding all aspects of Ethiopia's political, economic, and social affairs.

The country has a federal system and ten regional governments, many of which have border disputes or are experiencing unrest.

Ethiopia has had general elections every five years since 1995, but in the last vote in 2015 not a single opposition MP was elected. The 2015 legislative and regional elections were described by opposition parties as a "farce."

A wave of protests against the government and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in power since 1991 swept through the country in 2018, and a new Prime Minister named Abiy Ahmed was appointed.

The new Prime Minister has embarked on a substantial reform agenda called "Ethiopia: A New Horizon of Hope" which aims to build a national consensus and implement a national roadmap to facilitate a democratic transition in the country.

One of the pillars of this reform process is the adoption of measures to strengthen the independence, impartiality and capacity of the judiciary and democratic institutions.

³ This comment was made by several individuals during the interviews.

Among the important reforms, the roadmap provides for the revision and amendment of the electoral law for the holding of free, fair and credible elections at the next elections, the opening of political space to previously banned political parties, the creation of a favorable environment for CSOs to work on issues previously considered "sensitive", such as domestic election observation.

In the continuation of the reform process, a former judge and leading opposition figure Ms Birtukan Mideksa who had been in exile for seven years was appointed in November 2018 as the head the National Election Board, (NEBE). In addition, a new Board of Directors was appointed in 2019 and after that the (re)establishment of the NEBE was adopted in April 2019.

The NEBE is responsible for the conduct of elections since its creation in 1993. The Electoral board was initially conceived as "an independent and autonomous body for the conduct of elections with its own legal personality" but in fact, the 5 polls that were conducted by the NEBE revealed significant weaknesses that undermined the credibility of the electoral process and fueled the opposition's discontent over the years.

The elections which were scheduled to be held for August 29, 2020, were postponed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. Regional and municipal council elections were also planned to be held at the same time around the country . Several political parties seized this opportunity to express clearly their expectations for concrete changes in the administration of the elections to avoid the recurrence of previous electoral shortcomings in the upcoming elections and over the 2020 – 2025 electoral cycle.

The federal parliament then voted to extend the terms of parliamentarians, including Abiy's, which were due to expire in October. The decision was rejected by the Tigrayan leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which dominated the EPRDF, and has been gradually sidelined since Abiy came to power.

The TPLF held its own regional elections in September, which were considered illegal by Addis Ababa. On November 4, 2020, the federal government launched a military operation in the region that had defied its authority for months.

There is no accurate assessment of the conflict in Tigray, but the fighting has forced more than 50,000 people to flee to neighboring Sudan. According to the United Nations, more than 63,000 people have been displaced in the region.

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) originally announced that Ethiopia will hold its legislative and regional elections on June 5, 2021. The elections are widely seen as a crucial step in the political transition and the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, promised free, fair and democratic elections. On 15 May 2021, NEBE announced that the elections would be further postponed following delays in the opening of polling stations and voter registration. Whilst a new date has not yet been announced, NEBE indicated in a press statement that it does not foresee a delay of more than 3 weeks.

While welcoming the democratic reforms that have taken place in the country, political observers have pointed out that this electoral process presents major challenges, both in terms of institutional and operational capacity for the Electoral board, but also in term of security and geopolitics. Tribal and local inter-ethnic conflicts have emerged in several parts of the country and are exacerbated by ill-defined administrative borders between regions, which is a source of tension between the different security forces. In addition, conflicts between Somali and Oromo groups in the Somali region have led to the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

It is in this context that the project, entitled "European Response to Electoral Cycle Support in Ethiopia "EURECS Ethiopia "was launched by ECES and its partners in Addis Ababa in October 2019.

2.2 Overview of the project

The overall project aims to implement a long-term support strategy within the framework of democratic development and support to good governance. It has a budget of 16 550 000 EUR funded by the European Union under the 11 European Development Funds (EDF) and Germany.

The Federal Republic of Germany is represented in the project by the Head of Development Cooperation of the German Embassy. Until April 2021, Germany has contributed EUR 10 million to the total project budget, which was about 60% of the EURECS funding. In April 2021, EURECS + was signed between the EUD in Ethiopia and Germany with an additional EUR 3 920 000 million. Germany's contribution rises to EUR 13 920 000 million with EURECS + . EUREC and EURECS + represent an overall budget of EUR 20 470 000 million.

The funding is channeled from the KfW to the EUD in Ethiopia. KfW is one of the world's leading promotional banks. KfW has been committed to improving economic, social, and environmental living conditions across the globe on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany and the federal states since 1948.

The EU Delegation in Ethiopia is representing the European Union. The EU contribution is 6. 5 million Euros out of the total project budget which represents approximately 31, 84 % of the EURECS funding. The implementation of the project is carried out in partnership with the Forum of Federations which was established in the country since 2008 and registered as an international organization⁴ and with Go Innovation / CCL which has been in Ethiopia since 2006 working closely with national civil society organizations⁵ in response to their need for individual, team, and organizational capacity building.

The project is implemented by ECES along the lines of a specific and copyrighted approach developed by ECES entitled the European Response on Electoral Cycle Support (EURECS- Ethiopia - FED/2020/415-432)

The action started in October 2019 for a 36-months programming period, with a view to strengthen the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) to raise the profile of an independent, credible, and effective institution that is tasked to deliver inclusive and democratic electoral processes in Ethiopia.

The implementation agreement between the National Board of Ethiopia and the European Centre for Electoral support to develop in partnership the European Response to Electoral Cycle in Ethiopia was signed the 28 of April 2020 and endorsed by the EU Delegation and the Ministry of Finance.

NEBE is an independent institution established under FDRE constitution Article 102 mandated to manage elections in Ethiopia.

Therefore, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is the main beneficiary of this action but while in the exercise of its functions, NEBE interacts with other electoral actors such as security forces, organs for the administration of justice, judges and prosecutors, political parties and civil society organizations, women's, and youth groups, organizations' representing persons with disabilities. These are the secondary beneficiaries of the technical assistance provided by ECES and its partners.

2.3 Overall objective of the project

The core objective of the program is to increase the transparency and credibility on the electoral process and to instil a higher degree of public trust in the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

⁴ Under agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁵ Also, in partnership with the Unity University, the first independent university of Ethiopia .

2.4 Specific objectives of the project

The project implemented by ECES and its local partners in Ethiopia, the Forum of Federations⁶ (FoF) and GO Innovation⁷, is structured around 3 interconnected key area of interventions which are:

- 1) Increased leadership and management capacity of NEBE in conducting transparent, accountable, gender-responsive electoral processes.
- 2) Increased institutional and technical capacity of NEBE in conducting credible electoral processes.
- 3) Enhanced liaison between NEBE and electoral stakeholders to bolster an inclusive and responsive electoral process.

2.5 The intervention logic

The intervention logic is the set of the assumptions explaining how the intervention was expected to meet its objectives and produce the expected effects.

FIGURE 2: INTERVENTION LOGIC

Outcome	Component	Assumptions	Judgement criteria (JC)
1	Increased leadership and strategic management capacity of NEBE in conducting transparent, accountable, gender-responsive and rights-based electoral processes.	If the NEBE receives technical assistance to strengthen its leadership and strategic management, then it will be able to conduct transparent, accountable, gender-responsive and rights-based electoral processes.	Capacity of the project to increase the leadership and strategic management of NEBE.
2	Institutional and technical capacity of NEBE in conducting credible electoral process.	If NEBE receives technical assistance to increase its institutional and technical capacity, then it will be able to conduct a credible process.	Capacity of the project to increase the institutional and technical capacity of NEBE
3	Enhanced liaison between NEBE and external stakeholders in favour of an inclusive and responsive electoral process	If the NEBE receives technical assistance to strengthen liaison with external stakeholders, the electoral process will be more inclusive and responsive	Capacity of the project to enhance NEBE's ability to liaise with external stakeholders.

2.6 Evaluation questions

For each of the evaluation criterion and building on the specific areas of analysis specified by the TORs, the evaluation expert has developed a comprehensive set of research questions, then regrouped and consolidated them into overarching Evaluation Questions.

The 6 Evaluation Questions are set out in the table below, arranged by individual evaluation criterion. These overarching questions will structure the way the evaluation will test the hypotheses and assumptions in the theory of change underpinning the project during each phase of the evaluation. To respond to each of these questions in a comprehensive, evidence-based, and objective fashion, the evaluators have further broken them down into sub-questions and verifiable lines of evidence. Where they deemed necessary, the evaluators complemented the indicators and sources of verification already established in the action's logical framework with their own, as well as the most suitable methods for data collection and analysis, as summarized in the Evaluation Matrix described in Annex II.

Figure 3: Evaluation questions

⁶ <http://www.forumfed.org/>

⁷ <https://go-innovation.com/>

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTIONS
RELEVANCE	QE1: To what extent does the action address the critical needs of the electoral process in Ethiopia?
EFFECTIVENESS	QE2: To what extent are the interventions of the project supporting the development of the capacities of the NEBE and key electoral stakeholders and in which key area? What are the main challenges and enabling factors?
EFFICIENCY & value for money	QE3: To what extent the resources mobilized to support the development of the activities of the project are cost effective and present value for money ?
IMPACT	QE4: Is there any evidence that the project's actions to date have had a positive effect on the credibility and transparency of the electoral process?
SUSTAINABILITY	QE5: To what extent are beneficiaries taking ownership of the project? Will they be able to sustain the results of the action (programmatically, politically, and financially)?
GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS	QE6: To what extent does the intervention address issues of human rights, women's inclusion, equality, and women's empowerment? (Project design, implementation, management)

Evaluation questions are tailored to the different stakeholders, their mandate, and their role in their respective project and/or sector. The interviews have been conducted, either through unstructured interviews where the interviewee was able to express himself/herself freely and can discuss unplanned topics, because there is no predetermined set of questions, either through semi-structured interviews using an interview guideline with specific questions, either through structured interviews⁸ prepared by the evaluation expert.

The questions are classified in different families that correspond to different "viewpoints" on what is being evaluated. Five of these viewpoints, also called evaluation criteria, are to be considered: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact. They correspond to the traditional practice of evaluation of development aid. They have been formalized by the OECD (DAC).

The evaluator maintained an impartial and professional view towards developing its findings and based them on the evidence found and against the anticipated outcomes according to the Project Document.

3. Findings

3.1. Relevance: To what extent does the action address the critical needs of the electoral process in Ethiopia?

The overall design is aligned with the objectives and priorities of the government of Ethiopia.

⁸ This type of interview is useful when a large number of interviews must be carried out and when the evaluator wants to minimize the risk of bias from the interviewer.

The first draft of the project design was established through an identification and formulation mission which stayed in Ethiopia between the 4th and the 22nd of December 2018, ECES. A team of seven democracy- and electoral experts was mobilized. The document project was based on the overall assessment of the political and electoral framework contained in the Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) report of the UN Electoral Assistance Division (EAD)⁹. The final draft was finalized in 2020 after several consultations with the NEBE and EUD in Ethiopia took place to agree on a design and activities.

The project is highly relevant in a context of electoral and institutional reforms process in the field of democratic governance. The strategy of the action is aligned with the objectives and priorities of the government of Ethiopia and particularly with the democratic reform process which started immediately after the appointment of the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2018.

The project aims to implement a long-term support strategy within the framework of democratic development and support to good governance.

The reforms were regarded in the country as a unique opportunity to promote a peaceful transition to democracy since 1991, when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four ethnically defined organizations, first came to power. Political prisoners were released, women were appointed to more than half of all ministerial posts, a historic rapprochement with neighbouring Eritrea after decades of conflict was achieved.

In line with the roadmap of the reform program presented by the new administration called "Ethiopia: A New Horizon of Hope", measures to strengthen the independence, impartiality and capacity of democratic institutions are clearly outlined.

The design is in line with the EU's policy and strategic objectives of supporting Ethiopia's reform process, in particular to strengthen the democratic process.

EURECS is aligned with the EU policy and strategic objectives to support the Ethiopia's reform agenda and democracy support is at the center of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the EU's development cooperation with its partners countries."

The EU believes that Ethiopia's sustainable development should be underpinned by continuous democratization process.¹⁰

The EU provides extensive support to initiatives and program that seek to develop and consolidate human rights, democratic institutions, and the rule of law in partners' countries.

EURECS was crafted as an innovative and alternative delivery mechanism to implement electoral and democracy assistance activities that are consistent with the EU's values and policies.

As well, part of its design is informed by the recommendations of the previous European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) which took place in Ethiopia in 2005, 2010¹¹. Even if the context has changed, many of the recommendation remain very valid to support the independency of the NEBE.

On 14 June 2016, H.E. Prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia and H.E Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission President signed a Joint Declaration towards an EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement. This commits

⁹ The UN Needs Assessment Mission took place between 24 October and 7 November. Its report was shared on 8 December 2018.

¹⁰ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ethiopia/1186/ethiopia-and-eu_en

¹¹ Previous electoral processes have been marred by delays and incoherence between regions (2015); and delays in announcing election results (2005) due to fraud investigations.

both sides to an annual Ministerial Meeting and six sectoral dialogue¹². Among these sectors is the governance and human rights sector, which is in the midst of a reform process.

In January 2019, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker met with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy Ahmed to discuss EU support to Ethiopia's reform process. On this occasion, President Juncker said: The EU supports the ambitious reform agenda in Ethiopia and is committed to step up its support to the country.”

Regarding the announcement of general elections to be held on 5 June 2021 (that have now been further postponed), the EU initially welcomed the commitment of the Ethiopian government to organize **credible and transparent elections** and expressed its readiness to continue supporting such a process. On 03 May 2021, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell announced the cancellation the deployment of the EU Election Observation mission, citing that it was not possible to reach an agreement on the parameters for the deployment. In this context, the EU encouraged the Ethiopian authorities to redouble their efforts to ensure that all Ethiopians can exercise their legitimate political and civil rights, especially as €20 million has been provided through EURECS to the NEBE for the preparation of these elections.

The overall design is aligned with the institutional needs of the beneficiary institution (NEBE) to strengthen its independence and credibility after the reform process.

NEBE was established in 1993 but previous electoral processes were marred by Government biases and lack of independence according to the EUEOM to Ethiopia Report, 2010.

In line with the roadmap of the reform program, a new law on the re-establishment of NEBE was adopted in April 2019 to restructure the electoral board in a manner that is independent from the influence of any organization, one that enables it to conduct free, fair, credible, and peaceful elections.

As well, a notorious dissident¹³ was appointed as the head of the country's electoral board (NEBE).

Four additional members of the Board were appointed in June 2019 and the employees from the civil service were removed.

This is with a view to establish the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) a credible, effective, independent institution which has distanced itself from government interference. .

Therefore, to accompany the Government in the institutional reform process in the area of democratization, the design of the project EURECS targeted the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) as the main beneficiary of this action.

¹² .; Regional Peace and Security; Countering Terrorism and Violent Radicalization; Migration; Social and Economic Development, Investment and Trade; and Climate Change and Environmental Cooperation

¹³ The judge Birtukan Mideksa was appointed as the *head of NEBE*.

Strengthening NEBE's capacity through this project is relevant because the secretariat of this democratic institution has no prior expertise in the conduct of electoral operations and is undergoing institutional and structural reform.

Capacity building is an important aspect of the project in terms of relevance and one of the donors expressed his appreciation for the relevance of the project because "this is the first time Ethiopia has had an independent body fully responsible for the organization of elections".

This support is adjusted to the needs in order that the electoral board deliver technically credible elections now postponed from 5 June 2021 and beyond.

The design is highly relevant to all activities that are part of this project. The conceptualization was based on lessons learned and analysis of previous electoral processes.

To a certain extent, the initial design of the project underestimated the operational needs of NEBE to organize elections while the project design was built around the idea of capacity building considering also the operational intervention of UNDP and IFES in the context of the coordination among donors and electoral assistance providers.

As the 2021 election approaches, many of NEBE's needs have emerged in recent weeks and a large number of requests are being sent by NEBE to the EURECS to support the implementation of the electoral operations.

This important level of involvement **in the electoral operations** was not initially foreseen in the project design which was built more around the **idea of long-term capacity development**.

As well, many purchases ¹⁴were not foreseen in the project document.

Given the current limited level of readiness of the NEBE, the original design underestimated the electoral board capacity to conduct elections without major operational support provided by the Technical and Financial Partner

After the announcement of the postponement of the election, it was anticipated that NEBE would have benefited from this "vacant" period to prepare itself to conduct the electoral operations, establish a consolidated budget and a strong operational plan.

But it appeared that when NEBE resumed operations in the fall of 2020, the level of preparation for the election operations was not very advanced. This was admitted as a missed opportunity from NEBE.

Currently, NEBE needs a lot of support in terms of planning, logistics and operations and all activities are conducted in a fast-paced environment where many priorities collide.

This presents a real challenge for the project which is aligned with the NEBE agenda and very often suffers from change of schedule and unexpected requests.

¹⁴ 22 vehicles, all the furniture of the NEBE HQ

The project has managed to adapt to most of the requirements of the beneficiary institution, but this requires a lot of flexibility from EURECS which can adapt up to a certain limit.

It is important to recognize that operational support during an election period in the context of Ethiopia, which is undergoing a major reform process, must be inseparable from institutional support. This support contributes to strengthening the credibility of the Electoral Management Body in the conduct of electoral operations.

Beyond the Covid crisis and the postponement of the elections¹⁵, the context continues to evolve quite rapidly over the weeks. EURECS and its partners must demonstrate more and more adaptability and flexibility .

Despite the challenges, with the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Ethiopia, EURECS demonstrates a certain level of flexibility to adapt to the requirements of the beneficiary institution.

Thus, a budget amendment was made in October 2020 and many changes were made thereafter, up to 25%, in accordance with EU rules. It is noticeable that the Matrix has been updated to adjust to the project implementation and changing circumstances.

The design would have benefited from being more flexible, both in terms of budget¹⁶ and activity, to quickly adapt to unanticipated NEBE requests.¹⁷

The Logical framework matrix presents objectively measurable, attainable, and action-oriented indicators with baselines to measure the progress but some of the indicators could be more specific.

Several genders-sensitive indicators are listed but are not specific to measure women/ youth empowerment as the basis of an effective monitoring of impact. “

In this kind of issues promoting women, youth and PWD participation to the electoral process, it is recommended that the indicators have baseline and target values and a timeframe because the baseline values provide the reference point for later monitoring.

However, as this project addresses these issues in a cross-cutting manner, it is not a primary objective, while many other technical and financial partners are also trying to increase the participation of vulnerable groups in the electoral process. (UN Women, UNDP, IFES, NDI ..)

The overall design remains very valid to support the electoral board delivering its mandate and building its image as a credible Electoral management Body.

¹⁵ In addition , a key assumption of the design of the program did not hold true. ‘2020 elections are held on time.’”

¹⁶ The EU suggested that the budget could have been drawn up by blocks of activities

¹⁷ Recommendation 1

Because the design presents a two-pronged approach, which is support for the implementation of the electoral process, as well as capacity development for NEBE, the project design remains very valid. . EURECS is currently assisting the NEBE in delivering its mandate and organizing free, fair and credible elections.

The project embraces a long-term capacity building approach, and its development is aligned with the electoral cycle. Therefore, it is expected that the post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to focus more on strengthening the institutional capacity of the beneficiary institution.

3.2. Effectiveness support to the NEBE: To what extent are the interventions of the project supporting the development of the capacities of the NEBE and key electoral stakeholders and in which key area?

Relationships between the project and NEBE : at the very beginning of the implementation were marked by a mix feeling of appreciation considering also that ECES never worked in the country before unlike UNDP and IFES. The institutional environment that operated in support of the elections proved to be rather complex.

The EURECS project started in October 2019 for 36-months period. At the beginning of the implementation, EURECS management reported challenges to establish a close partnership with NEBE. The project had to demonstrate its specific added value to the NEBE board members and gradually gain the trust of the electoral board members as a partner capable of adding value in terms of technicality and support to NEBE.

Several factors may explain the pattern that has been observed during that period :

- Despite the existing agreement between the technical and financial partners directly supporting the electoral board since the identification and formulation of the different projects, the spectrum of a competitive environment between IFES, UNDP and the project was most likely prevalent, even if not very prominent .
- The two main key players providing electoral assistance to the NEBE were already present in the country in previous electoral cycles and had many opportunities to strengthen their relationships with the NEBE.
- The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) worked to support electoral processes in Ethiopia since 1994.
- Similarly, the UNDP had been involved in supporting NEBE for many years. One of the most important supports was provided in 2007-2008 during the implementation of the multi-donor program known as the Democratic Institutions Program (DIP).As a result, the UNDP, representing a group of donors through a basket fund delivery mechanism had been perceived over time as a very influential organization in Ethiopia¹⁸, working closely with the Ethiopian government but as well with so many institutions and even being imbedded at NEBE.

At the time of its inception , the ECES-led project, which was tailor-made to assist the NEBE in organizing its first elections after the reform process, was perceived as being provided by an outsider organization linked to the EU decision making process. ECES and its management had to provide additional efforts to demonstrate the specific added value of the project in supporting NEBE in the conduct of electoral operations.

¹⁸ UN Entities :Demonstrative of the significant external development actor support in Ethiopia, there are currently 26 UN operating agencies focused on various priorities such as economic and human development, humanitarian aid, and gender equality.

In the first months of its implementation, the project had to adapt quickly to a new electoral calendar and a new delivery method due to the pandemic.

The first months of implementation were marked by several important events that have impacted the project implementation:

- The COVID crisis which started in March 2020 in Ethiopia. The federal and state governments took more and more restrictive measures to contain the virus and finally the State of Emergency (SoE) was declared .
- The report of the elections initially scheduled for August 2020, then planned for June 2021 and now postponed further.
- The progressive deterioration of the security situation in the country, which necessarily had an impact on the work of the Electoral board.

The covid period was an opportunity for ECES to deliver online training on Master of Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) for key NEBE staff. It has been somehow an entry point to broader support to the NEBE and built a stronger relationship with the electoral board. .

During the Covid period, the project demonstrated its flexibility to adapt very promptly to external /changing circumstances. As an adaptative solution to the restrictions imposed by the State of Emergency through, the delivery of remote trainings was organized by EURECS, and the project started its online training on Master of Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) to NEBE Head Quarters (HQ).23 participants attended for individual module and 3 participants attended to the full Masters. This activity was developed under the component ” Hybrid LEAD-MEPA Training modules “ Activity 1.1 for NEBE Management Board.

The core dimension of ECES response to COVID-19 is based on a hybrid approach to training delivery, INNOV-ELECTIONS, whereby ECES, together with its partners, offers a flexible menu of training curricula, while delivering remote solutions to mitigate the challenges imposed by the confinement and teleworking working mood adopted by many institutions and organizations. INNOV-ELECTIONS is composed by live electoral coaching and the Master on Line on Electoral Policy and Administration via the entire Master or modules and tutorial sessions were organized for the individuals who took the courses to strengthen their skills.

The Master in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) is the only existing online Master Program worldwide providing advanced learning on electoral processes for current election professionals and all interested stakeholders. Its objective is to enhance the electoral knowledge.

In the view of the Head of Development Cooperation of the German embassy, the project has done extremely well to get through this difficult period and handle the frustration not to deliver what was initially planned in the workplan. It provided an alternative delivery mechanism to implement electoral and democracy assistance activities.

Relationships between ECES & NEBE: Since the announcement of the elections scheduled for June 2021 that have recently been delayed further, relationships between ECES & NEBE have been marked by a growing confidence. This facilitates the implementation of the project activities.

Over the past 6 Months, EURECS have been successful in gaining NEBE's confidence and the period is characterized by the establishment of a collaborative working relationship with NEBE and other key partners.

There is a normalization of ECES-NEBE relationship, and the last past months which correspond to the pre-election period have been very productive in terms of delivery in the three area of intervention of the project. This support is delivered as part of the capacity building component of NEBE but also as operational support in the run-up to the elections.

As per the perception of the donors, after the announcement of the elections, the project and its partners started to move very quickly and very efficiently. Many trainings were supported by the ECES such as CSOS's trainings, training in candidate registration, logistics, voter education, election observation...

There is evidence that the project is providing a tremendous support to accompany the NEBE in organizing the scrutiny for the upcoming 2021 elections. The overall level of effectiveness is quite significant.

In this pre-election period, the implementation of EURECS is marked by an important operational support to the electoral operations.

A lot of training activities have been carried out but also equipment's were purchased to provide operational support to NEBE such as the vehicles, badges of candidate agents at Constituency Offices, furniture's for NEBE Headquarters, purchase of vehicles for the NEBE.

An analysis of expenditures and activities shows that the project provides significant operational support to NEBE in preparation for the 5 June 2021 election, that has recently been delayed further. This includes advices, trainings and technical coaching for polling staff on the elections focusing on improving operations including voter registration, operational and logistical support for the improvement of voter registration and polling stations mapping using GIS, publication and dissemination of technical tools of the electoral process, the deployment of the lead facilitators and Master trainers throughout the country, the covering of the professional fees, transportation, and accommodation.

One of the main reasons of this support is that Ethiopia is highly dependent of the donors ¹⁹to organize its forthcoming elections .

In 2019 , the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has submitted a 3.7-billion-birr (\$132 million) budget for approval to the House of People's Representatives and in 2021, the estimated budget to conduct the upcoming Ethiopian elections was raised to 6.3-billion-birr (\$154 million)

¹⁹ Even if it is admitted that then Ministry of Finance and Economy has the primary responsibility for ensuring that adequate resources are made available, it seems that the NEBE is facing difficulties to cover the entire budget of elections which has increased the last past months due to the covid crisis and the post postponement of the elections.

The increased of the elections budget need to be attributed to several factors including the covid crisis, the election postponement, and the security deterioration of the country .

It should be noted that last minute requests of the NEBE obviously increase the cost of elections .

Some of the people interviewed during the midterm evaluation suggested that NEBE had difficulty determining the actual cost of its elections because of a lack of in-depth knowledge in the planning of electoral operations.

Operational and even logistical assistance by the project is considered crucial for NEBE in the weeks leading up to the election but the agenda of activities is not completely settled.

Currently, in the views of several individuals interviewed during this mid -term evaluation, NEBEs appears to be struggling with some of the practical aspects of logistical operations. . This issue needs to be addressed in the post-election period. NEBEs could benefit from capacity building in logistics and planning exercises.²⁰

Relationship between ECES and NEBE: NEBE appreciates the support provided by the project. The deliveries are highly relevant in the current context .

The Board's Chairperson Birtukan Mideksa mentioned²¹ the limitations the Board has in logistics and expressed her gratitude for the support²². Chairperson Birtukan also stressed on the significance of the support the Board receives from the European Union and from the German Government. She said that the Board is grateful for the donation of 22 vehicles composed of 12 Hard Top and 10 Pickup.

During the interview NEBE expressed overall satisfaction with the support provided by the project.

The implementation of the project is aligned with the existing work, priorities and systems of the beneficiary institution in a logic of ownership.

The implementation of the project is aligned with the existing work, priorities and systems of the beneficiaries' institution in a logic of ownership.

The announcement of the election date has been the starting point for the implementation of many activities of EURECS and the extensive needs of the electoral commission in terms of support.

The implementation of project activities is fully aligned with the electoral cycle. This is considered as a good electoral practice to deliver electoral assistance.

This is also one of the main reasons why significant operational support is being provided to the electoral board at this time and why capacity development is taking place more in the form of on-the-job training for key NEBE staff through joint participation in election operations.

20 Recommendation N 3

21 On February 25, 2021, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) received a donation of 22 vehicles composed of 12 Hard Top and 10 Pickup trucks from the European Union and the German Government -

22 https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=893694748079462&id=414693405979601&_rdc=1&_rdr

The strategy adopted by the project for the achievement of the results, has been to respond to NEBE's requests as long as they are consistent with specific objectives of the project document²³ and that they provide support to NEBE in delivering its mandate.

The implementation of the project is directly related to the requests of NEBE. These requests cover various departments such as civic and voter education, legal, training, electoral observation.

The project is required to deliver upon request of the NEBE and very often in a noticeably short period of time and some of the requests were not initially foreseen into the project document. These two factors are challenging for the implementation of EURECS.

Most of the request are addressed at short notice and it require a lot of flexibility for the project to deliver²⁴. As a result, more and more requests are given to EURECS and some of these requests were not initially foreseen into the project document.

Any additional requests from the electoral board that are not budgeted for and not foreseen in the project documents are discussed very promptly between the project management and the EUD.

One of the factors that facilitated the successful implementation of EURECS was the excellent relationship between the project and the EU delegation. The EUD has taken a very flexible and committed approach to facilitating the performance of the project.

As EURECS does its best to adjust to the needs of the beneficiary institution, the European Union to Ethiopia demonstrate a high level of commitment and flexibility to support the project deliveries to NEBE in order that credible elections take place. A lot of formal and informal consultation are taking place between the EUD and the project management throughout the implementation.

In addition, there is good coordination between ECES and the EU to handle NEBE requests.

It is undeniable that during these first months of implementation, the EU has shown a lot of support and commitment to ECES to facilitate the delivery of the project.

At the time of the evaluation, the following activities have been carried out in the three-key area of interventions:

Outcome 1 – Increased leadership and management capacity of NEBE in conducting transparent, accountable, gender-responsive electoral processes. An estimated amount of EUR 323 310,55 had been spent for the activities at the time of the evaluation. It represents 1.95% of the overall budget after 18 months implementation.

The following activities have been conducted in outcome 1 :Master of Electoral Policy and Administration, as previously mentioned, Induction training for the newly appointed Regional Head Officers and NEBE Senior

²³ These demands appear in the monitoring report as " following NEBE's request and as 'on demand' advisory services "

²⁴ This is also the recommendation. N 3 .

Staff²⁵, Induction training for newly appointed board member and hired staff²⁶, training of trainers selected by NEBE that that could be deployed to conduct different trainings²⁷, training on elections logistics and operations of NEBE²⁸, a lot of support for publication and dissemination technical tools of the electoral process such as printing of the Candidate Registration Directive , Candidate Registration Forms, Folders and Brochures²⁹.

Outcome 2 : Increased institutional and technical capacity of NEBE in conducting credible electoral processes. An estimated amount of EUR 1 943 158,98 had been spent for the activities at the time of the evaluation. It represents 11.77 % of the overall budget after 18 months implementation.

The following activities have been conducted in outcome 2 : Translation and Printing of Civic and Voter Education Handbook and Trainers Guide to five local languages, candidates Registration Training manual and Voter Registration Training manuals and other various documents prepared for the use of the software developed for the digitalization of the candidate registration process, in collaboration with other partners (IFES and UNDP) and NEBE, a total of 7 training manuals have been developed and 4 of them relevant for the first round of trainings on VR and CR are approved by NEBE after an ECES-led validation workshop was conducted, detailed ToT and Cascade training plan covering all the recruitment, operational, timeline, locations(venue) as well as budget related issues developed and approved, design, develop, test and publication of the website for the people interested in applying for the position of poll worker completed and implemented in receiving applications and 220 Master trainers (MTs) have been selected and the trainings took place in rounds³⁰.

As well as per the project document (activity 2.2), an operational and logistical support for the improvement of voter registration and polling stations mapping using GIS was provided with a final list of 50,719 polling stations and a Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) was set- up (activity 2.4) of the project document. The GIS mapping system to support NEBE field data collection process and prepared a proposal of activities to obtain the coordinates (Geographical locations) of all the polling stations at national level is a great added value to support NEBE to organize credible elections.

In term of procurement and operational support, as per NEBE specific requests, EURECS provided the following items:

- 22 vehicles were delivered on February 2021.
- 7000 Badges for Candidate Agents at Constituency Offices were procured and delivered in February 2021
- 500 USB Flash Disks and 20 Power Extension Cables were delivered to NEBE in February 2021
- Media monitoring equipment's. Among the delivers which were provided to NEBE, and highly valued by electoral board is the supplies and installation of the NEBE Media Monitoring Unit . It aims to support NEBE's internal and external communication as well as its visibility, to improve its functioning and outreach activities.

²⁵ 15 participants took part in a one-day induction training-Addis - Jan 02 and March 18, 2020

²⁶ 15 participants took part of a two-day induction training -Nov 30-Dec 1, 2020

²⁷30 participants, ECES and IFES trained - January 2020 (following NEBE's request)

²⁸ On demand advisory services provided on issues such as CVE handbook, inclusivity of various directives, recruitment options for poll workers, preparation of operational budget and so on

²⁹ 500 copies - Printing of the Candidate Registration Directive, 500 copies- Candidate Registration Forms , 700 copies -Folders, and Brochures - delivered to NEBE in Feb 2021.

³⁰ The following activities implemented so far for 4,410 participants.

-Furnitures for NEBE HQ were purchased and installed at the NEBE which is grateful for this support as “a good operating environment is essential.”

EURECS has a security support component which is implemented under the lead of a senior election security expert.

Security has been a growing concern over the last past months for the project and its donors and also for the NEBE.

A senior election security expert has been hired by EURECS in January 2020 and he is providing the following high-level expertise’s:

- Regular Security threat assessment to EURECS management. The analysis is shared with the EUD.
- Improvement of accessibility of NEBE HQ office. As per the Activity 2.1 Office security is one of the immediate issues and is particularly important for NEBE. Suppliers have been identified and consulted and this activity is coordinated with the security focal point of NEBE appointed in May 2020.
- Design and provides training to the Ethiopian polices forces in a cascade training with an objective to target 110 000 police officers out of 150 000 police officers in the regions and at federal level. “This is a massive step forward “as per the senior expert.
- 44 polices officers had been trained already to be master trainers, each of them will be training at least 50 trainers, 2200 trainers will be trained.
- As well, 150 000 pocked cards are being produced for the police forces with code of conduct and a guide to prevent unnecessary misconduct in the electoral process.

Outcome 3 : Enhanced liaison between NEBE and electoral stakeholders to bolster an inclusive and responsive electoral process . An estimated amount of EUR 1 351 796,2 has been spent for the activities at the time of the evaluation . It represents 8.19 % of the of the overall budget after 18 months implementation.

The project supported NEBE to organize public consultation sessions on directives on many issues such as CVE Licensing, political parties funding, grievance hearing committee establishment, media code of conduct and Media Coverage, voters registration, establishment of constituencies and polling stations, establishment and code of conduct of poll workers, candidate Registration Procedure, Collection of Signatures and Allocation of Symbols, election Campaign Activities, accreditation, procedure and Code of Conduct of International Observers, establishment of Special Polling Stations, registration of Pastoralists (Mobile Polling Station), accreditation for and Code of Conduct on Voter Education, allocation of air time.

Support to Consultation with Media on CVE was provided by the Project ³¹, consultative meeting with CSOs on voters’ education and election observers organized by NEBE were provided as well³², consultation meeting with

³¹ Consultative meeting on the role of media in voter education organized by NEBE with 34 journalists and media representatives took place the 12 February 2020 .

³² 82 local CSO representatives attended to the consultation the 15 February 2020.

CSO and media representatives organized by NEBE on the tentative election calendar and COVID-19 protocols took place supported by the project³³, EURECS in coordination with the UNDP and IFES supported the organization of the 2nd NEBE National Stakeholders Conference, a ECES a voter education strategy was developed in collaboration with UNDP for the NEBE for approval, the project supported the registration and accreditation of domestic and international observers.

As per NEBE, many of the consultation held by partners were supported. “it is quite important to assist NEBE build confidence with CSO’s, Media.”

As well, a plan for trainings/workshops for public prosecutors/police on EDR has been finalized with Master Trainers delivered³⁴ and two days’ workshop was organized by NEBE to 76 CSO representatives accredited to Conduct Civic and Voter Education for the 6th National Elections.

Conclusion budget expenditure : On March 17, 2021, expenditures reached 4 812 047 euros . It represents 29, 16 % of the of the overall budget after 18 months implementation. The project is currently implementing a large number of weekly activities and expenditure figures are increasing rapidly.

At the time of the evaluation, an amount of approximately 3. 617 664 Euros had been spent by the project . This amount represents 21.92% of the overall budget but it excludes expenses incurred but not disbursed. These figures imply that during the first months of implementation, the rate of disbursement was not high because of the covid crisis and the postponement of the elections, which limited the possibility of conducting activities. The project is currently implementing a large number of weekly activities and expenditure figures are increasing rapidly. A few days after the evaluator's mission ended, on March 17, 2021, expenditures reached 4 812 047 euros.

3.3. Efficiency: To what extent the resources mobilized to support the development of the activities of the project are cost effective and present value for money?

The implementation of the project started in a context where EURECS activities were to be pre-financed by ECES for a period of 7 months. This was an opportunity to reflect on the sharing of administrative costs with the PEV.

ECES started the implementation of the project Prevention, Mitigation and Management of Election-related Conflicts and Potential Violence (**PEV-Ethiopia**) in June 2019. The PEV-Ethiopia aims at preventing, mitigating and managing conflicts that may arise during the electoral cycle by assisting non-state actors in addressing root causes of election related violence and conflict.

ECES started the implementation of **EURECS** the 1 of October 2019 but the grant contract between the EUD and ECES was only signed the 30/03/2020. The EURECS project seeks to strengthen the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in order to raise the profile of an independent, credible and effective institution that will deliver inclusive and democratic electoral processes in Ethiopia.

³³ 76 CSO and media representatives’ consultations took place on the tentative election calendar and COVID-19 protocols.

³⁴ 37 participants attended to it on Mar 05 and 06 in Addis.

Therefore, the first months of project implementation was marked by a retroactive period when ECES was pre-financing the activities of the project through a retroactive clause. This period was an opportunity for ECES to reflect on the sharing of certain costs, mostly administrative, with the PEV, to minimize the risks involved in the pre-financing period and to maximize the benefit of the implementation of two relevant and complementary projects.

Therefore, there is a lot of cost sharing between the two projects led by ECES in Ethiopia (EURECS and PEV)

There are many synergies between the PEV and EURECS projects; As a result, both projects share many operating costs, including staff members,

All these measures of cost sharing are making the two projects administratively extremely competitive in terms of human resources and office sharing.

ECES' budget follows the same principles for all its projects, namely based on real costs with a provision for indirect costs of 7% (based on the total amount of eligible costs). That 7% allow to cover for the costs related to indirect management of the project as well as costs related to project design and implementation that cannot be included in the budget.

Some budget lines related to human resources are rationalized so as they are shared between the two budgets, based on the expected pro-rata of the EU contributions and project and as well some experts, although paid by one project, make their expertise available to the other project.

This is good management practice which when the two projects pursue the same overall objective and show complementarity. During the retroactive period, EURECS was thus able to benefit from many facilities already put in place by the PEV project to advance the implementation of activities. As well, it is expected that the PEV will be able to benefit from the EURECS facilities when the project will reduce its activities as it will approach its closure.

A management structure has been set up to ensure a coordination mechanism between the two projects and the sharing of running costs. These provisions between EURECS and the PEV are efficient.

The two projects have a Project Coordinator more specialized in the project specifics i.e. Prevention of Violence and Electoral Administration and Electoral Assistance to electoral management bodies;

A Project Coordination Unit (PCU) was established in June 2019 to implement the PEV project's activities and ensure information-sharing, synergies, and coordination mechanisms between EURECS and PEV and proceed to the monitoring of the activities. The PCU function as a coordinating hub and as a repository of knowledge, centrally placed in between the two projects and the various stakeholders, beneficiaries and development partners connected to them.

The PCU is led by the ECES representative in Ethiopia and Senior Electoral Adviser, and mandated by ECES HQ, under the supervision of the Co-Founder and Executive Director of ECES, to oversee the implementation of the PEV and EURECS Ethiopia projects in its various aspects.

The budget and arrangements mechanisms between PEV and EURECS have been designed to ensure the best possible value for money and ratio costs/activities.

This ensure that implementations of both projects are done in full conformity with EU regulation and ECES Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and in line with the EU PRAG, actually they are a paraphrasing of the EU PRAG rules adapted to the electoral assistance field in order to implement projects according to the EURECS approach

The PRAG provides the contracting procedures applying to all EU external actions financed by the EU budget and the European Development Fund (EDF).Under the PRAG, the core principles of procurement are transparency, proportionality, sound financial management, equal treatment and non-discrimination, avoidance of any conflict of interest and non-retroactivity.

Throughout the action, the PCU is providing monthly narrative and financial monitoring reports under the supervision of the Monitoring and Reporting Officer and administrative and financial department. An updated comprehensive interim narrative report was provided by EURECS on September 30,2020.

Sharing of tasks between ECES, FOF and GOI Innovation is based on organizational excellence and reputation to complement each other and on a MOU signed the 29th May 2019 . It is working well.

The Action is implemented in partnership with GO Innovation and Forum of Federations based on good and collaborative working relations. A MOU was signed the 29th of May 2019 between ECES and the Forum of Federations. This MoU will serve to outline specific partnership principles to ensure that the Project is implemented in a coherent and harmonized way, strictly following indication from the Contracting Authority (the EU), the project documents submitted, as well as ECES SOPs and the EURECS strategy

All partners are implementing the project elements based on this MOU but also on organizational excellence and reputation to complement each other towards best achievements of the anticipated results. Go innovation is contributing to the implementation of the relevant activities related to political dialogue, conflict prevention, and political analysis including :Leadership and Conflict Management Skills for electoral stakeholders (LEAD) Training of Trainers (ToT) and LEAD cascade training.

- A steering committee is supposed to be organized every three months between the 3 partners to support coordination, but it seems that there has been no coordination meeting for a while due to the rush of the election period.
- As well, weekly meetings were supposed to take place internally within various ECES departments, but it seems that in this pre-election period, there is very limited internal coordination meetings.
- The project will gain if internal communication is enhanced and if steering committees are organized among the three partners. EURECS at management level could design a way for the project to communicate better during the election period by organizing “ standing meetings of 20 minutes “ to support the internal communication.

These two points above are recommendation for improvement in internal communication.³⁵

³⁵ Recommendation 4

The time constraint of this pre-election period slows down the frequency of coordination meetings between ECES -led projects, NIMD and IDEA projects but there is a fairly clear distribution of tasks.

While the EU has established a “democratic package” that is composed currently by five interventions related to the overall context for the general elections 2021, for an approximate envelope of 26.95 M Euros (22.95 M EUROS+ EURECS +), it seems that the working relationships between ECES-led projects, NIMD and IDEA projects present a room for improvement. .

As per the EUD, “the different projects are not sharing information’s as they would have expected, and it did not work as well as the EU planned “³⁶

NIMD is supporting the Ethiopian Political Parties Dialogue for an amount of 1.8 MEURO, funded under IcSP-FPI and as well NIMD is developing a project to establish an environment for inclusive, knowledge-based dialogue on the political process in Ethiopia . The project of 1 MEURO is funded under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace of the Foreign Policy Instrument (IcSP-FPI) and implemented by International IDEA.

Joint activities have been conducted between the project, IFES and UNDP to support the NEBE conducting its electoral operations. There is apparently a clear division of tasks between UNDP, IFES and ECES and its partners, all supporting the NEBE to deliver its mandate.

The project is implemented in coordination with the other main electoral assistance providers (International Foundation for Electoral Systems –IFES, funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN -with UNDP in the lead, funded by different bilateral donors contributing to a basket fund³⁷.

Under the UNDP initiative, a code of conduct was signed between the three partners supporting directly the NEBE at the early stage of the design. The objective of this code of conduct is to share common information’s among partners³⁸and support the division of tasks.

For a better coordination of the international support for the political and electoral process, an electoral dashboard was established at the early stage of the electoral process in December 2018 by the EU, UNDP and USAID upon the request of the Government of Ethiopia.

The dashboard follows the electoral cycle, indicates the main areas of activities where the partners can get involved, and establish a division of tasks, and a preliminary budget based on the added value provided by the major electoral technical assistance partners in Ethiopia.

³⁶ Recommendation 5

³⁷ To date, the donors to the UN basket fund (40 M USD) are: Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Korea, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

³⁸ According to the EU's testimony, there have been times in recent months when the EU has received last-minute information from UNDP and UNDP has withheld information.

ECES and IFES are more involved in trainings³⁹ and long-term capacity development and UNDP is more involved in providing logistics to NEBEs for the forthcoming elections⁴⁰, although in recent months EURECS has also been involved in providing logistical support to NEBEs, at the request of the electoral board.

NEBE will open 55,000 polling stations, deploy over 275,000 polling staff and over 55 million voters are expected to cast their ballots on election day.

These needs are financial, logistical, technical and security. There is no doubt that the dashboard has been a critical coordination tool to avoid duplication in the activities to be implemented by ECES, UNDP and IFES and for a division of tasks.

While it seems acknowledged that at the beginning of the implementation of the project, there might have been institutional competition between the three NEBE partners⁴¹, it is important to stress that at individual level, the EURECS project management maintain good interpersonal relations with the UNDP program management and with IFES.

This factor is positive and facilitates task sharing and the implementation of joint activities and even informal communication to update on the activities.

A lot of capacity building activities were conducted jointly by the project to support the NEBE in partnership with IFES and the UNDP. A total of 7 training manuals have been developed and 4 of them relevant for the first round of trainings on voter registration.

Building strong partnerships between key actors in the field of electoral assistance proves to be fundamental particularly in the challenging context of Ethiopia .The interest to create a conducive and non-competitive environment among electoral assistance providers was underlined by ECES founder and executive director⁴², on Thursday, 15th April 2021, in the framework of a meeting with the Under secretary General of the UN Peace Operations Department and members of the UN Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs⁴³.

The meeting represented an occasion to discuss the creation of possible strategic and operational synergies between electoral assistance actors. Parties underlined the interest for better coordination and partnership to avoid the overlapping actions and the risk of undermining the efficiency.

The meeting was facilitated in the context of the of the Paris Peace Forum⁴⁴. As a matter of facts, the EURECS and PEV approaches of ECES were awarded at the Paris Peace Forum as one of the 10 projects in the session of November 2020 to receive one year support in the context of their Scale Up Programme especially with two

³⁹ For the trainings of voter education and candidate registration, the division of tasks between IFES and ECES is very clear and there is an excellent level of coordination. Weekly meetings called "planning meetings" were organized between the main partners to support the coordination mechanisms. ECES has been assigned the MASTER level and IFES is more involved in the regions while NEBE is in charge of the local level.

⁴⁰ Purchases of ballots papers.

⁴¹ According to the EU delegation at the beginning of project implementation, the division of labor was not always respected by UNDP and some of the discussions took place between donor agencies, at the request of the EU, to clarify these attempts at overlap.

⁴² Fabio Bargiacchi

⁴³ ECES Founder and Executive Director, Fabio Bargiacchi and ECES Strategic & Advisory Committee Vice-President Filiberto Ceriani Sebregondi, participated in meeting with the United Nations Under Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre François Renaud Lacroix, and several members of the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division of the department of political affairs.

⁴⁴ <https://themorningherald.com/news/france-tackles-global-issues-strengthens-multilateral-cooperation-through-paris-peace-forum-the-davos-of-global-governance-issues/0297606>

senior mentors, former Under Secretary General of the UN for Peace Operations, Jean Guehenno and former Director General of DEVCO, Stefano Manservigi⁴⁵.

The technical coordination meetings are ensured through an "election sub-group." Les coordination meetings took place in the last weeks at the technical level, weakening the coordination mechanism.

In terms of the coordination mechanism at technical level⁴⁶, the three main development partners supporting the NEBE meet in an "election sub-group." within the Governance Technical Working Group within the Development Assistance Group (DAG).

The objective of this sub-group is to provide a platform of coordination for the international community to share information on the electoral process and the support given to the electoral board.

Coordination meetings between ECES project and other programs supporting the elections have become quite irregular in recent weeks. This has been noticed by some stakeholders that there has not been coordination meeting “ for a while . ”.

Even if might be due to the pre-election period, and the limited availability of the electoral stakeholders, being all highly active in implementing activities to support the electoral process, coordination meetings remain important.

In this critical period, particularly in the stage of the electoral process which present uncertainties, it is relevant for the Technical and Financial Partners involved in different project to support the elections and working with the NEBE, to jointly go over their work plan and discuss progress and challenges and monitor any challenges that require special attention.

According to some experts interviewed and who work closely with the NEBE” delivery could have been better if there was proper planning at the NEBE, better organization and advance communication with all the partner organizations .”

The human resources recruited for the project demonstrate dedication to the activities, competence, and professionalism.

As per the Human Resource Plan, the project has mobilized 10 long term experts as part of the project management unit who work on running the project daily work and 15 Short-term technical experts involved in ICT, communication, Media, political parties, security, gender issue...

As the international experts, 13 local experts were mobilized for the project were recruited through a competitive process. Forum of Federations conducted the recruitment process supported by ECES for most of the local

⁴⁵ <https://theconversation.com/amp/le-forum-de-paris-pour-la-paix-nouvel-outil-du-multilateralisme-ou-instrument-du-soft-power-francais-157654>

⁴⁶ There is a donor platform of regular coordination at the political level with the US, UN , EU

experts. Their positions have been fulfilled and personnel selected against developed TORs (which were published at the time of announcing the vacancies) as well as the following general criteria:

Most of the local expert shared their enthusiasm to work in the EURECS project and have been integrated into a team of qualified international experts.

There is good collaboration between national and international project experts who rely heavily on their national colleagues to overcome the language barrier with the public.

According to one of the donors of EURECS “ the project is running well and has a good team of people who are ambitious and working hard to make out of this project a success. “

According to NEBE, the experts recruited by the project have a lot of experience, knowledge, and share best practices, and are very flexible.

This is quite positive assessment and ECES has undoubtedly managed to recruit and mobilized excellent international experts from its database⁴⁷, to support the implementation of the project.

The level of expertise of EURECS international staff was mentioned several times by stakeholders, including NEBE. Indeed, the level of expertise provided by the project is remarkably high and appreciated by all parties interviewed. (Election security⁴⁸expert, media monitoring expert, electoral operations experts, trainings experts, technology and GIS mapping specialist)

The level of local expert is quite good even if they have not been involved previously in an election project.

All partners, including NEBE, recognize that the project human resources demonstrate ability to organize complex training courses that require organizational and technical skills.

Very recently, 220 Master trainers (MTs) were trained in Addis Ababa on candidate registration and voter registration exercise which took place in several rooms at the same time in a cascade training, polls workers were trained in cascade as well. (More than 150 000 polling staff). 21 training centers have been opened by the project all over the country in the 11 regions and the two administrative cities.

The Covid crisis had a negative impact on the human resources recruited by the project.

The Covid crisis had a negative impact on the project human resources and when the Federal Government decided to close the country’s borders, some of the EURECS experts left to their family residence. Few of them, decided not to come back while the epidemiological situation was still a major issue in the country.

The administrative and financial department was the most affected by the departures from the project because it lost the senior finance and administration manager, an administrative and finance officer and a Finance and Administration Manager. As well, the first Project Coordinator was replaced internally by swapping post with the Training Expert following the shown capableness in training of the Project Coordinator and the more important experience in EU issues and project management of the training expert.

⁴⁷ The list of ECES electoral assistance experts is based on an accumulation of 20 years of knowledge, experience and professional networks in various EU institutions and international organizations implementing electoral assistance and election observation.

⁴⁸ Activities around the elections

The interpretation of the tax regime on experts in Ethiopia is particularly complicated for the absence of non-double taxation treaties signed by Ethiopia with the countries of origins of its international experts. This has obliged ECES to use the services of four lawyers firms to see how to comply with EU and Ethiopian rules as to avoid double taxation for its experts.

ECES has been duly registered since November 2019 as an international foreign organization in the register of the Civil Registry Organizations of Ethiopia and accordingly operates in compliance with the legal framework of Ethiopia. Ethiopia imposes 15% taxes for the non-resident and 35 % taxes for the employees who are legally resident and work in Ethiopia with a regular visa and working permit for more than 183 days during a 12-month period. It is a matter of interpretation the rules to be applicable to international consultants that is the status.

Due to the limited number of international treaties⁴⁹ that Ethiopia has signed in the area of double taxation, most of the experts of the project face the possibility of having to pay taxes in two countries and ECES had to make sure taxes are paid in one country according to the situation of each expert residence and centre of interest. Double taxation refers to the same income being taxed by two different countries. It is perceived worldwide as a very unfair tax practice when the same income earned is subject to multiple instances of taxation due to the simple fact that it has a cross border character.

Since December 2018, ECES Ethiopia team together with ECES HQ have implemented the usual ECES approach and explored in detail different possibilities to solve the issue as in any country where ECES operated. Following the same procedures ECES have contacted and contracted different lawyers and tax advisors, including Mr. Salomon Mano, Mano Accounting Service - Mr. Haileleu Tamru, Independent tax advisor - Mr. Getu Jemaneh, HTS (Consulting, Audit, Tax, Learning Solutions), the law firm Million and the international taxation firm Grant Thornton. ECES HQ and its lawyers have taken a number of initiatives⁵⁰ to request tax exemption to its international experts and also a revision of taxes and customs and import duty status on the basis of agreements with the European Union and the Cotonou agreement.⁵¹

At the moment, while all experts and ECES are striving to get the proper resident and working visa under Ethiopian law despite the official support from the EU Delegation and NEBE, ECES is held responsible by the Ethiopian tax authorities to withhold 15% of the fees for potential taxes for its international experts and pay the related amounts to the relevant authorities when and if resident and working visa are granted. Without visas there is no possibility to comply with the law and ECES found itself in the same situation of all the not-for-profit organizations and international NGOs working in Ethiopia.

This retention was a decision taken jointly by the team in the field and ECES HQ together with the decision to continue to recognize the fees of most international experts, as a measure to protect the experts and the organization, while finalizing the issue with the local authorities once and if the working and resident visa are granted to all international experts and once determined that double taxation can be avoided to international experts..

⁴⁹ Ethiopia enjoys a rather limited number of double taxation treaties, and most of the experts do not benefits from those treaties apart Italians, UK, Portuguese and other few nationals.

⁵⁰ Please find in Annex letters dated April 15, 2020, mail of 7 December 2020. addressed to the Minister of Finance and Economic Cooperation by ECES HQ

⁵¹ The project is placed within the parameter of the Cotonou Agreement in respect of tax and customs matters providing therefore basis for an exemption from value added tax (VAT)and customs duties.

So once more it is important to underline that the issue is not solvable till when international experts have not received working or residence permits. Since the beginning of its registration, ECES immediately initiated steps to obtain the work permit for its staff. In this context, the ECES representative spent a lot of time liaising with the Ethiopian administration to obtain these permits, however, without any success so far.

The « Red card » of international organization seems to be sufficient to work in Ethiopia. However, for the rest of the internationals which do not possess the red card, an Attorney was hired to request the work permits from the Ministry of Labor. NEBE produced a letter to support ECES in obtaining these work permits – however workpermits have still not been secured.

Concerning the VAT, a first letter requesting exemption to the Deputy National Authorizing Officer was sent on April 25 2020.

Since then further correspondence was held with the Ministry; including a request by the Ministry that this exemption should be requested by NEBE on behalf of ECES as its national partner. NEBE decided that it could do so, however only for goods that were bought by ECES for the direct use of NEBE. NEBE subsequently sent a letter of support to ECES to obtain the exemption, however, the Ministry insisted that NEBE send this letter directly to the National Authorizing Officer at the Ministry of Finance Directorate of the European Union.

It is recommended for NEBE to relaunch the process of requesting exemption of VAT directly with the MoF. At the same time ECES is ready to provide all the supporting documents for goods purchased for NEBE. A letter should also be sent to the Ministry of Finance with the complete amount of VAT paid under PEV and EURECS projects even if the goods are not directly in support of NEBE, to prove that all possible was done to retrieve these funds.

The most vulnerable aspect of the project's implementation comes from the administrative and financial department, which is suffering from workload due to the context of this pre-electoral period and the important change of nature of EURECS to an operational and financial support project to NEBE.

Currently, while the human resources situation seems more stabilized in the administrative and financial department, which has 4 staff members and among them, two expatriates and a temporarily assistant, the department which is one of the most critical for the project in the operational phase of the electoral process is suffering from workload.

The volume of work is especially important because, among other activities, the department has the task to contracting to processing payments, conducting procurements, for minor purchase and big tenders, provide the financial reporting, monthly report, budget follow up, allocation and reallocation of funds.

In term of implementation, this presents a risk for ECES and the project as the NEBE constantly provide to the project last-minute requests. To palliate this challenge, and following the usual ECES approach, ECES HQ has sent numerous time senior and junior staff in mission from Brussels to support the project and financial management including preparation of the expenditures verification processes. This deployment of HQ experts is funded by the PEV and EURECS+ budget (Senior and Junior finance HQ financial management support) and it is entirely part of the ECES way of working (SOP).

These last-minute requests are very challenging for the financial department which has to make sure that the project is able to deliver upon the request of the NEBE and at the same time is ensuring the compliance with ECES rules and procedures.(SOP)

As per the human resources working in this department, “sometimes they have notices of less than 24 hours to make something happen”.

In addition, reallocation of the budget when it is needed requires long hours of reflection with the project management and additional work for this department.

Therefore, there is a risk of a bottleneck in the processing of project request, as these requests are becoming more and more important in the run-up to the elections in this department. This situation is expected to last until the 2021 elections that were recently postponed further.

Tight control of ECES HQ over expenditures and sound management over expenditures

In line with its Standard Operating Procedure, ECES Headquarters exercises tight control over expenditure in Brussels, for tenders over 20 000 euros and need to provide its approval after checking the tender. The EU delegation in Ethiopia acknowledges the fact that the ECES group knows very well the EU rules and procedures.

From the ECES point of view, past experience in Afghanistan and Jordan has proved that less or the lack of involvement of ECES HQ has caused several issues especially when it comes to audits and the number of ineligible expenses as well as the closure of the projects.

A verification of the expenditures of EURECS covering the period from the 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020 was conducted in April 2021 by BDO LLP, one of the UK’s largest accountancy and business advisory firms. The firm checked individual amounts claimed as recorded in the reports to the European Commission against supporting invoices and documentation⁵². The final expenditure verification report was released the 7 May 2021 suggesting that “There are no errors to report”. Evidence suggests that the project is run with efficiency and in line with the EU rules and procedures.

In April 2021, Germany increased its financial contribution by EUR 4 million for the development of a project called "EURECS + .

Due to the specific agreement with the EU, the German funds are channeled to the EU.

Germany do not have a direct agreement with ECES, and this is the EUD in Ethiopia which is responsible for the whole management and arrangements of the funding according to the EU rules and regulations.

From an EU perspective, this arrangement is considered administratively complicated. Therefore, Germany is not directly and deeply involved into the monitoring of the program. Germany considers this partnership as very valuable, and they are very happy to work with the EU on this program.

⁵² All necessary documents were made available to us during the fieldwork mission.

Satisfaction is expressed in both sides about the performances of the project EURECS during the period under review. According to the EU, by choosing ECES, the EU “has chosen a reliable and serious partner.”

Thus, Germany decided to increase its contribution to EUR 4 million (3 920 000 million with the administrative costs⁵³) in order that ECES implement EURECS+. The EURECS+ project aims at providing logistical and procurement support to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia- NEBE in order to contribute, together with United Nations Development Programme - UNDP and IFES, to their ongoing operations task to organize the electoral processes in Ethiopia, postponed from 5th of June.

The agreement comes into force the 13 April 2021 under a retroactive clause⁵⁴. The EURECS+ project will last 12 months. It is entirely financed by KFW on behalf of the German government and channeled through the European Union in Ethiopia.

The project is divided into 3 important pillars: Personal protection equipment's⁵⁵, civic education campaign on peaceful acceptance of the electoral results, logistical support to NEBE to transport the electoral material⁵⁶ with 3 expected results.

- Result 1: NEBE's capacity to manage a credible electoral process amid the global pandemic crisis is enhanced and polling stations equipped to mitigate the COVID-19 spread.
- Result 2: Electoral stakeholders and the population sensitized on the acceptance of election results and are aware of the legal channels for election complains.
- Result 3: The electoral material is delivered on time contributing to the proper conduct of elections.

This financial support brings Germany's contribution to the ECES-led project to EUR 14 million which is important. This contribution shows the Germany interests to support free, peaceful, and transparent elections in Ethiopia. It also reflects the high level of satisfaction and trust that the donor gives to the project implementation.

The EU contribution is being ensured in the action through a communication and visibility plan.

In outlining the “Visual Identity Elements” of the grant contract, the project produced a Communication and Visibility Plan. The guidelines have been elaborated jointly with ECES project partners and following the “European Commission’s Visibility Manual for EU External Actions”.

As per the ECES project strategy, the project visibility plan operates on several levels, addressing activities and/or communications to:

- i. Inform in a strategic manner - which may require visibility or careful discretion - electoral and political stakeholders about the support provided by the Project and its related activities.

⁵³ administrative costs of the transfer agreement DE-EC

⁵⁴ In order to be able to sign this new grant contract-to be titled“EURECS Plus”-, still some administrative steps are needed, i.e: formalisation of the transfer agreement DE-EC and amendment of the Financing Agreement between the EU and the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance via exchange of letters. Due the urgency to provide proper assistance to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) for the preparation of the general elections scheduled organically scheduled for 5th June 2021, and within the limits of the mentioned EU contribution, the Commission authorises that the costs incurred under EURECS Plus may be recognized as eligible as of the date of registration of this letter

⁵⁵ Masks, sanitary gels ...

⁵⁶ By road and air/ Ethiopian Airlines

- ii. Raise awareness around the project, for example project communications and initiatives, key meetings and coverage of workshops/conferences/activities.
- iii. Illustrate the specific impact of the project with EU funding.
- iv. Produce visibility materials and features within the project framework that are made available to all stakeholders/partners, such as Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections – CECOIE, the National Election Board of Ethiopia – NEBE, media, and others.
- v. Provide updated information on activities to a wide range of target audience mainly through the project-dedicated website (<http://democracy-support.eu/eurecs/>), ECES website (www.eces.eu) and democracy support package’s social media pages as well as of ECES; Facebook pages: www.facebook.com/eu4democracy.ethiopia; www.facebook.com/eces.eu , Twitter accounts: @EthiopiaEurecs, @ECESeu, Instagram: @eu4democracy.ethiopia, @eces.eu.

NEBE is reluctant to make visible the actions of the project. In Ethiopia, issues of visibility are extremely sensitive when linked to the electoral process.

It should be noted that in Ethiopia, issues of visibility are extremely sensitive when linked to the electoral process. NEBE is very reluctant to make visible the actions of the partners including ECES, IFES and UNDP. This issue causes some frustration on the part of the EURECS project management who consider that the money given to the electoral process is from the European taxpayer’s money and it would be desirable to have an adequate visibility.

The questions of visibility to be provided on the Media monitoring unit, the formation of the Media, are still not resolved between the project and NEBE.

For the European Union Delegation, visibility of the actions financed by the European funds is important as the EU is accountable to European taxpayers . Therefore, the EUD required EURECS a visibility plan at the beginning of the project as well the publicity on the democratic package. At the moment, given the uncertainties of the elections and the high level of European involvement in the electoral process, this issue of minimal visibility because of NEBE policies, is advantageous. It limits the reputational risk.

The choice of ECES to implement the Action in the partners’ country presents several added values for the EU.

During the design and formulation of the project, there was apparently a lot of negotiation with EU headquarters and the EU delegation about how the EU funds to support the electoral process would be channeled, either through ECES or another implementing partner such EISA or through a UNDP basket program.

The implementation of activities through the UNDP channel is a technically valid choice according to EU representatives.

Similarly, ECES has demonstrated its technical capacity over the years in many countries to support electoral management bodies to organize elections.

As well, over the years ECES had demonstrated its ability to provide effective assistance in capacity building programs, particularly in fragile countries in democratic transition.

But undoubtedly the choice of ECES to implement the Action in the partners' country presents several added values for the EU represented by the EU Delegation in Ethiopia.

- i. ECES presents substantial added value in terms of visibility. With a contribution of more than 22.95 M EUROS in as democratic package: “ it brings more recognition of the Government of Ethiopia⁵⁷ . “regarding the efforts provided by the EU to support the ongoing democratic reform process.”. One of the factors that increases the EU's ability to exert some leverage over the activities financed by EU funds is the fact that ECES implements the action in close partnership with the EU delegation.
- ii. It was admitted during the interviews conducted with the EU representatives in Addis Ababa that ECES choice provides an opportunity to be closer to the decision-making process ⁵⁸particularly after the EU-Government of Ethiopia (GOE) normalization of relations that took place in recent years .⁵⁹ In comparison with the UNDP, the EU feels less “ remote from the political process and the political process is the main concern at the moment in Ethiopia ".The EU representatives in Addis expressed their satisfaction at the opportunity to engage with NEBE members directly with ECES members on the implementation of activities.
- iii. From a financial perspective, ECES was able to pre-finance program activities for 6 months for , which was a significant advantage given the ultra-tight electoral agenda, time constraints, and the urgency of starting the project in 2019. Under the agreement with the EU, ECES has taken all the financial risks associated with this pre-financing agreement. Under retroactivity and until the signature of the grant contract, ECES from a legal point of view was to bear all Financial risks associated to the implementation of activities and their associated costs.
- iv. ECES demonstrates flexibility for the re-allocations of funds to adapt to ongoing changed circumstances. (covid crisis, postponement of the elections)
- v. ECES is seen in the country has an entity marked by its neutrality and independency in the electoral process comparing to the UNDP who was and remain closely involved and linked with the governmental affairs of Ethiopia.

3.4. Sustainability. To what extent are beneficiaries taking ownership of the project? Will they be able to sustain the results of the action (programmatically, politically, and financially?)

Substantial on-site support is currently being provided by the project to transfer technical capacity to national beneficiaries working for NEBE and many of the tools provided by the project are sustainable elements such as manuals, guides, toolkits.

Preliminary evidence suggests that many of the tools provided by the project are sustainable elements, such as manuals, toolkits, guides, training manuals(7) have been developed by the project and 4 of them relevant for the first round of trainings on voter registration and candidate registration.

⁵⁷ Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the country is an attractive partner for investment and trade relationships between the EU.

⁵⁸ In recent years, the EU +Norway and Switzerland (EU group)disbursed annually around € 1 billion of ODA, equivalent to roughly a quarter of total external aid to Ethiopia and can reach up to 10% of the country's annual federal budget in certain year. EU development cooperation support to Ethiopia exceeds € 2 billion for the period 2014-2020 and rests on five pillars.

⁵⁹ Following the elections of 2005 , Ana Maria Gomes who was the head of the EUEOM in Ethiopia stated that "indeed there were massive human rights violations" during and after the election. She endorsed calls for the creation of national unity government as well as new elections. The prime minister said Gomes had violated standards of impartiality expected from neutral election observers by promoting opposition suggestions.

These instruments are potentially sustainable, and they will be used much beyond the project lifetime furthermore that they have been established in close partnership with the NEBE.

The LEAD initiative is contributing to enhancing the institutional and management capacity of the NEBE targeting management, and promoting the organizations' capabilities to develop comprehensive strategies, deliver results, mobilize resources, motivate staff and volunteers in order to carry out its mandate in the most effective manner.

As well, the project supported training of trainers (TOT) selected by NEBE on various electoral issues. The Training of Trainers (ToT) model is intended to engage master trainers in coaching new trainers that are less experienced with a particular topic or skill, or with training overall. The Training of Trainers (ToT) is very often seen in projects as a strategy to build country capacity and long-term sustainability. The Media Monitoring Center is a very sustainable element and a lot of equipment's and capacity development have been delivered to NEBE.

A media monitoring team, comprising of 11⁶⁰ monitors at NEBE's HQ for 12 months covering the entire territory, recruited in collaboration with NEBE was set up. The topics which are under monitoring are the voter education, women in election, electoral violence .

There is evidence that the technical assistance hired for the project is supporting the transfer of knowledge and capacity. In addition, a media manual is currently being developed.

Many people interviewed during this evaluation process consider that the added value of the ECES is the expertise provided by the project through international experts with an effective transfer of skills and sustainability of actions.

The local team recruited for the project is acquiring a great deal of electoral knowledge by being integrated into a team of qualified international experts.

Most of the local team recruited and working for the project had no previous experience in electoral projects due to the specific context of Ethiopia before the reform process .The implementation of activities with ECES gives them the opportunity to be "on site" in terms of training and capacity building.

They have been trained to electoral operations through the project . They are learning fast and most of them shared their enthusiasm to be working in the EURECS project. and been integrated into a team of qualified international experts .

This is a good opportunity for them to become familiar with electoral operations and to continue in the future to work in electoral projects and be recruited as qualified experts. Some local experts recruited in the project have had career advancement with more responsibility given to them since they reached the project.⁶¹

There is evidence that EURECS works in a logic of staff empowerment.

⁶⁰ Staff selection, training and recruitment finalized for 11 Monitors and 1 Supervisor for different language categories (Amharic, Tigrigna, Afan Oromo, Somali). Recruitment for Afar expert ongoing

⁶¹ Dr Shimels Sisay work currently as a training coordinator and he was previously civic and voter education and inclusion expert.

It is expected that the equipment's purchased for the NEBE will be used for future elections, in a sustainable approach.

As mentioned earlier, about 60% of EURECS funding comes from the Federal Republic of Germany. There is important point for the German donor that should be mentioned in this section on project sustainability.

3.5. Impact - Is there any evidence that the project's actions to date have had a positive effect on the credibility and transparency of the electoral process?

Credibility of the electoral process and uncertainties of the outcome of the elections.

The overall objective is to enhance the transparency, credibility, and public confidence in NEBE, which is in charge of conducting the electoral process. Thus, it is anticipated that the project will contribute to a paradigm shift in the conduct of elections in the country as per the theory of change.

It should be noted that it is too early to measure the impacts of the action at this time, as one of the main outcomes will be measured after the elections have taken place and the results are announced and accepted by the population as free, fair and transparent elections.

The outcome of the elections will demonstrate the capacity of NEBE to manage electoral operations from a technical point of view but there are currently a lot of uncertainties about this outcome.

At the moment, with three months to go before the elections, NEBE is perceived as structurally independent from the influence of the Government and the conduct of the electoral process is enjoying a certain level of public trust in Ethiopia.

There is no doubt that the project is supporting the implementation of good electoral practices, processes and equipment's which are therefore strengthening the credibility and transparency of the electoral process. Several activities conducted by the projects such as the MEPA trainings had a positive impact on NEBE staff because it created an appetite for learning and enhanced knowledge on election management and electoral operations. This is an important achievement in term of leadership and technical capacity. It was one of the specific objectives of the project.

Even if the project is targeting the NEBE as the main beneficiary, the project has some positive effects on other stakeholders of the electoral process. The Ethiopian Broadcasting authority, which is the federal media regulatory body of Ethiopia, will be able to monitor the airtime of the candidates during the electoral campaign because of the Media Monitoring Center provided by the project . This is one of the many positive impacts of the project.

The project's performance and NEBE's increased confidence are entry points for further support to the EMB in its restructuring process.

In less than 18 months, the project has succeeded in establishing itself as a key partner in the electoral process in Ethiopia, with increased confidence from donors and the main beneficiary, NEBE.

This growing confidence has to be considered as an entry point for the project to pursue partnership with NEBE in the post electoral period and support its restructuring process. This performance was one of the expectations of the German donor vis-à-vis the project.

It is also clear that the project supports NEBE's independence from external political interference.

For most NEBE staff, this electoral process has been a learning exercise. The MEPPA trainings had a positive impact on NEBE staff because it created an appetite for learning on election management and electoral operations. This is an important achievement in term of leadership and technical capacity.

Several experts interviewed by the evaluator admitted that NEBE increasingly requires EURECS support when they are facing a challenge. This is an encouraging performance furthermore that the head of the German cooperation stressed the importance for the project to work in an in-depth with the NEBE with a view to strengthen the capacity of the electoral board for the future.

German cooperation is expecting that the project and NEBE will work together” not during a single electoral exercise but for the future “ .Similarly, the head of cooperation at the EU said that "it will be interested to see how the project delivers after the elections. "

While the current focus of the project is to support NEBE in the organization of elections, the post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to reflect on the lessons learned during the electoral process and to consolidate the knowledge gained.

At the moment, because of the pre-election period and unavailability of NEBE staff, many of the capacities are provided by jointly planning exercises and implementation of the activities foreseen within this project. This is consistent with the project's strategic approach in alignment with the electoral cycle.

The election will take place in less than 3 months, and during this pre-election period, NEBE is requesting increasing support from the project for the implementation of electoral operations.

In this respect, NEBE requests demonstrate a good level of ownership of the project by the beneficiary institution but in the opinion of some of the people interviewed in the project. It is questionable if NEBE really understand the level of capability in ECES program and what the project can provide in term of capacity building support.

This will be a lesson learned and recommendation to inform the continuation of the project in the post-election period for sustainable results.

Therefore, it is expected that in the post-election period, attention, will be given will be given to how the project will intervene to strengthen NEBE's capacity. (“They will be looking at how the project will do this in the future”). This period will be overly critical for the project to measure whether it has developed a sufficiently trusting relationship with NEBE in order that the Electoral Management Body of Ethiopia accept the project's contribution in its institutional reform process and long-term capacity building. While project funding will be terminated on October 2022, the post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to address structural gaps and institutional needs and develop specific tools to strengthen NEBE as an independent institution which can deal with future electoral process.

The ability of ECES to continue the program with capacity development activities will be highly dependent on the time remaining in the project and the resources available.

The review of the conduct of the electoral process will reflect on the lessons learned acquired over the past months.

This will be an important period of the electoral process and it is recommended to the donors to support the funding of this activities.

3.6. Gender and human right: To what extent does the intervention address issue of human rights, women's inclusion, equality, and women's empowerment? (Project design, implementation, management)

Based on lessons learned and analysis of previous electoral processes, the EURECS project design document suggests that electoral processes in Ethiopia do not fully include vulnerable groups, including youth and people with disabilities.⁶²

Low representation and participation of women is a persistent trend in Ethiopia.

Despite some appearances, women are still underrepresented in the decision-making process in proportion to their numbers in Ethiopia. According to a recent study by researcher Shimelis Kassa⁶³, 38 % of women have been elected in the parliament which is quite good performance but in term of decision making and influence were behind, but it is progressive. While women represent approximately 51% of the Ethiopian population, they have minimal political participation. Lack of commitment to increased women's participation and lack of sufficient political knowledge on women's representation are some of the issues that account for women's low participation in politics. It was therefore recommended that women's participation in the electoral administration, political parties, state councils and the House of People's Representatives be further encouraged. .

youth remain underrepresented in Ethiopia's public life.

According to a World Development Indicators report, 70 percent of the population was under 30 years old in 2019. Although the Ethiopian government adopted the National Youth Policy in 2004 to support youth engagement in politics, youth remain underrepresented in Ethiopia's public life. It is undeniable that the 2015-2018 events were marked by youth mobilization and these youth are potentially a driving force in the 2021 elections.

There are an estimated 15 million children, adults, and elderly persons with disabilities ⁶⁴in Ethiopia, representing 17.6 per cent of the population.

In November 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities raised concerns about the ability of persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their right to vote in Ethiopia.

EURECS project interventions address the needs of vulnerable groups (women, youth, and people with disabilities) through the activities of Project 1.6 and 1.7: "“Mainstreaming gender concerns within the NEBE policies and programs.”"

⁶² The previous EUEOM of 2010 found that electoral processes in Ethiopia do not fully include vulnerable groups, including youth and people with disabilities.

⁶³ Situation analysis of EURECS projects document

⁶⁴ Based on the World Report on Disability jointly issued by the World Bank and World Health Organisation

In an effort to increase the inclusiveness of the electoral process, the EURECS project document included in its design several activities to increase the political participation of women, youth and people living with disabilities. (Gender and Social Inclusion Policy - gender mainstreaming, Training on Gender Awareness and Violence Against Women in Elections Policy (VAWIE), Establishment of an inter-agency committee on civic and voter education, with special attention to the needs of people with disabilities, people living in remote areas, etc.).

In terms of implementation, it appears in the project that "people living with disabilities are part of gender inclusion and that youth empowerment is more of an EPI issue.

Within the EURECS project, EURECS recruited is an inclusion expert . He has been consulting and providing assistance to the gender and inclusion experts of the NEBE, upon request.

Most of the activities to support the participation of vulnerable groups into the electoral process were conducted under NEBE's liaison and in collaboration with other international partners – UN Women, Embassy of Canada, IFES, & UNDP.

The project has been involved in consolidating all gender and inclusion related initiatives not only by NEBE but with other partners organizations who are interested in this specific topic with the objective of ensuring gender mainstreaming in NEBE's work, a gender strategy⁶⁵ was developed for NEBE, gender auditing⁶⁶ was developed as well in a joint partnership led by NEBE.

A gender matrix document was elaborated to consolidate all the budget and initiatives that were separately planned by the partners organizations to avoid duplication of activities in gender empowerment. The project provided the development as well of NEBE's draft gender and inclusion strategy document.

Civil society organizations working on gender and inclusion (associations of Persons with Disabilities) were invited to consultation sessions on the draft election directives and have been provided with the right platform to assess the gender sensitivity and inclusiveness of the draft instruments to ensure that their concerns are duly addressed in the laws.

These activities were conducted Under NEBE's liaison and in collaboration with other international partners – UN Women, Embassy of Canada, IFES, & UNDP.

A series of trainings were planned on gender equality and gender responsive electoral process as well as the mitigation and prevention of violence against women in elections in the project document. This activity was postponed due to the delay in staff recruitment process at the NEBE HQ, Regional Office, Constituency Office,

⁶⁵ The Gender and inclusion strategy document; and the one-plan-one-budget matrix aim to create synergy and integrate efforts through a harmonized and well-coordinated approach. These documents will help minimize duplication of efforts, mobilize resources and work jointly towards identifying key areas of; intervention activities, implementation approaches, and expected outcomes in regard to NEBE's and partners' commitment to ensure gender and disability inclusiveness in the upcoming election. Accordingly, the priority set by NEBE in collaboration with the different partners will be the basis for ECES's future interventions.

⁶⁶ Assessment of the electoral normative framework has been carried out by analyzing and auditing the existing legal framework aimed at ensuring the right to political and electoral participation of Women and Youth, Persons with Disabilities, and Minorities. The documents were submitted to the respective NEBE departments for further consideration and use. Presented in three separate documents, the main objective of the task was to assess the normative and operational value of the existing legal framework; and audit the gender sensitivity and inclusiveness of the instruments in light of international standards. These legal instruments are the new Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019, the NEBE Establishment Proclamation No. 1133/2019; and all the Directives (draft) adopted by the Board.

and Polling Station levels but also to the Covid crisis and it is expected that it will be implemented after the election.

At the implementation level, it is noticeable that the project gives importance to the empowerment of women, youth, and to some extent PWD in order to increase their democratic rights in the Ethiopian society.

The goal of the project is to involve 50% of women in all workshops, where possible,” which will ensure that women and specific organizations/networks that promote women's equal access to political and electoral processes will benefit in the most sustainable way possible.”.

The evaluator found that in some trainings, this target is not reached because of the lists given by NEBE to EURECS where men are in the predominant position. This aspect is undoubtedly structural, but it is important to emphasize it so that NEBE becomes aware of it.

It is crucial that each activity conducted under the project use sex-disaggregated data to assess and support NEBE to increase the participation of women and youth.

Therefore, there is evidence that a relevant strategy is embedded into the design and into the implementation of EURECS, as a cross cutting issue aiming to support activities to enhance the participation of vulnerable groups.

Converting actions into results will require a long-term support in the absence of positive actions such as the adoption of a quota policy. The project should continue focusing on youth and gender strategy as they are emerging issues in the country.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The project is being implemented in a rather difficult context as NEBE struggles to meet the deadlines for the June elections that had to subsequently be delayed and the security environment deteriorates.⁶⁷The political and legal environment is extraordinarily complex. Two major political parties are boycotting⁶⁸ the elections and the Ethiopia's Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) is asking for the extension of a delay for the elections. A border war looms between Sudan and Ethiopia as Tigray conflict sends ripples through region⁶⁹.

The electoral process is becoming gradually highly political and sensitive⁷⁰ exposing NEBE as one of the main key players of the electoral process. NEBE is obviously struggling in term of capacity to understand the complexity of the whole organization of an election, in term of management of an electoral process.

The operational plan apparently is suffering from shortcomings⁷¹ and has not been made accessible to all electoral stakeholders. This is impacting a lot the implementation of the project while the project is aligned with the implementation of NEBE's needs upon request, and there is a lot of overlapping of electoral activities and of course, last minutes requests. Therefore, EURECS is constantly called upon to adjust and increase its contribution to electoral operations even at short notice.

⁶⁷ Five of the country's nine regional states are now plagued by violence with millions of internally displaced people and Insecurity has driven 2.4 million people out of their homes according to the United Nations.

⁶⁸ Ethiopia's Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) announced its decision to boycott 2021 elections due to the high levels of arrests and detainments of its members and supporters, including the media mogul and prominent opposition figure Jawar Mohammed, which the party said will make it “extremely hard” for it to run.

⁶⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/19/sudan-ethiopia-border-conflict/>

⁷⁰ The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) criticized the Somali regional state, which said it would not participate in the upcoming elections if the board did not reverse its decision to cancel polling stations in the disputed kebeles between Somali and Afar regional states.

⁷¹ According to many interviewees, this planning document is very "confidential." "It is not a good practice to keep such an important document confidential, as it is the basic document for the implementation of electoral operations on which all stakeholders are aligned. It is not read for public consumption .

Under this background, unquestionably the project is being implemented using a demand-driven approach. Notwithstanding, there is no doubt that in the past months the project has been able to provide considerable technical assistance to NEBE to ensure that credible elections take place and to deliver huge number of activities. The project informed by the lessons learned from the previous electoral processes in Ethiopia is trying its best to avoid NEBE replicating the former electoral mistakes in the upcoming process. The project is performing well under this difficult context, but the nature of the technical assistance slightly deviated to an operational support to the NEBE.

It is questionable whether this significant support was originally foreseen at this level of operational commitment. This poses a reputational risk for the projects and the donors if the outcome of the elections turns wrong⁷² in term of acceptance of the results and credibility of the overall process.

The overall credibility of the electoral process depends on external factors. The electoral process is marred with a lot of uncertainties due to a fast-evolving context. The announcement of NEBE on 15 May to further postpone the elections scheduled for 05 June 2021⁷³ in view of the numerous operational and logistical challenges, in a context increasingly marked by insecurity in certain regions suffering from interethnic tensions causes considerable uncertainty. The last postponements of the elections had contributed to increased tensions between the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Until now, NEBE has not confirmed the new date of the elections.

While the electoral security task force is chaired by the prime minister office and giving regular update, since 2020, an election security expert hired by EURECS is closely monitoring and advising the project on security risks by providing security threat assessments and analysis in order that the project activities operate and develop, unhindered and unrestricted.

It is undeniable that the northern Tigray region and the ongoing war in Tigray and other open conflicts might affect the electoral process.

Even if the project and the EU have tried to maintain their support at technical level⁷⁴, a clear strategy of reputational risk management must be put in place at the EU policy level.

It should be stressed that this risk⁷⁵ is shared with UNDP which is at the front line to support NEBE electoral operations and IFES⁷⁶ that is implementing many trainings in partnership with EURECS.

As well, as per the German cooperation “good understanding needs to be developed among donors what are their influence” in the process.

With elections fast approaching despite the announcement of a delay, NEBE is perceived as structurally independent from the influence of the Government and the conduct of the electoral process is enjoying a certain level of public trust in Ethiopia. As well, the representative of the German donor is very satisfied so far with the

⁷² The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has revoked the legal status of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) as a political party because the TPLF has engaged in armed rebellion and hence can no longer meet the board's criteria for a legal status.

⁷³ Critics say postponing the national vote could cause an adverse social reaction, further fuel regional conflicts, and damage Abiy's democratic credentials.

⁷⁴ This is why they have not been supporting activities which were too political such as the demarcation of the constituencies.

⁷⁵ EURECS project document identified very well the context of the intervention by stating “ Notwithstanding the potential of the reform process to level up Ethiopia’s political and economic future, the reform process will likely be marred by fragile moments that will intensify during stages of the electoral cycle.”

⁷⁶ 28 Feb 2020 :The United States and the National Elections Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) signed a memorandum of understanding for a new \$30.4 million program to support the upcoming national elections. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director Sean Jones and NEBE Chairwoman Birtukan Midekssa jointly unveiled the new USAID Ethiopia Election and Political Processes Program, which will help strengthen the capacity of NEBE officials to organize, administer, and conduct free and fair election.

performance of the project and working with ECES has proved to be very satisfactory for the EU delegation in term of visibility and flexibility.

Channelling funds through ECES to implement support to NEBE is of great added value to the EU delegation. In return, the EUD provides great support to the implementation of the project to overpass smoothly to the challenges encountered.

Project experts have good individual working relationships with people at NEBE. There is an increased and growing level of confidence between NEBE human resources and the project's teams.

It is expected that the post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to support NEBE restructuration process and support the development of NEBE capacities.

EURECS currently is well positioned to address several structural causes that weaken NEBE and provide capacity development after the elections. The current support is an entry point for broader institutional support therefore the post-election period will be crucial for the project to achieve this objective. Some interviewees during the evaluation exercise recommended that the project strengthen its relationship with NEBE, while others, such as the EU, felt that given the uncertainties of the process, it is best for ECES and its partners to remain relatively" discreet "about their current involvement.

UNDP is currently seen as the biggest supporter of NEBE in the conduct of operations therefore at the forefront of the elections.

It is a delicate balance between prudence and visibility.

The recent cancellation of the deployment of the EU Election Observation Mission for the 5 June 2021 legislative elections provides an even more alarming expression of the uncertainties surrounding the electoral process.

The EU High Representative Josep Borrell issued a statement the 3 Mai 2021 stating that despite all efforts provided by the European Union, it was not possible to reach an agreement with Ethiopian authorities on key parameters for the deployment of the mission as conditions were not fulfilled.

"The integrity of an electoral observation mission is a cornerstone of the EUs support for democracy. The EU regrets the refusal of the fulfilment of standard requirements for the deployment of any Electoral Observation Mission, namely the independence of the Mission and the import of mission communication systems, something that is key for the security of EU observers, in particular in the context of a challenging security environment. This situation also impacts election preparations, including voter registration".

Ethiopia's foreign ministry said in a statement it was unfortunate the EU had presented the need to import communication systems as a condition to monitor the vote." As an important strategic partner and staunch supporter of the reform process, this demand by the EU has come as a surprise to the government of Ethiopia, as none of these elements were a bone of contention in past elections," the ministry said.⁷⁷

In this context, the EU encourages the Ethiopian authorities to redouble their efforts to ensure that all Ethiopians can exercise their legitimate political and civil rights, especially as €20 million has been provided through EURECS to the NEBE for the preparation of these elections.

ECES requested instructions to the EU Delegation on how to advance and in the meantime ECES will continue its activities as per project document and budget signed for EURECS and EURECS+

4.2 Lessons learnt & Recommendation.

⁷⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-04/european-union-cancels-election-observer-mission-to-ethiopia>

1. Increasing the flexibility of the Project design

Lessons learned. The context continues to evolve quite rapidly over the weeks. EURECS and its partners must demonstrate more and more adaptability and flexibility and it is challenging. The design would have benefited from being more flexible, both in terms of budget and activity, to quickly adapt to unanticipated NEBE requests.

Recommendation: For future design, providing a more flexible design. The EU suggested that the budget could be drawn up by blocks of activities.

2. Improving the operational plan for future elections

Lessons learned: The last-minute requests to the project increase the cost of elections due to the shortcomings into the planning of electoral operations. NEBE's schedule of activities is not completely settled (A), last-minute requests being sent by the project which are particularly challenging for the financial department which has to make sure that the project is able to deliver upon the request of the NEBE .(B)

Recommendation : Capacity building should be provided to NEBE in the post-election period on electoral operations planning and on logistics planning.

3. Improving internal communication between NEBE partners and ECES various departments

Lessons learned: While the Action is implemented in partnership with GO Innovation and Forum of Federations, it seems that there has not been steering committee (coordination meeting) organized as often as It should. As well weekly meetings which were supposed to take place internally within various ECES departments are not very often taking place currently.

Recommendation :The project will gain if internal communication is enhanced and if steering committees are organized among the three partners . EURECS at management level could design a way for the project to communicate better during the election period and organizing “ standing meetings of 20 minutes “ to support the internal communication.

4. Enhancing the communication between the partners of the NEBE "election sub-group”

Lessons learned: The technical coordination meetings are ensured through an "election sub-group." Less coordination meetings took place in the last weeks at the technical level, weakening the coordination mechanism among partners NEBE.

Recommendation : The Technical and Financial Partners involved in different project supporting NEBE must be aligned and updated on the same level of information's. This is critical. It is advisable that meetings of the electoral subgroups be organized and that the partners jointly go over their work plan and discuss progress and challenges.

5. Supporting the work of the administrative and financial department to avoid bottleneck.

Lessons learned: The most vulnerable aspect of the project's implementation comes from the administrative and financial department, which is suffering from workload during this pre-electoral period. In term of

implementation, this presents a challenge but also a risk for ECES and the project as the NEBE constantly provide to the project last-minute requests.

Recommendation : The project is recommended to monitor this situation and to find a rapid solution should the situation worsen. In the view of the PEV coordinator, this area can be an area of improvement and “it is advisable to hire more support staff until the administrative and financial department is less overloaded. “.

6. Equipment’s provided to NEBE and measures for sustainability.

Lessons learned. As a lot of equipment were purchased by the project and delivered to the NEBE in the constituencies. As mentioned earlier, about 60% of EURECS funding comes from the Federal Republic of Germany which gives a particular attention to the sustainability of the equipment’s.(laptop, printers, generators, vehicles...)

Recommendation It is expected that the equipment’s purchased for the NEBE will be used for future electoral process, in a sustainable approach. EURECS needs to ensure that there is an inventory of the equipment’s and that all equipment’s are used in a proper manner to survive the life of the project.

7. Question mark about NEBE full understanding of what the project can deliver in term of capacity building.

Lessons learned. The project has not reached its delivery potential in terms of capacity building. It is doubtful that NEBE fully understands the level of capability of the project and what it can provide in term of capacity building because at the moment, the project is operating as a supplier of operational support for the upcoming elections. (but there is an inventory it was also requested by the auditor)

Recommendation: The post-election period will be an opportunity for the NEBE to strengthen NEBE's capacity.

8. Post-election period and review of the electoral process

Lessons learned : Based on the findings of electoral observation missions⁷⁸ there is a consensus that the conduct of the electoral process needs to be reviewed after the elections. This review process needs to examine the integrity of the whole electoral process, from voter registration and nomination of candidates through voting, counting, transmission and tallying to dispute resolution and post-election procedures, deals with the role of political parties, observers, the media, civil society and the public at large, and comments on the independence, capacity and functional efficiency of the NEBE.

Recommendation: The post-election period will be an opportunity for the project to organize a post-election evaluation and to conduct an in-depth reflection on the lessons learned by NEBE and its partners... It will focus on lessons learned and best practices acquired during the past months of implementation, but also on bad practices that affect the transparency⁷⁹ of the electoral process⁸⁰

Best practice on project implementation

⁷⁸ It is expected that the report of the election observation mission of the EU experts and other observers will be important to support the review of the electoral process.

⁷⁹ The overall impression is that NEBE's planning instruments were not shared to the extent that they should have been .

⁸⁰ Management style of the chairperson and issue of participative leadership within a structure, poor visibility of the operational plan even for the Partners, delays, miscommunication between various department of NEBE

Liaison between the project and the EUD: One factors that facilitated the successful implementation of EURECS is the excellent relationship between the project and the EU delegation which closely follows the implementation of the project and give support to overcoming challenges.

Security threat assessment in volatile context is part of the due diligence measures in such a project : Since 2020, an election security expert hired by EURECS is closely monitoring and advising the project on security risks by providing security threat assessments in order that the project activities operate and develop, unhindered and unrestricted. This is a best practice in such a political context.

Cost sharing is a sustainable approach: The first months of project implementation was marked by a retroactive period. This period was an opportunity for ECES to reflect on the sharing of certain costs, with the PEV, to minimize the risks involved in the pre-financing period and to maximize the benefit of the implementation of two relevant and complementary projects.

Electoral dashboard is facilitation the task division: For a better coordination of the international support, an electoral dashboard was established at the early stage of the electoral process between EU, UNDP and USAID. The dashboard indicates the main areas of activities where the partners can get involved, and establish a division of tasks, and a preliminary budget based on the added value provided by the major electoral technical assistance partners.

Good interpersonal relations between all partners are supporting project implementation: While there may be institutional competition among the partners working with the electoral commission, it is important to emphasize that good interpersonal relations among the partners is a factor that facilitates task sharing and the implementation of joint activities.

Collaboration between the local team and international experts recruited by the project is strengthening the skills of the local experts in a sustainable approach.

The good collaboration between national and international project experts who rely heavily on their national colleagues to overcome the language barrier is a best practice. It is increasing the skills of the local team in a sustainable approach.

The limited visibility of the project presents an added value in a context of high political sensitivity to limit the reputational risk.

Influenced by its history, NEBE is reluctant to make visible the actions of the project. In Ethiopia, issues of visibility are extremely sensitive when linked to the electoral process because the country has never been under the influence of a foreign country. It is advisable to leave the issues of visibility aside. The strong involvement of the project in the electoral operations present a reputational risk. Minimum visibility acts as a risk mitigation measure

Annex – Evaluation design Matrix

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE OF EVIDENCE	METHODOLOGY
Element assessed	Judgement Criteria	Including baseline and targets where	Documentation Review	Data collection methods /
RELEVANCE	QE1: To what extent does the action address the critical needs of the electoral process in Ethiopia?			
Rationale & design	Extent to how well <u>the strategy of the action</u> has been aligned with the objectives and priorities of the government of Ethiopia and particularly with the democratic reform process.	Beneficiary critical needs clearly identified in formulation studies	Identification/formulation report Project documents EU EOM REPORT	Review of project documentation Review of past EOM reports KII with EUD, ECES, and key beneficiaries as well as the project identification team
	Extent to which the <u>design of the project</u> is aligned with the existing work, priorities of the <u>stakeholder's</u> strategic priorities.	Level of involvement of beneficiaries in action design, consistency of action design with beneficiaries needs, Integration into the action's intervention logic of needs as expressed beneficiaries and in internal needs assessment.	Project documents	
	Relevance of the action to <u>EU policy</u> and strategic priorities in support to democratic governance	Consistency of the action intervention logic with EU policy and strategic objectives in support to the democratic governance in Ethiopia	Project documents EU policy documents	Review of project documentation and EU policy documents
Intervention logic	Extent to which the intervention logic responds to identified needs and key factors in democratic governance	TOC / Intervention Logic addressed key beneficiaries' critical needs & the matching of the needs of the electoral stakeholders. . TOC / Intervention Logic addressed key factors affecting democratic governance	Identification/formulation report Project documents internal needs assessment/EU EOM Baseline surveys (if they exist)	Review of project documentation and identification/formulation reports, key stakeholders as well as project identification team KII with EUD, ECES, CSOS, NEBE & key beneficiaries
	Robustness of the action's Intervention Logic.	Causal links foreseen between inputs, activities, expected results and objectives proved realistic	Intervention Logic (initial) Intervention Logic (revised)	

		through delivery. The scope and complementarity of the action's component were commensurate with expected outcomes. Indicators were adequate to measure progress (S.M.A.R.T.)	Project reporting Monitoring and evaluation reports	
	Validity of assumptions and risks as initially identified	Initial assumptions realised. Adequacy between risk identification including planned mitigation measures and actual obstacles in delivery.	Intervention Logic Project reporting Monitoring and evaluation reports	Review of project documentation, KII with EUD, ECES and key stakeholders as well as project identification team
	Consideration given to Human Rights and Gender Equality issues through all components of the action.	The Intervention Logic promotes a right-based observation. Gender Equality is mainstreamed in the Intervention Logic. Indicators are gender disaggregated where relevant.	Project documents, Formulation Monitoring and evaluation framework	
EU Coherence	Coherence with EU broader support to the democratic governance in Ethiopia	Consistency of objectives with EU broader support Complementarity of Intervention Logic with other actions Frequency of coordination through delivery	Project documents Documentation on other actions Project Reporting	Documentation review KII with EUD, ECES
External Coherence	Coherence of the action design with existing, related interventions by member State and other development partners with other support to democratic governance	Project design took account of existing interventions.	Narrative Reports Training Reports	Review of project documentation and identification/formulation reports with EUD, ECES, UNDP, UN Women, IFES, NDI and other stakeholders providing support to the relevant institutions (NEBE & partners)
	Extent to which there is evidence of synergies and complementarities being created at institutional/Sector level within the other components of the governance project	Existence of coordination mechanisms/forums Effectiveness of coordination mechanisms/forums Frequency of coordination through delivery	Project formulation reports Project documents Documentation on other interventions	

CRITERIA	EVA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE OF EVIDENCE	METHODOLOGY
EFFECTIVENESS		QE2: To what extent are the interventions of the project supporting the development of the capacities of the Election board and key electoral stakeholders and in which key area? What are the main challenges and enabling factors?			
Delivery of the Project component 1		Extent to which the interventions of the project are supporting the development of NEBE 's leadership and strategic management capacity.	Evidence that the project is supporting the development of NEBE leadership and strategic management capacity. -trainings of staff at national and regional levels -advisory services - technical support in the implementation of strategic interventions	Desk review, NEBE reports EOM reports from Local and International observers Media reports, Project Documents, narrative reports, financial reports, EU EOM reports, EOMs reports, political party and other stakeholder reports, training report, outreach material, manual delivered.	KIIs with the Project team, review of the interim narrative report 1, interview with NEBE board members and staff.
Delivery of the Project component 2	Extent to which the interventions of the project are supporting the development of NEBE's institutional and technical capacity.	Evidence that the project is supporting the development of NEBE's institutional and technical capacity. (effective mapping of polling stations through GIS, technical support in key intervention, financial support, logistical support to equip NEBE.;			
Delivery of the Project component 3	Extent to which the interventions of the project are supporting the strengthening of NEBE 's capacity <u>to liaise with external stakeholders to increase the inclusivity</u> of the electoral process	Evidence that the project is supporting the strengthening of NEBE's capacity to liaise with external stakeholders to increase the inclusivity of the electoral process. (consultative sessions and constructive dialogue between NEBE and Key Electoral Stakeholders -CSO's, the media, political parties, the judiciary...)			
Level of preparedness of the Electoral board due to level of delivery	Extend to which the Election board has been adequately equipped by the Project to perform its core mandate of delivering credible elections	Evidence that the Election board has been adequately equipped by the Project to deliver credible elections for the next elections / possible shortcoming identified regarding NEBE current capacity.			
The impact of changing	Extend to which the Project can adjust to the changing circumstances and	Evidence of the project adaptation to changing circumstances (COVID-19 crisis, state of	Narrative reports Steering committee reports		

circumstances on the delivery of activities	particularly measurement of the postponement of the election on some of the activities jointly implemented between ECES and the NEBE staff.	emergency, postponement of the elections.). Existence of a <u>of a risk management strategy</u> . Evaluation of the impacts of the changing circumstances on the Project implementation . Impact of the postponement of the elections on the delivery of the <u>on-the-job training for key NEBE staff</u> .	Log frame	KIIs with project staff, EUD and ECES
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CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE - mean of verification	METHODOLOGY
EFFICIENCY & value for money	QE3: To what extent the resources mobilized to support the development of the activities of the project are cost effective and present value for money?			
Use of Resources	Extent to which <u>the staff mobilized</u> to support the development of the activities are contributing to an optimization of the resources.	Sufficient number of staff allocated to the project, quality of the staff and the experience.	Financial and narrative reports Original budget	Robust desk review of the project documentation including financial reports and narrative reports KIIs with project staff KIIs with the ECES/other implementing partners and EUD, steering committee members
	Extent to which the monetary investment and other resources in the interventions conducted by ECES represents sensible <u>value for money</u> in comparison with previous EU- funded projects in support to democratic process in Ethiopia.	Evidence that the monetary investment and other resources in the interventions conducted by ECES represents sensible value for money. (for example, funds dedicated to activities compared to human resource/management costs)	Financial and narrative reports Original budget	
	Extent to which <u>the rate of delivery</u> and issuance of the budget were timely and sufficiently effective to achieve the planned results.	Expenditure of the overall budget each year is in line with scale and scope of expected results. Number of delays in activities due to be delayed spending of budget	Financial and narrative reports Annual Work Plans	
	Extent to which bottlenecks or challenges existed and hindered resources being used appropriately.	The budget and workplans were approved on a regular basis and in line with the workplans. Established work plans are delivered on time and implemented	Annual work Plans Narrative Reports	
	Extent to which the	Governance/management mechanism	Steering Committee Meetings	

Organisational efficiency	<u>management/governance mechanisms</u> established are sufficient to oversee the programmatic and financial management of the intervention.	established and adhered to, efficient oversight of project.	Narrative Reports Financial Reports	
	Extent to which are workplans realistic and are they <u>delivered in a timely manner.</u>	Feasible workplans are developed and implemented, workplans are considered realistic and relevant. workplans are developed and approved on time	Financial and Narrative Reports Training Reports Annual Workplans	
Monitoring Efficiency	Extent to which <u>the log frame was utilised</u> to guide implementation and as a monitoring tool.	Baselines, indicators and targets were established. Results based management reporting was utilised, the existence of a monitoring and evaluation framework	Narrative reports Log Frame	Desk review including Log frame, desk review of narrative reports KIIs with ECES, EUD, and IOS
	Extent to which the project management put in place mechanisms to monitor <u>the impact of the intervention on women and</u> other groups.	Evidence of disaggregated reporting on results Reference to gender and the progress made in the narrative reports.	Intervention Logic Narrative Reports	Robust desk review of the project documentation, log frame KIIs with project staff, ECES and EUD and IPs
	Extent to which <u>the reporting</u> on the implementation of donor assistance was adequate.	Adherence to the templates established at the beginning of the mission	Narrative reports Templates	Project documentation, log frame KIIs with project staff, EUD and ECES
Local Partnership & cost effectiveness	The extent to which <u>the partnership</u> between ECES and its local partners represents an added value for the <u>implementation of the Project.</u>	Evidence of the added value of ECES local partners (the Forum of Federations ⁸¹ (FoF) and GO Innovation ⁸²) for the <u>implementation of the activities of the Project.</u>	Narrative reports, training reports, annual workplans	Project documentation, log frame KIIs with project staff, EUD and ECES
Synergies with NEBE 's partners	Extend to which <u>synergies are established</u> among partners working with NEBE (IFES -UNDP, UN Women, NDI)	Evidence of synergies between ECES and NEBE 's partners, Joint activities ECES together with UNDP (Voter Education and Public Outreach Strategy (POS) common approach	Narrative reports, training reports, annual workplans	KIIs with project staff, EUD and ECES, IFES , UNDP , UN Women ..

⁸¹ <http://www.forumfed.org/>

⁸² <https://go-innovation.com/>

		between; NEBE, ECES, UNDP, contribution to the team working on gender and inclusion.)		
Synergies with other actions	Extend to which synergies are established among stakeholders working <u>in the thematic of democratic governance in the country.</u>	Evidence of synergies with other actions funded by the EU/ cost effectiveness / Collaboration between the projects.	Narrative reports, training reports, annual workplans	KIIs with project staff, EUD and ECES, IFES, UNDP , UN Women , International IDEA.

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE OF EVIDENCE	METHODOLOGY
IMPACT	QE4: Is there any evidence that the project's actions to date have had a positive effect on the credibility and transparency of the electoral process?			
Long term Impact	Extent to which the action contributes to supporting <u>Ethiopia reform process</u> towards consolidating democracy	Evidence that the Action contributes to support Ethiopia reform process towards consolidating democracy	Narrative Reports Project Documentation Electoral observation reports Policy papers	Data from desk review of project documentation/narrative reports KIIs with the ECES and donor, IPs and other key beneficiaries
Medium Term Impact	Extent to which the actions conducted through the project are contributing to increase the positive perception of NEBE as independent, credible and effective institution.	Evidence that the support provided to the National Electoral Board is contributing to increase the positive perception of the NEBE seen as independent, credible, and effective institution.		
	Extent to which the actions conducted through the project are contributing to increase the positive perception of the electoral process with more inclusiveness, transparency, credibility.	Evidence that the support provided to the National Electoral Board is contributing to increase the positive perception of the electoral process with more inclusiveness, transparency, credibility, public trust.		
	Extent to which the actions conducted through the project are contributing to <u>peace, security and the prevention of conflicts</u> related to the implementation of the electoral process in Ethiopia	Evidence that the support provided to the National Electoral Board is contributing to a certain extent to peace, security and the <u>prevention of conflicts</u> related to the implementation of the electoral process in Ethiopia		
	Extent to which the intervention increases and enhance <u>the participation of vulnerable groups, women, youth, persons with disabilities</u> and minority groups to the electoral process	Evidence that women, youth, persons with disabilities and minority groups are increasing their participation to the electoral process		
	Extent to which the <u>intervention has been a starting point for a paradigm shift in the</u> conduct of elections in the country.	Evidence that the support provided to the National Electoral Board has been a starting point for a <u>paradigm shift in</u> the conduct of elections in the country. .		

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE OF EVIDENCE	METHODOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY	QE5: To what extent are beneficiaries taking ownership of the project? Will they be able to sustain the results of the action (programmatically, politically, and financially)?			
	Extent to which the NEBE and electoral stakeholders are endorsing the results of the interventions	Evidence that the capacity development support is endorsed and promoted by the NEBE and the other stakeholders.	Narrative Reports Former evaluations of the action Quality and number of material produced and disseminated / added value of the material provided.	KIIS with ECES, and key beneficiaries as well as external actors Desk review of relevant documentation
	Extent to which the action supports the production of sustainable elements such as guidelines, manuals etc which will support NEBE 'e electoral operations beyond the Project and forthcoming electoral cycles	Evidence that the technical assistance hired for the project is transferring knowledge, skills and material to the beneficiary's institutions which will be used beyond the Project and forthcoming electoral cycles		

CRITERIA	EVALUATION QUESTION	INDICATORS	SOURCE OF EVIDENCE	METHODOLOGY
GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS	QE6: To what extent does the intervention address issues of human rights, women's inclusion, equality, and women's empowerment? (Project design, implementation, management)			
General right based approach	Extent to which the action is ensuring that gender issues and participation of <u>vulnerable/disadvantaged groups is mainstreamed</u>	Evidence of NEBE's enhanced capacity to mainstream gender issues in the electoral process, space allocated to gender and vulnerable/disadvantage groups participation to the electoral process	Narrative Reports Training Reports	training reports KIIS with key stakeholders
Right- based approach monitored	Extent to which gender and youth issues and participation of vulnerable/disadvantaged groups are being monitored by the Project.	Evidence that the rights-based approach is been <u>monitored by the Project</u> ;	Narrative Reports Training Reports Monitoring reports	Desk review of documentation including EOM reports. KIIs with ECES, UN Women, CSOs, Women's Groups, EISA
Right- based approach identified	Extent to which the <u>rights-based approach</u> has been considered in the <u>identification/formulation</u> documents of the Project	Evidence that the rights-based approach is been reflected <u>in the identification/</u> formulation of the Action	Narrative reports Training Reports Monitoring reports	Desk review to ascertain if reference has been made.
Right- based approach implemented	Extent to which the <u>rights-based approach</u> is been implemented during the development of the Project.	Evidence that the rights-based approach is been reflected <u>in the implementation</u> of the Action	Narrative Reports Training Reports Monitoring reports	Desk review of documentation including EOM reports. KIIs with ECES, UN Women, CSOs, Women's Groups

Methodology: Gradually tracking the results and assess the validity of the theory of change

OECD/DAC and EU specific evaluation criteria

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with OECD/DAC and EU specific evaluation criteria namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact (DAC) and coherence/complementarity, and Community value added.

1. **Relevance:** assesses the extent to which the overall and specific objectives of the project are consistent with Ethiopian and EC's policies and needs.
2. **Effectiveness:** assesses to what extent the project results have been attained and the project specific objective achieved or is expected to be achieved. The rating is based on the type of outputs and outcomes in terms of quality and quantity as well as of their direct and indirect contribution to the achievement of the envisaged results and objectives.
3. **Efficiency:** the parameter used to measure whether the project activities have achieved the planned results hence to determine how economically inputs are converted into outputs. This assessment considers both the choice of instruments and the resources used. Efficiency has also to do with the appropriateness of the planning mechanisms, the suitability of the organizational structure in terms of cost-efficiency.
4. **Sustainability:** assesses whether the results from interventions are likely to continue in the long term; the parameter relates to whether the positive outcomes of the project and the flow of benefits are likely to continue after external funding or non-funding support interventions
5. **Impact:** assesses the contribution to the wider policy or sector objectives the difference made through the implementation of activities will be measured at the outcome and result level, also as a basis to orientate future interventions, optimize resources allocation to Project budget and work plans, support an implementation and reporting of activities and relating financial records according to the M&E established framework.

In compliance with the standard DAC and EU evaluation criteria, the evaluation process tracked the performances of the programme i.e. the intervention logic, activities, outputs, and the sequence of outcomes against the results framework.

An attention was given to assess the manner that cross cutting issues were taken into consideration into the identification/ formulation of the programme and to which extent they have been reflected in the implementation of the Action and if desirable effects were produced.

Lines of Evidence

Desk Review: The desk work portion of the evaluation will be done by the evaluator and in preparation for the development of the Preliminary Findings and the final report; Statistical data, public opinion surveys and analytical reports will also be used where available to gain supplemental information on electoral and political attitudes, practices, and knowledge.

The evaluator will review the most relevant documents relating to the electoral process and election administration in Ethiopia. This should include election observer reports from recent elections, political analyses, opinion poll data on the electoral process, the NEBE strategic plan, the government's development plan, and available project progress reports.

KIIs: Given the limited amount of time to conduct the evaluation, the consultant has endeavoured to identify a wide array of stakeholders to reflect the complexity and the achieved results of the

action. the KIIS will be tailored to the given stakeholder and it will be normal practice that the emphasis of the questions will differ according to the stakeholder. The evaluator will seek to obtain: i) Facts and information for the verification of facts; ii) Opinions and perspectives; iii) Analyses; iv) Suggestions and v) Reactions to the evaluator's hypotheses and conclusions.

Particular attention will be given to the management challenges, time/sanitary-political constraints, causes for delays in recruitments and procurement (if there is), the possible remedial actions that were undertaken, and the structural questions on partnerships, coordination among Projects, coordination between NEBE's technical partners, and management structures emerging from these management challenges.

Most of the interviews will be conducted through face-to-face contact. All interviews will be transcribed, coded and sorted according to the type of stakeholder and under each evaluation question. The stakeholder mapping foresees a wide variety of interlocutors and the consultant will strive for gender balance, where possible, and ensure a wide range of interlocutors in order to garner information on the gender and human rights responsiveness of the action. The evaluation will ensure a participatory approach, and ensure that all ethical standards are adhered to, ensuring the principle of “do no harm”. When analysing the information obtained, the consultant will ensure that the implementation of a rights-based approach is examined at all stages of the action.

Synthesis of the data

Phases of the evaluation and their content

The following table presents an overview of the key activities to be conducted during each phase (not necessarily in chronological order) and lists the deliverables to be produced by the evaluator, including the key meetings with the Contracting Authority (ECES).

The evaluation process will be carried out in 3 phases: An Inception Phase, a Field phase in Addis Ababa and a Synthesis Phase (consolidation of findings).

Phases of the evaluation	Key activities	Deliverables and meetings	Working days
Inception Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial document/data collection, literature review Direct engagement with the leadership and management team of the project & initial interviews Definition of methods of analysis Background analysis Reconstruction of Intervention Logic and description of Theory of Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inception report. Meetings with ECES/EU-JDID representatives 	6 working days From the 22/02 till the 1/03/2021
Field Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remote interviews at country level with key stakeholders Gathering of primary evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field Note Slide Presentation Remote debriefing 	7 working days From the 4 /03 till the 12/03/2021

	<p>with the use of the most appropriate techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection and analysis 	with ECES and partners	
Synthesis phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final analysis of findings (with focus on the Evaluation Questions) • Formulation of the overall assessment, conclusions, and recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Final Report • Slide presentation 	7 days

The data collection toolkit that will be utilised during both the field phase and it will include the collection of quantitative as well as qualitative data/information. The Evaluation Matrix referred to in Annex II illustrates how the data/information collected with the use of individual tools will be gathered. As aforementioned, the theory of change and the evaluation matrix using the OECD/DAC criteria plus one criterion are central to the overall evaluation framework. The various data collection tools will form the different lines of evidence for exploring each of the EQs to evaluate the overall cause and effects of the inputs, activities, and outputs, outcomes and impacts.

The evaluators will thus use a mixed-method research design combining the data collection methods emanating from both primary and secondary data and a variety of data collection methods to gather the information needed to conduct the work. The evaluation will hence be informed by two lines of evidence: (1) A comprehensive desk review of both the project documentation and relevant literature pertaining to ECES (2) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted in the field.

List of stakeholders met from the 3 of March till the 13 of March 2021 – Addis Ababa

PMU

Mr David Le Notre: ECES Representative
 Mr Franck Balme: ECES Coordinator
 Mr Zefanias Matsimbe: Electoral Training Expert
 Mr Steadman Harrison: Senior capacity development Expert -GoInnovation
 MR Maeregu Habtemariam: Electoral Advisor - Forum of Federation
 Mrs Melete Gebregiorgis: Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
 Dr. Shimels Sisay Belete: Civic and voter education and inclusion expert
 Mrs Sisay Melese: Senior political parties' expert
 Mrs Aytnew Debebe: Senior legal expert
 Mrs Rinday -PEV (Zimbabwe)

Donor

Mr Erik Habers: Chief of Cooperation EUD
 Mr Micharl Pulichino: Team Leader Governance - EUD
 Mrs Daniela Forte: Project Manager -EUD
 Mrs Laura Schmidt: Head of Development Cooperation - German Embassy

Beneficiary

Mrs Bizuwork Ketete(board member)
 Dr Getahun (Ex NEBE board member)

Electoral Assistance Partners:

Mrs Costanza Lucangeli: Chief Technical Advisor UNDP

Mrs Rakeb Abate: IFES Country Director