

NATIONAL ELECTION BOARD OF ETHIOPIA
ELECTORAL SPECIAL MEASURES
IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 and SCENARIOS
Presented for the Council for Constitutional Inquiry

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL BOARD OF ETHIOPIA

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) was established under the Ethiopian constitution with the mandate to conduct free and fair elections at federal and regional levels. The board implements the roles and responsibilities entrusted upon it by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia Establishment Proclamation, Proclamation 1133/2019 and the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, Proclamation 1162/2019. Among its roles and responsibilities, the main one is organizing all types of elections in the country, including referendums.

Since its establishment, the NEBE has organized a total of five general elections, four local elections, six referendums, and various bi-elections across the country. It is to be recalled that, in regards to the general elections that were scheduled for 29 August, 2020, the Board had developed and announced to the public its operational plan and electoral calendar.

On the basis of this plan, the Board was preparing to conduct voter registration for 30 days, candidate registration for 14 days, political campaigning for 90 days, and voter education for 121 days. Additionally, the Board had plans to accommodate 1,500 voters at each polling station.

To this end, the Board was preparing to do the following:

- Engage 50 million voters;
- Establish 50, 000 polling stations; and
- Recruit, train and dispatch 250, 000 election officials.

The focus areas in the Board's preparation were to:

1. Secure budget needed to conduct an election that is of international standards from the government and international donor organizations;
2. Finalize procurement of election materials to be used for voter registration at the 50 thousand polling stations;
3. Publish documents and materials for voter registration that were translated into five national languages – Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Afari, Somali, and Tigrigna languages;
4. Store election documents and materials in a sufficiently secured storage space;
5. Gather information from various institutions on the recruitment of election officials;
6. Prepare and digitalize and make public an electoral map showing the various constituencies;
7. Ensure/ verify that information on polling stations is gathered through GIS technology and that identified spaces are ready to conduct the election;
8. Establish regional branch offices and coordinate with the respective regions for assistance;
9. Finalise developing strategy for training of election officials, and finalize preparation to provide the trainings;
10. Draft 28 directives needed to implement the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, Proclamation 1162/2019;
11. Hold consultations with representatives of political parties, civil societies, and the media on 12 draft directives;
12. Develop strategy documents for voter education, and prepare to provide voter education in five national languages - Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Afari, Somali, and Tigrigna;
13. Prepare a list of the requirements to be fulfilled by political parties to be registered under the new proclamation, communicate these requirements with all political parties, and assess documents submitted by parties;

14. Conduct continued discussion and consultation with civil societies and other stakeholders.

While the activities listed above were underway, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Ethiopia on 13 March, following which on 16 March the government imposed the first 14-day social distancing measures to contain the virus on 16 March. The NEBE swiftly moved to assess the impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 and related government-imposed restrictions on election operations. This assessment is part of the ongoing work of the NEBE to review operational planning in light of the COVID-19 situation.

Based on the initial findings of the assessment, the board conducted a consultation with political parties on 20 March, 2020. The assessment looked at the global trend of the COVID-19 pandemic, national contexts, inputs from public health experts, and the types of restrictive measures imposed to contain the spread of the virus, and how these could impact the scheduled general elections.

Accordingly, the assessment developed two scenarios, in which the first scenario predicted that conducting the election as per the initial timeline would be possible if the social distancing measures imposed in the country were to be lifted within two weeks. However, the second scenario predicted that conducting the election as per the electoral calendar would not be possible if the social distancing measures were to extend beyond the initial 2-weeks period. In addition to the restrictive measures imposed by regional governments, the NEBE considered inputs from public health experts and decided that it would not be possible to conduct the elections per the electoral calendar.

At the time, the NEBE notified the House of People's Representatives on its decision and its plan to re-assess the situation, to develop another operational plan and electoral calendar, and to resume its operations once the pandemic is under control, while continuing to work on other activities less affected by the outbreak of the virus in the interim.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

After announcing the suspension of electoral operations on 31 March, the NEBE, in parallel, established business continuity plans, ensured communication protocols, and reprioritized work for the interim period. The NEBE focused on maintaining regular communications with electoral stakeholders regarding its continued work on the upcoming elections.

Some of the activities that are ongoing following the cancelation of the electoral calendar are:

1. Build a database that allows digitising of voter registration and will be used to prepare for voting on election day;
2. Build a database that allows digitising registration of candidate information
3. Build a database that allows digitising information on agents of candidates, civil society observers, accredited media groups;
4. Evaluate and pass decisions on political parties that have submitted documents required for registration;
5. Procure materials needed for election day; accordingly, the purchase of secret ballot boxes, marking inks, and stationery items has been finalized and is in transit into the country.
6. Provide an additional storage space for election day materials (which has been finalized)
7. Evaluate documents which will be used to accredit civil society organisations that will be conducting voter education;
8. Procure materials needed to conduct media monitoring in five languages - Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Afari, Somali, and Tigrigna;
9. Recruit qualified professionals who will be conducting media monitoring; and
10. Conduct an initial assessment on the establishment of a media center (finalised)

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE DIRECTIONS OF ELECTION OPERATIONS THE NEBE COULD TAKE IN THE FUTURE

The NEBE is conducting an ongoing work to review its operational planning in light of the COVID-19 situation. It is known that measures taken to respond to the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic have posed challenges to the overall electoral operations. Particularly, in the Ethiopian context, the challenges are salient because key phases of the electoral process - notably voter registration, candidate registration and polling – are conducted in-person with minimal use of technology. Given the magnitude of the operation, the available infrastructure and the security and development environment in the country, the situation is not at all conducive to use options used in other countries such as on-line voter registration, postal voting, e-voting, etc.

NEBE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In order to visualize the future direction, it will take the NEBE is conducted it in three parts. The first part of the assessment looked at risks and identified mitigating measures while the second part, which is captured in this report, looked at the financial and operational implications of mitigating measures. The third step will focus on consultation with national and international stakeholders that the NEBE plans to conduct.

ASSUMPTIONS MADE DURING THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

While assessing the future of the general elections in light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the NEBE considered risks, impacts and responses related to the outbreak and electoral operations. Based on these assumptions, the board presented the challenges in two sections as indicated below. The first section outlines the general assumptions that relate to the two scenarios developed by NEBE. The second section outlines one set of assumptions that relate exclusively to scenario two.

General assumptions:

1. Stakeholders that are not typically involved in operational planning will become key stakeholders. These include national health authorities, experts (epidemiologists, etc.), and international organizations such as the World Health Organization;
2. The time needed to implement the different phases of the electoral process might increase;
3. Disruption of the supply chain might increase costs for required goods and services;
4. Budget allocation from the government might be limited and there might be challenges in securing additional funds from international partners;
5. The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 might increase social tension and economic hardship, which could increase the risk of electoral violence;

Assumptions related to a persistent and increased spread of COVID-19:

6. A certain level of social distancing and limitations on size of gatherings might still be enforced during the period of implementation of electoral operations;
7. A post COVID-19 environment will necessitate the introduction of new measures and standards as part of election operations (for example, the use of personal protection equipment, sanitizer, disinfection of premises, etc.);
8. Amendment of the legal framework for elections to allow the implementation of special measures might be necessary;
9. Fear of COVID-19 might impact the level of participation of citizens;

10. Certain segments of the population might comparatively be more affected by the virus and related public health measures than others, which will negatively impact inclusivity.

THE TWO SCENARIOS

On the basis of the assumptions detailed above, the Board has developed two scenarios that imply different timelines/calendars. These two scenarios could be altered by different new developments that may occur in the future.

Scenario One

In this scenario, the NEBE must conduct elections without implementing additional special measures and the assumptions listed under section two do not apply. Nevertheless, the suspension of elections and the declaration of the state of emergency (SoE) will have had an impact on the capacity of the NEBE. Moreover, the capacity of other national authorities that support election operations will be limited and their focus diverted due to their nationwide pandemic-related field operations. This will diminish the support the NEBE will get from these authorities.

NEBE estimates that two months are required for national authorities to resume their support to electoral operations. Additionally, the NEBE will incur additional expenses because of the extension of the overall timeline. The additional costs will mostly be related to enhanced voter education and logistic.

Accordingly, major election activities will be impacted in the following manner:

Organizational: Additional time will be needed to fully resume organizational work. It will take **60 days** to secure national authorities' full support to and focus on election operations as well as to make elections the main national agenda.

Voter registration and candidate registration: In this scenario, there will be a need to conduct enhanced voter education campaign during the voter registration period. This is to be done because, although there will no longer be a threat from the pandemic, there will be a need to conduct voter education geared towards alleviating fear among voters so as to prevent voter turnout from being impacted by fear. As a result of the cancellation of the electoral calendar, NEBE will incur additional costs related to warehouse storage and additional content in voter education. Voter registration will also need to be conducted separately from candidate registration. In total, this activity will take **76 days**.

Campaign: Political parties will have been unable to reach and organize their supporters due to COVID 19-related restrictions. Therefore, parties will need a longer period of time to campaign. For this reason, campaigning will take a total of **102 days**.

Polling and Counting: To prevent low voter turnout on election day and ensure overall full participation of voters, additional voter-education concerning COVID-19 will be needed. Additional budget will be needed for this.

In scenario one, the total additional budget needed to organize elections will be 139,349,918 Ethiopian birr. In USD, this is \$4, 098,527. The period needed for preparations will be ten months.

Scenario Two

In the second scenario, it is assumed that COVID 19 will continue to be present in or affect Ethiopia and NEBE will organize elections under some restrictions. The postponement of elections and the declaration of the SOE will have impacted the capacity of the Board and national authorities to support electoral operations. Moreover, because other national authorities will be preoccupied with responding to COVID 19, the capacity and resources available for electoral operations will be reduced.

The implementation of special measures will have the impact of lengthening the election timeline (for voter registration, candidate registration, campaign and printing of ballot papers). Moreover, it will have a major impact on the budget.

Accordingly, major election activities will be impacted in the following manner.

Organizational: Additional time will be needed to re-engage all authorities involved in supporting elections and re-establish a coordination mechanism including with additional health authorities and professionals that will need to support and participate in the process. In light of this, an additional **90 days** is required to identify activities that should be prioritized and to prepare and adopt health-related laws and directives.

Voter registration: Because health protocols will require preparations for voter registration to be conducted at a smaller scale and this in turn will necessitate the training of trainers and election officers to be conducted in small number and over a prolonged period.

The number of voters that can be registered at each polling station will need to be limited to 1000. As a result, the number of polling stations will increase by 10,000; additional time and money will be needed for training; and additional procurement of election materials will be needed. There will also be a need to recruit and train additional election officers for these additional 10,000 polling stations. This means that on top of the election officers envisaged previously, an addition 30,000 election officers will be needed.

During voter registration, there will be need to provide PPE for election officers and sanitization provisions for prospective voters. In addition to election officers, each polling station will need one additional person to enforce health-related restrictions, and this increases the number of election officers per each station to four. As a result, the manpower needed will increase from 180,000 to 240,000.

To respect social distancing, the voter registration period will need to increase from 40 days to 45 days. Packing of voter registration materials will also need to be done respecting social distancing and as such the period for packing will also increase. Including all the above, voter registration will require **55 days**.

Candidate registration: During candidate registration, Board employees and candidates will require PPE. To prevent overcrowding, candidate registration will be conducted after the completion of voter registration. Overall, this will require **21 days**.

Campaign: Political parties will have been unable to reach and organize their supporters due to COVID-19-related restrictions. Therefore, parties will need a longer period of time to campaign. For this reason, campaigning will take a total of **128 days**.

Polling and Counting: On election day, in addition to five election officers, two additional persons will be required (to enforce health-related restrictions and to manage queues). In total seven officers will be needed for each polling station. This means that, including the 10,000 additional polling stations required in this scenario, a total of 420,000 election officers will be required.

Moreover, on election day, there will be a need to provide PPE for these election officers and sanitization provisions (alcohol/sanitizer) for voters at all polling stations.

There will be a need to procure election materials for the additional polling stations as well as to conduct voter education that has a very wide coverage on how to vote without being exposed to COVID-19. In the interest of ensuring the integrity of the elections, voting will be conducted in one day, while complying with safeguard measures.

Conducting the above indicated activities under the second scenario where elections will be conducted by NEBE along with COVID-19-related restrictions will require an additional budget of 2,512,926,536 Ethiopian birr (\$73, 909,604) and a total of 13 months.

While the NEBE has considered different issues when developing these scenarios, it will in

addition consult with and gather inputs from main stakeholders (political parties, government authorities directly or indirectly concerned with the matter as well as civil society organizations) [while implementing the scenarios]. These inputs might affect the implementation of these scenarios. Beyond this, should issues that were not included in the scenarios emerge in the future, election operations will need to take account of them as well. Therefore, we respectfully ask that while considering this briefing, the CCI recognize that the practical implementation [of these scenarios] could be altered on the basis of inputs from other entities.

ANNEX TABLES ON SCENARIOS

Scenario 1 – COVID19-related restrictions will be required					
Key Election Process	Impact on Activities	Legal Considerations	Budget Implication	Timeline Implications	
Organizational	Additional time required: Re-engaging all entities involved in supporting elections: re-establishing coordination mechanism –identifying and managing competing priorities for national authorities	None	\$50,000	2.5 months relaunch time	
Voter Registration	Extended timeline results in longer-term and greater volume of warehouse storage requirements	None	\$2,000,000	Some additional days for packing of voter registration materials considering limiting measures and social distancing requirements	
	Enhanced voter education campaign: Wider coverage, deeper penetration and enhanced messaging to include COVID-19 messaging	Improving training manuals and materials	\$1,000,000	Election campaign duration to remain the same	
Candidate Registration		None			
Campaign	Because of COVID-19 restrictions, political parties’ will have been unable to campaign and organize voters, therefore a longer campaign period will be required	If there are special requirements in government’s health protocols,	0	Longer campaign period to enhance inclusivity while following health protocols	

		there might be need to make changes in directives to accommodate these requirements			
Polling and Counting	Enhanced voter education campaign: to have wider coverage, deeper penetration and enhanced messaging to include COVID-19 messaging	Additional advertisements and airing time required	\$1,000,000	None	

Scenario 2 - Managed COVID19: special measures required					
Key Election Process	Impact on Activities	Legal Considerations	Budget Implication	Timeline Implications	
Organizational	Additional time required: Re-engaging all entities involved in supporting elections and re-establishing coordination mechanism	None	\$100,000	3 months	
	Identifying and prioritizing issues that should be prioritized by national authorities				
	Engaging relevant actors in relation to COVID-19 (such as epidemiologists and health authorities) to discuss in detail the planning process	None	\$20,000		

Voter Registration	Increase in number of trainings days because of smaller sessions and more trainees	None	\$5,700,000	30 days of training
	Limit the number of voters per polling station to 1,000: Increase number of polling stations (10,000 additional stations); procurement of additional training and operational material	Change in directives may be required	\$1,670,000	2-month time for procurement and delivery of materials (part of relaunch period)
	PPE requirements/protective measures for voter registration staff and sanitization measures for prospective voters	Inclusion of protection measures in directives	\$11,300,000	2-month time for procurement and delivery of materials (part of relaunch period)
	Extension of voter registration (15 days) to limit overcrowding: Longer employment contracts, preparing additional staff for queue management and to man increased number of stations	Change in directives may be required	\$40,000,000	15 days extension: 45 days of voter registration and 10 days for display
	Suspension of elections resulted in longer term storage requirements, additional space and establishment of safety protocols for warehouse management services	None	\$2,100,000	Some additional days for packing considering restrictive measures and social distancing requirements
	Enhanced voter education campaign: wider coverage, deeper penetration and enhanced messaging to include COVID-19 content	Liaise with health authorities to evaluate requirements to amend directives	\$1,500,000	Longer duration of voter education campaign: to start at least 30 days before the start of voter registration and then to continue during the 45 days voter registration and 10-day display period

Candidate Registration	PPE for NEBE staff and candidates during candidate registration period	Changes in directives may be required in case government health safety protocols have specific requirements	\$48,527	To avoid congestion, candidate registration will start after the completion of voter registration	
Campaign	Because of COVID-19 restrictions, political parties will have been unable to campaign and organize voters , therefore a longer campaign period will be required	Changes in directives may be required in case government health safety protocols have specific requirements	0	Longer campaign period to enhance inclusivity while following health protocols	
Polling & Counting	An additional 10,000 polling stations: additional staff (including 2 queue controllers)	Changes in directives may be required in case government health safety protocols have specific requirements - such as inking etc.	\$6,400,000	None	
	PPE requirements/protective measures for polling staff and sanitization measures for prospective voters	Incorporating health measures in directives	\$2,097,600	None	
	An additional 10,000 polling stations: additional polling and counting materials required	None	\$1,474,477	None	
	Enhanced voter education campaign: to have wider coverage, deeper penetration, and enhanced messaging to include COVID-19 messaging for the general public and vulnerable groups	Additional advertisements and airing time required	\$1,500,000	None	