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A NEWSLETTER ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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Promoting Greater Civic Awareness and Participation in Zambia

Southern University Partnership Led Civic and Media Initiatives

by Gloria Braxton

When USAID’s five-year Democratic Governance Project (DGP) in Zambia ended in September 1997, the country had made progress on its path to democratic transition, but challenges remain. The \$15 million project was initiated in September 1992, and in 1994, because of the increasing complexity of the project, Southern University—the largest historically black land grant university in the United States—was brought on board to help implement the DGP. Southern University established a Project Administration Unit (PAU) to help manage the DGP and assist its democracy and governance advisor.

The overall purpose of the DGP was to promote accountable government in Zambia. The project’s objective was to make public decision-making more accessible and effective by enhancing the involvement of citizens and their representatives, making public policy consistent with stated goals, and strengthening the media. Project activities were designed around four strategic areas:

- Civil Rights Promotion—increasing citizen awareness of civil rights through civic education, and supporting the constitutional reform process;
- Media Independence—enabling independent and professional journalism;
- Legislative Performance—enhancing legislative performance of the National Assembly; and
- Cabinet Office Policy Implementation—coordinating policy implementation in the Cabinet office.

Southern University’s PAU managed the civic education and media independence components of the project, while USAID/Zambia managed the constitutional reform and the Cabinet policy components. The legislative performance aspect of the project was suspended because of difficulties over the scope of activities to be undertaken.

To promote constitutional reform, USAID and other donors supported the Constitutional Review Commission to

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Ghana’s Electoral Commission Provides Regional Model

by René Lemarchand

Set against the backdrop of blocked, aborted, flawed, and contested elections in west and central Africa from 1992 to the present, Ghana’s is a remarkable success story. The country has successfully crossed the threshold of free and fair transitional elections and, even more significantly, developed political institutions capable of responding effectively to post-electoral challenges.

Political institutions alone do not explain why the prospects for democratic consolidation are brighter in Ghana than

elsewhere in Africa, for without a shared commitment between the state and the governed to make them work, political institutions are like empty shells. Whether a specific institution can help consolidate democracy depends as much on its capacity to adapt to change as on the skills and commitment of political actors.

These are two of lessons learned from the performance of Ghana’s Electoral Commission (EC). Enshrined in the 1992 constitution to replace the largely discredited National Commission for Democracy (NCD)—itself set up a decade earlier by the Provisional National Defense Council to accelerate the march towards a “true democracy”—the EC’s constitutional mandate now extends far beyond the ballot box.

On top of its more technical functions, including compiling the voters’ register, demarcating electoral boundaries, and conducting public elections and referendums, the EC is

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expected “to educate the people on the electoral process and its purpose . . . and perform such other functions as may be prescribed by law.” In addition, a number of statutory functions have been added to its initial constitutional mandate, such as the redrawing of electoral and administrative districts, the supervision of national elections, and making rules and regulations for issuing identity cards.

Over and above its mandates, however, the EC has been remarkably innovative in expanding its jurisdiction to new areas in response to changing circumstances. In activities ranging from conflict resolution to the conduct of public hearings on party activities and the training of Ghanaians in electoral data processing, the EC has shown its capacity to play an increasingly important role in supporting democratic consolidation.

The Commission consists of a seven-member policy-making body, headed by a chairman (Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan) and two deputy chairmen (David A. Kanga and K. Safo-Katanka), and has 10 regional offices and 110 district offices. The EC employs approximately 1,500 people, whose salaries are entirely government paid, and donors contribute primarily supplies, equipment, and training.

In terms of its electoral responsibilities, the EC’s track record shows a miraculous improvement over that of its predecessor. Many Ghanaians remember how poorly the NCD fared in its task of putting together a voters’ register in 1987 and its unimpressive performance in carrying out political education activities. The lack of a reasonably accurate voters’ register was the decisive factor behind the opposition’s boycott of the 1992 election.

The NCD was also highly politicized, as the government intended it to be an ideological weapon in the service of revolution rather than that of an independent monitoring instrument. Its large number of political appointees included representatives of the Committees for

the Defense of the Revolution and members of the former electoral commission. Although the current EC’s commissioners and chair are presidentially-appointed, their reputation for impartiality and competence is well-established.

Whereas the NCD emphasized political education, the EC confines its role to electoral and civic education, and aims not to preach the virtues of revolution but the duties of participation. For example, the chairman’s message in the booklet distributed to Ghanaian voters on the eve of the 1996 elections says that “you as a registered

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voter will be called upon to take part in selecting the men and women who will hold the destiny of your country in their hands for the next five years You have the right to vote in freedom and peace. You have a duty to vote according to your own conscience.” There are few parallels in Africa for the outstanding performance of the EC in promoting voter education through various media, including booklets, posters, press releases, radio programs, and workshops.

With a broad constitutional mandate to “conduct and supervise all public elections,” and with the support of USAID’s Supporting the Electoral Process (STEP) Project, the EC played a crucial role in creating a level playing field for the December 1996 presidential and legislative elections, thus avoiding a repeat of the 1992 boycott. STEP contributed \$8.5 million to the registration of 9.2 million Ghanaians, the issuance of voter identification cards and photo identification cards in regional capitals, the publication of booklets and posters for civic education programs, and training for foreign and some 4,500 domestic election observers.

Domestic and foreign observers unanimously declared the elections free and fair. President Jerry Rawlings was elected with roughly the same percentage of the popular vote in 1996 as in 1992, and his areas of support were virtually unchanged. Unlike 1992, however, the results were broadly accepted by the opposition National Patriotic Party (NPP). After the 1992 elections, which the NPP boycotted, opposition parties ended up with three seats in Parliament; today the opposition parties control 67 out of a total 200 seats. This is just enough for a united opposition to block constitutional amendments—and the ruling National Democratic Congress.

If much of the credit for this outcome goes to the EC, the roles played by local NGOs and civic organizations in monitoring the electoral process were also important factors. Their commendable perfor-

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DHRF Project Supports Civil and Political Rights

by Heather Brophy

Pauline Biyong, a member of Cameroon's Parliament, is supposed to be discussing the accomplishments of the League for Women and Children (LEWCE), one of several organizations of which she is president. But instead, Biyong cannot help taking this opportunity to extol the value of supporting democracy and human rights programs in Africa. She is meeting with two members of an assessment team that hopes to determine the impact of grants like the one received by LEWCE and other African groups from the Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) Project, a joint USAID/Department of State program to promote civil and political rights in Africa.

LEWCE used the small grant to conduct seminars on campaign techniques to increase women's participation in the electoral process and politics in Cameroon, and ran widespread radio, television, and newspaper campaigns to encourage greater participation. In conjunction with these activities, a Women's Caucus was established, which unites women parliamentarians across political parties. A manifesto created by the caucus is putting women's issues on the president of Cameroon's agenda. *Ms.*, a bimonthly U.S. magazine, is planning to write about the manifesto in an upcoming issue.

The DHRF was established in 1991 to follow on earlier programs that responded to Congressional legislation calling for activities to strengthen democratic values and promote greater respect for civil and political rights, as set forth in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The fund promotes human rights and democracy in sub-Saharan Africa through small grants to indigenous organizations averaging \$25,000, although some are as high as \$100,000, with more than \$20 million awarded to

date. Recipients of DHRF support are typically NGOs working in areas related to democracy, human rights, legal assistance, the media, and elections, but also include members of judiciaries and legislatures. Funding decisions are made annually by a Washington-based committee comprising USAID, the Department of State, and the U.S. Information Agency. Funds are dispersed and managed in each country through the U.S. embassy.

The meeting with Biyong was the first stop for part of the five-person assessment team, which included staff from USAID, the Department of State, and an outside consultant. The team, which worked in two separate groups, spent four weeks at the end of 1997 visiting eight DHRF-recipient countries as well as South Africa to assess the overall project and the impact of activities funded. The assessment will determine whether the DHRF, which is due to end in September 1999, should be continued and provide lessons learned for any follow-on project.

Later that evening, the assessment team had the chance to meet with leaders of a number of DHRF-funded organizations at a reception held by the U.S. ambassador to Cameroon, Charles Twining. Two young women from the local chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, a group the team also encountered in other coun-

tries, earnestly discussed the need for U.S. government support for projects like theirs. They were joined by members of a group that addresses violence against women. Together these women related their experiences and reminded the team that African women live in oppressive societies.

During the course of the assessment the team heard repeatedly about the need to support democracy and human rights programs. They encountered groups engaged in a wide range of activities and found that in general DHRF recipients were meeting their goals and having a positive impact within their communities. The team looked at the financial and administrative procedures in each country as well as the impact of each DHRF project. They spoke with local embassy and USAID staff, but more importantly, they met with each recipient organization, and when possible, the groups' beneficiaries. They observed democracy strengthened and human rights awareness increased through DHRF activities such as a me-

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Part of a Childline poster on child abuse

Civic Education Fosters Dialogue and Action in Mozambique

Since 1995, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked with USAID's Mission in Mozambique on a comprehensive civic education program to equip citizens for effective participation in the country's political process. The program, titled Increasing Participation and Democratic Politics in Mozambique, was designed to educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities in a democracy and help voters prepare for the country's first municipal elections, which will be held in 33 localities on June 30, 1998. Through a series of NDI-sponsored civic education training sessions and forums for NGOs, parliamentarians, and their constituents, citizens in Mozambique have been spurred to express concerns and make changes within their communities.

Eleven public forums were held in each of the provincial capitals and in Maputo to increase communication between citizens and elected officials from the National Assembly, several of which were broadcast on radio and television. During the sessions, participants were able to engage in dialogue with a deputy from each party represented in Parliament in that region and gain a clearer understanding of their deputies' responsibilities. At a forum held in Tete province, for the first time a provincial governor attended one of the forums, and citizens responded positively. They were pleased to see representatives of rival factions working together and one citizen remarked, "This is real democracy."

NDI conducted a two-phase civic education program that reached more than 265,000 citizens throughout the country. The first phase focused on rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, and the second on the structure of national government and the multiparty system. Many participants soon put their newly acquired democratic skills into action and tried to make improvements within their communities. In Sofala province, for example, participants wrote a letter to the District Office of Education com-



An NDI civic training session in Tica, Mozambique

plaining about the disappearance of funds the community had pooled for the construction of a school. The school administration was forced to pay the money back, and this encouraged the community to provide additional funds, which enabled the school to be built.

In Manica province, residents learned they could try to prevent the illegal seizure of their land by initiating a petition. As a result of the petition, the party responsible for the land expulsions was forced to cease activities. And in Mecufi district, civic education training resulted in residents making use of the press to express their concerns. During interviews with journalists from Radio Mozambique, which were later broadcast, citizens denounced illegal actions taken by police and questioned actions of the local administrator.

Through a series of NGO seminars conducted by NDI for national organizations and associations, groups learned about advocacy, the right to petition, coalition building, effective use of the media, how to use local resources to solve community problems, and the use of public forums. The NGOs learned techniques to communicate effectively with their representatives in Parliament and the importance of collaboration between NGOs to achieve results. As a

result of one seminar, 32 organizations drafted a petition to the provincial government expressing their concern about South African farmers buying large amounts of land in the province as well as concerns about workers' rights and seasonal labor laws.

NDI is also assisting AMODE, the Mozambican Association for the Development of Democracy, to build its capacity and become a sustainable civic education organization and develop the skills needed to conduct civic and voter education. AMODE's trainers conducted voter education to inform voters about the registration process. Only those who reached 18 since the 1994 elections and others who did not register and vote in the previous elections were required to register. In addition, NDI collaborated with STAE, the Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration, on the production of voter education materials, including 400,000 copies of two posters to explain the voter registration process and the registration card and its use. At the end of registration in December, 827,876 new voters were registered, according to the National Elections Commission.

For the upcoming June elections, NDI will coordinate closely with

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dia campaign focused on the rights of women and children in Namibia, the publication of a manual outlining the rights of the disabled in Cameroon, and seminars addressing the issue of female genital mutilation in Senegal. They also met a group that supported democracy and the expansion of free and fair media by creating a Web site (<http://pressejeunecameroon.org>) for archiving press articles about elections in Cameroon, and another that sponsored the first ever press seminar and conference in Equatorial Guinea.

In Senegal, as a result of efforts made by a DHRF grantee, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, on behalf of a woman beaten by her husband, laws governing women's rights to divorce are being changed. In Namibia, DHRF funding enabled the Legal Assistance Center to provide legal advice to traditionally disadvantaged groups, including disenfranchised farm workers, thus strengthening the judiciary. A Botswanan NGO called Childline received funding to train foster parents caring for abused children and the group is working to establish policies to protect children. In Zimbabwe, the Legal Resources Foundation used a DHRF grant to hire and train paralegals to bring human rights issues to the attention of the public and government, and the Supreme Court there received copies of U.S. court case decisions to use for reference.

These results are exciting but they are not the only benefit of the project. Some organizations later received funding from USAID and other donors as a result of the experience and institutional growth gained through the DHRF. USAID may also fund a larger-scale program based on work that began as a DHRF activity. USAID's success in working with the Parliament in Namibia can be traced to a DHRF project. In addition, DHRF funds are one of the few ways available to embassies in African countries without a USAID mission to show U.S. government support for democracy and human rights. Many

U.S. ambassadors have held public signings of DHRF award agreements to increase awareness of this support for civil and political rights.

DHRF funding is designed to be timely, with an annual review process based on current issues, unlike USAID's long-term sustainable development programs. This is an advantage, but it also has drawbacks. DHRF grants are too small and short-term to make monitoring and evaluation cost-effective, thus making it difficult to immediately determine the degree to which they influenced the growth of democracy and protection of human rights. Activities are funded for one year and are intended to address immediate rather than long-term issues and needs.

In addition, many countries are experiencing difficulties in the financial process that impede the disbursement of funds and impair organizations' abilities to accomplish their activities within the one year allotted. The lack of a USAID controller further complicates the process in countries without a USAID mission. The issue of timely disbursements, which is DHRF's main advantage, needs to be addressed in any follow-on project.

The team found immediate impact from some DHRF activities, but others will take longer to bear fruit. In Mali, for example, President Alpha Oumar Konaré was part of an organization that received a DHRF grant of less than \$9,000 to publish a newspaper that later grew into one of the country's major newspapers. While not every recipient will later become president, the Democracy and Human Rights Fund does provide a mechanism to show U.S. support for democratization and provide timely assistance to Africans in an ever-changing political climate.

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AMODE to implement candidate forums for each municipality holding elections. The forums will give mayoral candidates the opportunity to answer questions about their vision, platform, and plans for resolving municipal problems and how citizens will be involved in this process. Citizens will have the opportunity to listen to candidates and make an informed choice on election day. The forums are being funded by USAID and the Danish government.



From a STAE poster explaining that voters must be at least 18 years old to register

A series of focus groups were held to determine the impact of NDI's civic education programs and plan new programs. Results indicated an increased understanding of the basic principals of democracy since the last study in 1996. However, there is a need for expanded civic education in rural areas, and citizens indicated a desire for access to more information about the elections and the role of local government.

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mance reflected, in part, the cooperation each received from the EC.

The overall fairness of the 1996 elections testifies to the competence and dedication of the commissioners and their ability to work hand-in-hand with local NGOs and foreign observers. But the EC's contribution to the consolidation of multiparty democracy goes far beyond the efficient management and monitoring of national elections. If the texture of Ghana's civil society is becoming more democratic, this is partly due to the EC's ability to expand its technical electoral assistance to a host of civil society organizations (CSOs). With the spectacular growth of CSOs between 1992 and 1997, a phenomenon traceable to the gradual opening of Ghanaian society during these years, the EC is increasingly called upon to organize, supervise, and validate the election of their directing organs.

CSOs as diverse as the Ghana Football Association, the University of Ghana Alumni Association, the Ghana Medical and Dental Association, the Association of Retired Soldiers, and the Trade Union Congress have turned to the EC commission for assistance in electing their officials. Thus, the EC helps institutionalize democratic procedures and contributes to the legitimacy and vitality of a significant segment of Ghanaian civil society.

Equally impressive is the role played by the EC in the realm of conflict resolution. One of the most promising initiatives taken by the commissioners—with USAID's encouragement—was to provide a forum for the exchange of views among parties to defuse potentially explosive situations. The interparty advisory committees (IPACs) contributed decisively to the success of the elections, as did the voices of civil society. Today the IPACs constitute a critically important arena for resolving differences among parties, clarifying the meaning of statutory rules, and regulations concerning their activities and raising a broad range of issues related to electoral processes.

Operating at the national, regional, and district levels, IPACs serve as a forum where representatives from all parties can articulate their grievances and disagreements openly, where they can interact with each other informally, and develop a better understanding of their respective positions. The regional and district IPACs, however, are active only during presidential and parliamentary elections, and not during local elections, which are by law nonpartisan.

Getting party representatives to talk to each other in informal settings is one way the EC helps defuse tension; another is the EC's organizing public hearings on controversial issues concerning party activities. Until 1993, when the first IPACs were launched, mutual distrust was the principal obstacle that kept party leaders from talking to each other; to the credit of the EC, much of this distrust seems to be evaporating,

No electoral commission can hope to enjoy credibility and legitimacy unless it is prepared to act as an independent body.

paving the way for meaningful dialogue on election-related and other issues.

One of the most significant features of the EC's mandate concerns its power to redraw electoral and administrative district boundaries. The EC is reviewing 13 requests for new administrative districts, some from chiefly authorities anxious to assert their independence from existing districts, others from district assemblies. Whether all requests will be acted upon is uncertain. The EC's recommendations on redistricting are normally forwarded for approval to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. However, the EC first solicits reactions from regional or district IPACs regarding redistricting requests. Not until broad agreement has been reached by all parties concerned will the redistricting be authorized.

There are some important lessons electoral commissions might learn from their Ghanaian counterpart. These include:

- No electoral commission can hope to enjoy credibility and legitimacy unless it is prepared to act as an independent body.
- No electoral commission can make a meaningful contribution to democratic consolidation unless its mandate extends beyond the technical fix of election management and monitoring to include a broader range of social responsibilities.
- No electoral commission can expand and diversify its activities without a dedicated and competent leadership.
- The efficiency of donor assistance to electoral commissions is largely a function of the quality of cooperative relationships between donors and recipients.

Ultimately, however, very little can be accomplished without a proper enabling environment. This is where Ghana has something to teach its Francophone neighbors, most of whom are still captive of a metropolitan model that shows little tolerance on the part of governmental authorities for electoral commissions that seek to act as independent bodies.

In sum, the EC is an institution that goes far beyond meeting the technical conditions for conducting free and fair elections. Thanks to its foresight and competence, the EC has developed an impressive record of educating voters about the meaning and mechanics of electoral choices, encouraging grassroots participation, promoting accountability, and exploring ways of resolving differences among political parties, all of which are critical to democratic consolidation.

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create a draft constitution. A final constitution was signed in May 1996. Under the Cabinet policy component, USAID supported the creation of a Policy and Analysis Coordination (PAC) Division within the Office of the Cabinet and provided a computer network and training for PAC staff on the use of computers for the analysis, monitoring, and planning of policy.

The PAU supported Zambian institutions and individuals working to enhance the democratic process in Zambia, and became involved in civic education and media-related activities that may have reached more than half the population.

The civil rights promotion component implemented by Southern University focused primarily on civic education activities, with the goal of spreading the activities down to the community level in every district of the country. The PAU supported the Foundation for Democratic Progress's (FODEP) efforts to change from an election monitoring body to a civic education organization, especially in terms of institutional strengthening. As a result, FODEP improved day-to-day operations and strategic planning, and developed its capacity to provide civic education throughout the country. By the end of the project, FODEP moved from a weakly run organization with approximately 10,000 followers (but fewer members) to a more efficiently run body with field offices in every province and a growing membership.

FODEP's activities ranged from the training of trainers to discussions with ordinary citizens about civic education. Elected officials and other leaders were important target groups in conducting civic education. FODEP organized a mass media campaign and developed a multimedia system through which citizens could enhance their civic awareness. With USAID support, FODEP increased awareness of civil rights through 205 civic education workshops at the national, district, and community levels, which reached more than 71,000 individuals. In addition,



Zambian teachers address strategies for community awareness at a training session

they implemented election as well as voter registration monitoring during the 1996 elections to promote free and fair elections and preserve the integrity of the democratic process. These activities were achieved through a widespread network of dedicated FODEP members throughout Zambia.

Through a Civic Action Fund managed by the PAU, 78 grants of up to \$25,000 were awarded to 61 organizations involved in civic and human rights initiatives. The grants were very effective in mobilizing an array of civic activists to inform the grassroots population about basic elements of democracy. Activities included workshops and discussion groups on topics such as voter education, the prevention of violence during the elections, women's rights, and good governance. A variety of innovative theater productions were funded, which focused on the theme of understanding one's rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Performances were held throughout the country, and before and after each show, audiences usually held a discussion about the message presented.

The project's civics curriculum component resulted in the complete revision of the junior secondary school civics curriculum, which, according to the DGP's final evaluation, should have

a major impact in terms of school children being exposed to an explanation of democratic values. The new textbooks cover such topics as democratic governance, the reintroduction of multi-partyism in Zambia, human rights, political parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

To develop the new curriculum and textbooks, the PAU worked closely with the Zambia Curriculum Development Center, the Ministry of Education, and Zambian educators. A study of the state of civics at the junior and secondary level was conducted, and a national symposium on civics education was held to discuss the themes and concepts to be included in the new textbooks. New syllabi were developed for grades 8 and 9 civics classes and teacher training colleges, and more than 800 teachers were trained how to use the newly developed curriculum and textbooks. New standard exams were also developed to incorporate the new curriculum. Nearly 200,000 new books have been distributed to more than 700 junior secondary schools, replacing the old texts worn out by two decades of use.

The permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education, Sichelwe M. Kasanda, commented on the impact of the civics curriculum revision in a let-

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ter to the PAU. "It is quite obvious from the data gathered from the provincial workshops going on in different parts of the country that the project is a major catalyst in the promotion of citizenship education in Zambia," he wrote.

The main purpose of the project's media independence component was to foster the establishment of independent and professional journalism in Zambia. Most of the project's media assistance went to the Zambia Institute for Mass Communication (ZAMCOM) a multimedia training facility for communication professionals, which also provides media-related services to the public. Media specialists from the United States and other African countries conducted monthly two-week workshops for Zambian journalists from a variety of media organizations on topics such as political and feature reporting, ethics, responsibilities and rights, election reporting, in-depth and enterprise reporting, and improving and polishing writing skills.

By the end of the project, more than 300 media professionals had been trained during 33 workshops, representing almost half of the professional journalists in the country. According to workshop evaluations, participants found the sessions highly beneficial. "The workshop opened up horizons that were somewhat vague, such as profile writing . . . and it unveiled the realism of in-depth research and writing of feature articles, which will help improve the production of our materials," said a participant.

In addition, four Zambian journalists and media managers participated in six-week training sessions at media establishments in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in conjunction with Southern University. Several of these journalists contributed articles to the local Baton Rouge paper during their internship.

The PAU provided crucial project assistance to help ZAMCOM establish itself as an independent media trust. In 1996, the institute was able to disengage from government support through increased self-sustaining activities. ZAMCOM has strengthened its capabilities as the only training and resource center of its kind for journalists in the region and established a Media Resource Center, including a computer network for training and a desktop publishing system for public hire.

The University of Zambia received project funding for training in the United States of two teaching fellows from its Department of Mass Communication, and the addition of a 24-computer network has enhanced instruction and production capabilities. An important outcome of this component is that communications students at the University of Zambia are now publishing their own newspaper, *The Lusaka Star*, and graduates can become computer literate before entering the job market.

Both the midterm review and final evaluation of the Zambia DGP indicated that most project activities were implemented successfully. This was USAID's first large-scale democracy governance project in Africa and lessons were learned for future activities in Zambia

and elsewhere, especially the importance of local involvement in project decision-making and flexibility in programming. Through its partnership with USAID, Southern University was able to make significant inroads toward greater citizen awareness and participation in this emerging African democracy.

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Conferences

Democratic Africa or African Democracy? will be the topic of the 5th annual conference of the African, African-American, Development, Education, Research and Training Institute (AAADERT), July 10, 1998, at Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts. For information contact Dr. Mulugeta Agonafer, P.O. Box 3786, Springfield, Massachusetts 01101; telephone 413-748-3779, fax 413-748-3236.

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