Electoral Systems and Processes

Choosing one’s political representation or running for a political office are fundamental human rights and give citizen the opportunity to voice their interests and preferences. Each vote is part of a larger process that stretches before, during and after an election – the electoral cycle. UNDP offers strategic assistance throughout the electoral cycle, from support to designing more effective systems to mechanisms to address disputes after the votes are counted. UNDP assistance aims to ensure that elections are credible and transparent, as well as fully nationally owned and that the results are accepted by the majority of the citizen.

To advance these goals, UNDP helps countries around the world to acquire the necessary skills to organize elections that enjoy the confidence of electoral stakeholders.

UNDP promotes credible and inclusive elections at all levels by supporting national efforts for:

- Promoting legal reform;
- Establishing and strengthening independent and permanent electoral management bodies (EMBs);
- Implementing systems for planning, monitoring and budgeting;
- Supporting voter and civic education for democratic rights and responsibilities;
- Coordinating electoral assistance;
- Promoting women’s participation in elections as voters, candidates and electoral administrators;
- Encouraging political participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups such as youth, women, persons with disabilities and minorities; and
- Preventing electoral conflict and violence and strengthening peaceful electoral dispute resolution.

Inclusive political participation and gender mainstreaming

MATTERS OF FACT

- In 2014, UNDP provided electoral assistance to approximately 70 countries.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the main beneficiary, followed by Asia and Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Almost all of UNDP’s Country Offices use the electoral cycle approach, rather than focusing on supporting a specific election.
- Almost two-thirds of all UNDP electoral assistance now incorporates a gender perspective to its work.

More countries than ever before are working to build or to strengthen democratic governance and sustainable peace. Women, youth and minority groups are increasingly seeking a voice in public decision-making and are shaping government policy towards inclusive participation. UNDP is promoting gender mainstreaming in its electoral programmes and currently two-thirds of UNDP country offices providing electoral assistance, have adopted a gender perspective to their work. Furthermore UNDP works to increase the political and electoral participation of indigenous people and youth, as well as of people living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS.

Elections and conflict

Election periods are in many countries accompanied by political tensions and societal grievances, which sometimes deteriorate into violence and (armed) conflict. Yet, people are less likely to resort to violence for resolving their differences or to make their voice heard if they can participate in credible and inclusive elections and if electoral dispute institutions are capable and responsive. Therefore, UNDP’s electoral assistance programming pays careful attention to include all stakeholders, as well as to the timing and conduct of elections. Electoral assistance project are based on thorough political analysis, follow a conflict-sensitive approach and focus on long-term
capacity development. UNDP Electoral assistance has been instrumental to the holding of credible elections in complex post-conflict and transitional environments, as well as to electoral dispute resolution.

Political parties, Civil Society, ICTs and Media
Voter registration and voter education efforts can engage political parties as well as civil society organisations. UNDP supports these dynamic groups in such efforts, while developing their capacity to run campaigns, create media strategies, and ensure that the number of women participating at the leadership level increases.

Another cross-cutting area is ICT, where the role of computerized voter registers, biometrics and electronic voting methods is being explored, particularly to help achieve more cost-effective and sustainable electoral processes. UNDP is also increasingly working with the media, which plays a crucial role in providing an environment where voters can make informed choices.

UNDP in action
The Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS Phase II 2015 -2017) is implemented at the global, regional and country levels with an emphasis on mainstreaming women’s electoral and political participation. Since the inception of the first phase in 2009, GPECS has focused on providing long-term support to improve and strengthen countries’ electoral processes and institutions throughout the entire electoral cycle. Other areas of assistance include: voter registration, civic and voter education, electoral law reform, electoral operations and enhancing women’s participation in electoral processes. GPECS has also innovated in new areas of demand, including electoral indicators, media and elections, and youth participation.

Furthermore, UNDP engages in global partnerships and joint knowledge development:

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network is the world’s largest free online encyclopedia of electoral information and hosts a dynamic practitioner’s network. ACE also offers a wide range of services related to electoral knowledge sharing and networking. See www.aceproject.org/.

BRIDGE is the most comprehensive professional development course available in election administration. See www.bridge-project.org/.

UNDP takes a partnership approach to providing electoral assistance, working closely with the Electoral Assistance Division of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and many other partners at the global, regional and country level. One example is the EC-UNDP Partnership on Electoral Assistance, which includes the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force, which shares knowledge through training, conferences, workshops, e-learning opportunities, election materials and services and publications. See www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/

Country examples
The 2015 general elections in Guyana resulted from a decision to dissolve the Parliament in order to provide a solution to a political deadlock. The elections took place on 11th May under the organization of GECOM, a credible and well known electoral management body. Being a highly polarized political environment, with a past of electoral violence, the expectations of the Guyanese people regarding the announcement of the electoral results in the immediate aftermath of the elections were very high and did not necessarily always reflect the real challenges and the procedural requirements. In order to foster peace and stability, UNDP was requested to support GECOM during the critical period before, during and after polling day. Based on this request, UNDP provided essential support to the EMB, most notably through the provision of IT and communications experts and a media centers, all of which played a crucial role in the critical period. UNDP also supported conflict prevention efforts through work with religious leaders, the private sector, the media and small group of key civil society leaders. Therewith, the UN played a vital role during the political transition in Guyana.

For more information, visit: www.undp.org/democratic-governance-and-peacebuilding/inclusive-political-processes/

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