



Electoral Systems and Processes

PRACTICE NOTE

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Executive Summary

Elections are one of the most important ways citizens can participate in decisions that affects their lives and hold their representatives accountable for results. Elections therefore provide a critical intersection between citizens and the interlinked goals of poverty alleviation, human development, and achievement of the MDGs. The political legitimacy that credible elections confer is essential for robust states and provide a crucial mandate if governments are to have the capacity to tackle a myriad of sustainable development challenges. UNDP recognizes that elections are pivotal to its central ambition of alleviating human poverty, and endeavors to strike a balance between offering short-term, event-specific support and longer-term support to electoral systems and processes that will help sustain democratic institutions.

In the “third wave”¹ of democratization, many countries began to reform and refashion their electoral rules to more closely meet the goals of accountability, legitimacy, representation and sustainability. In partnership with countries, UNDP provides electoral assistance as a primary means to achieve these goals and thus to enable all citizens to participate in and influence government policy and practice. As a result, since the 1980s, UNDP has played an ever-expanding role in supporting electoral processes, and this now represents a significant component of the organization’s governance and institutional development activities.² The organization takes the approach that democracy is ever a work in progress, and that strengthening democratic institutions and promoting truly democratic politics is the best way to overcome democratic deficits and to foster the link between democracy and human development. It is therefore a UNDP priority to focus on building the longer-term capacity of electoral institutions such as electoral management bodies and processes such as voter registration and voter and civic education.

When engaging in electoral assistance, UNDP country offices need to take into account the sensitivity of the area. First, elections are fundamentally political processes. They feature “winners” and “losers” and therefore the stakes can be high, particularly for incumbent governments, which usually constitute UNDP’s main partners. It is important to note that UN support to elections is demand driven and that there are intra-UN issues to be considered. The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs is the UN’s designated focal point for electoral assistance. The relationship between the work of UNDP and UNDPA in this field is set out in the *Note of Guidance for UNDPA and UNDP on Electoral Assistance Activities, dated 17 January 2001* (<http://portal.undp.org/server/nis/4649027220113235>). It is important that all electoral assistance activities undertaken by UNDP are consistent with the division of responsibilities set out in this Note.

To date, UNDP has amassed considerable experience and learned valuable lessons in the areas of resource mobilization and coordination, and support to electoral management bodies and processes such as voter registration. At the same time, it is being asked to play a greater role in new areas of assistance such as local elections, civic education, and strengthening of political parties. This Practice Note, prepared by the Democratic Governance Group, Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) of UNDP, draws on UNDP experiences and the expertise throughout its network of 132 country offices. It will be updated periodically to incorporate new learning and policy advice from ongoing global, regional and national programme work. Contributions to enhancing the content of this note should be made directly to Ms. Gita Welch, Group Leader, Democratic Governance Group, at gita.welch@undp.org.

I. Introduction

This Practice Note³ is intended to establish a framework for UNDP activities in the field of electoral

¹ Huntington, Samuel, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

² The Second Multi-Year Funding Framework (2004-2007) notes that 26 country offices received UNDP electoral assistance in 2002 alone, and that among UNDP’s comparative strengths in the area are its ability to use of elections as an entry point for support to broader governance programmes. DP/2003/32, 13 August 2003.

³ This practice note covers the service line of Electoral Systems and Processes. Two earlier notes cover the service lines on Parliamentary Development, and E-governance and Access to Information (September 2002 and September 2003, respectively).

assistance. The Note focuses on the various components of electoral assistance, the primary areas in which UNDP and others have worked, recent trends in the field, and lessons learned. In so doing, it attempts to set out some practical guidelines for UNDP governance practitioners in the area of electoral systems and processes. It does not attempt to dictate to country offices the type(s) of support UNDP should provide in this field. Rather, this Note should be seen as a primer on some of the areas in which electoral assistance activities may be most effective, and their implications.

Elections have three main functions in a democracy. First, they are a means for people to choose their representatives, in a legislature, a congress, and/or a single executive office such as the presidency. Second, elections are a means of choosing governments; indeed, in many (though not all) parts of the world, elections are primarily a contest between competing political parties to see who will control the government. Finally, elections confer legitimacy on the political system. Especially since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of democratic governance around the world, elections have become an essential element in constituting a legitimate government. Today, there are very few states in the world that do not conduct elections, although the meaning and quality of these vary enormously. While UNDP has embraced and endorsed the concept of countries being “differently democratic”⁴, in the sense of respecting and learning how different political systems, cultures and traditions can lead to equally valid means of choosing governments, it remains a UNDP principle that free and fair elections are a universal must for any state to be considered truly democratic.⁵

Despite the central role of elections in democratic governance, it is important to remember that elections themselves are not synonymous with democracy. As the 2002 *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World* made clear, democracy is ultimately about voices more than votes:

Elections are the paradigm of enforceable accountability: when a government fails to live up to the needs and desires of the people, the people can throw it out of office. No form of accountability is more direct, no form of participation is more egalitarian. But it would be a mistake to equate democracy with regular elections: democracy also requires functioning institutions (Ch. 2, p. 54).

Building a democracy means much more than regular, competitive and transparent elections, vital as these are. What happens before and after elections is equally important, as is the capacity of voters to demand that electoral processes are translated into genuine democratic gains for the population.

II. The Issue and its Dimensions

More governments today have been chosen via free and fair elections than at any time in history.⁶ At the same time, as UNDP’s 2002 *Human Development Report* makes clear, the results of this democratic transition are mixed. There is a spread of ‘illiberal’⁷ democracies featuring governments elected through competitive means but which rule through authoritarian practices once they are in power.

Over the past decade, as the number of democratically elected governments and the challenges associated with sustaining democracy have risen, UNDP’s focus has changed as well. According to the 2003 report on the Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFFR), 42 per cent of total programme expenditures from 2000 to 2002 went to democratic governance. Activities that seek to strengthen

⁴ See HDR 2002, Chapter 2, page 55.

⁵ Free and fair elections are characterized by, *inter alia*, universal suffrage, open registration procedures, secure and secret ballots, universal access to voting sites, independent supervisory bodies, and basic freedoms of speech, expression and association.

⁶ According to Freedom House, the number of countries in which elections are competitive and meet minimum standards of freedom and fairness reached a high-water mark in 2003, with 121 (or 63 per cent) of the world’s 192 governments qualifying as “electoral democracies”. This marks a threefold increase from 1989 at the end of the Cold War.

⁷ Zakaria, Fareed, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, W.W. Norton & Company (April 2003).

democratic governance include providing assistance to governing institutions such as electoral management bodies, parliaments and judiciaries. This is an area of growing demand. From 1991 to 2000, the UN received 226 requests for assistance from 89 countries and entities/territories (including Kosovo, Western Sahara and the occupied Palestinian territory), or an average of 25 a year; from 2001 to 2003, the UN received 76 such new requests, a three-fold increase. In response to this surge in electoral assistance requests, UNDP has steadily moved from providing direct assistance to an electoral event towards longer-term capacity building programmes aimed at producing effective and sustainable electoral procedures over the long run.

UNDP defines governance as “the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs at all levels...[comprising] the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations.” Democratic governance is, inter alia, “participatory, transparent and accountable. It is effective, equitable, and promotes the rule of law.”⁸ It is now generally accepted that assistance to electoral systems and processes represents a crucial element of democratic governance promotion and one that should be integrated more with UNDP assistance to other governing institutions and processes.

There are two main forms of electoral assistance. One is offering support to the preparation for, and conduct of, a specific electoral event, typically a national general election. The other is helping to build the long-term capacity of institutions involved in elections, such as electoral management bodies, delimitation commissions, civil society organizations and political parties, or enhance the effectiveness of national election-related processes such as civic and voter education, voter registration and domestic observation. Increasingly, UNDP’s focus in the electoral field is on this longer-term assistance.

Electoral assistance is a sensitive area of work for several reasons. While the management of elections is a large-scale exercise in public administration – and is thus amenable to the same kind of institution-strengthening programmes that are often deployed in other areas of governance, such as public sector reform – elections are also quintessentially political events. This means that any practitioner giving assistance in this field needs to handle the task with tact and an awareness of its potential political impacts. The fact that UNDP’s key partner in development is usually the government of the recipient country makes this particularly important. Governments by their nature tend to have a direct interest in the outcome of elections and thus cannot be automatically considered as neutral partners in this area.

In addition, UNDP works in partnership with the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, which supports the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who is the UN’s designated focal point for electoral assistance. The relationship between the work of UNDP and UNDP/EA/AD in this field is set out in the *Note of Guidance for UNDP and UNDP on Electoral Assistance Activities, dated 17 January 2001* (<http://portal.undp.org/server/nis/4649027220113235>). It is important that all electoral assistance activities undertaken by UNDP are consistent with the division of responsibilities, the framework for cooperation and the procedural steps the *Note* sets out.

To date, UNDP has accumulated a good deal of experience in elections and, in February 2001, produced a report entitled *UNDP and Electoral Assistance: Ten Years of Experience*, which looks in detail at the comparative experience of UNDP’s work in this field. Following are among the major recommendations of the report⁹:

- UNDP must concentrate more on long-term electoral assistance capacity building, giving particular emphasis to the development of permanent and independent electoral commissions.
- UNDP must view its electoral assistance activities holistically within the broader governance programming objectives of the organization. High-profile support for elections serves as a key entry point to strengthen a country’s institutions and can be used to attract donor assistance for other governance-related interventions.

⁸ UNDP, *Governance for sustainable human development* (January 1997), p. iv.

⁹ A more extensive discussion of these recommendations is included in the section on “Practical Guidance”, below.

- Support for pre- and post-election voter and civic education programmes must be strengthened, especially for increasing dialogue among citizens and their political representatives at national, regional and local levels.
- UNDP must increase its support for sub-national elections and referenda in order to broaden the base of democracy and reinforce decentralization processes that seek to empower people, particularly the poor, at the community level.

III. UNDP's Niche and Entry Points

Because of its focus on development assistance and poverty alleviation, UNDP supports electoral assistance as a primary means for all citizens – especially the poor, women and other disadvantaged sectors of society – to participate in and influence government policy and practice. This requires, among other things, links of accountability between voters and their elected representatives, broad-based political parties, cost-effective election processes, and independent and permanent electoral management bodies. Further, because of the stress UNDP places on impartiality and brokerage among a broad range of development actors, it is often ideally placed to play a coordinating or direct support role in electoral processes. Table 1 sets out the major entry points within the field of electoral assistance through which UNDP support is usually focused.

Table 1: Principal entry points for UNDP electoral assistance

Type	Description
Electoral system reform	This kind of assistance often involves political institutions undergoing institutional reform to make them more broad based, inclusive and representative. Through helping design new electoral systems and/or reform old ones, UNDP helps foster accountability between the government and the governed. UNDP assistance during Lesotho's electoral system reform helped create a new, mixed-member, proportional electoral system that resulted in a much more representative parliament than was in place previously.
Electoral administration	A priority area of assistance for UNDP is building independent and permanent electoral management bodies (EMBs). This assistance takes the form of strengthening institutions, assisting with legal reform; offering professional-development programmes to election workers, building greater public information and outreach capacity, and helping countries with election-related resource management. Support to EMBs is a feature of almost all UNDP electoral assistance activities and has been the main feature of UNDP's support programme in Mali and Pakistan.
Sustainable electoral processes	Building sustainable electoral processes is at the heart of UNDP's electoral assistance programmes. This often involves support for low-cost, free and fair elections, and can take many forms. Typically assistance focuses on fostering countries' election planning, monitoring and budgeting capacity. It can also include support for voter registration, and the creation or updating of a civil registry. Such long-term capacity building has been a feature of our programmes in Bangladesh and Mozambique.
Civic and voter education	These activities aim to expand democratic participation, particularly among women and other under-represented segments of society. UNDP's efforts include awareness-raising activities that highlight the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a functioning democratic society. UNDP has pursued such work in Malawi, Fiji and Kyrgyzstan.
Mobilization and coordination of resources for electoral support	Because of the sensitivity and importance of electoral reforms and processes, they can attract wide international interest. UNDP can serve as a conduit for financial contributions and participation by third parties. UNDP played a central role in developing the Partnership for Governance, which coordinated donor assistance to Indonesia's pivotal 1999 elections. It also coordinated international election observers and other activities in Bangladesh, and organized the whole electoral process in Sierra Leone under a UN Security Council mandate, where balloting was implemented by the Civilian Affairs component of UNAMSIL and UNDP.
Emerging areas of support	Two emerging areas for UNDP are support to strengthen political parties and to resolve electoral disputes – both cases where UNDP's advantage is its non-partisan approach. Its work with political parties strives to ensure that they are involved in voter registration and

	<p>education efforts, and to improve party campaign and media strategies, strengthen party caucuses within legislatures and make parties accountable for their commitments to address gender imbalances at the leadership level. This work is closely linked with institutional development, since more effective, democratic and transparent parliamentary party caucuses allow legislatures to work more effectively. In Comoros, UNDP involved political parties in electoral-list validation. In Lesotho, UNDP supported civic education, and in Guyana, it enabled policy makers to reach consensus on the legislative framework around elections. Another emerging area is supporting electoral dispute resolution (see “Approaches and Techniques” below).</p>
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IV. Operational Implications

The following three sections (Lessons and Principles for Action; Approaches and Techniques; and Practical Guidance) expand on UNDP’s niche and entry points and address more specifically what makes a good practice in the main areas in which UNDP is regularly engaged. Links to selected case studies can be found in Annex 3 to this Note.

1. Lessons and Principles for Action

Good practices are built on lessons collected over time. Together, those lessons provide a basis for action principles. The term “good practice” is used intentionally because it is difficult if not impossible to declare that something is a “best practice” when country contexts differ so considerably. Generalizations are not always helpful. To a certain degree, the lessons and guidance below must be contextualized for each country.

1.1 UNDP electoral assistance should focus on long-term capacity development

Today, most countries requesting electoral assistance are preparing for their third or fourth multi-party election. At this point in time, UNDP’s assistance is departing from the event-specific and priority is being given to strengthening the national institutions and processes essential to sustainable democracies. The primary goal of electoral technical assistance is to help enable countries to organize future elections with little or no outside help. UNDP’s assistance is departing from the event-specific and is increasingly focused on building the institutional capacity of electoral management bodies (such as independent, permanent electoral commissions), and the systems, structures, management, legal framework and budgetary processes that undergird sustainable electoral processes. These institutional development measures can be accomplished by means including: hiring international consultants to advise on the best methods and to train electoral officials, sponsoring in-country and international conferences on electoral matters, and working with executives and legislatures on electoral legal frameworks.

<p style="text-align: center;">Elections and Costs</p> <p>The least expensive elections cost between (U.S. dollars) \$1 and \$3 per voter and are held in countries with a long electoral experience, such as the United States and most Western European countries. Others with low election costs include: Chile (\$1.2 per voter), Costa Rica (\$1.8) and Brazil (\$2.3) in Latin America; Botswana (\$2.7) and Kenya (\$1.8) in Africa; India (\$1) and Pakistan (\$0.5) in Asia; and Australia (\$3.2). On the other hand, elections held as part of broader peacekeeping operations are the most costly, as expected. It should be noted that comparison between election costs is not always possible, given the difference in systems and processes. <i>Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance</i>, López-Pintor, Rafael for BDP/UNDP, 2000.</p>
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Where permanent and independent electoral commissions exist, the staff must be professionalized. The prospects are better for free, fair and effective elections when electoral bodies are free from interference and when they can rely on a permanent professional staff at various levels. This enables the commission and its staff to develop experience and expertise in basic planning and cost-effective techniques. Professionalism can also enhance the mutual respect of the political players involved in countries with recent histories of conflict. In Armenia, for example, UNDP is working

with the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) to train all levels of commission members and to provide training materials and equipment to CEC and Territorial Electoral Commissions (TEC). UNDP provided similar assistance to the Cambodian National Election Committee and facilitated qualitative and quantitative improvements in both voter registration and voter education. In Yemen, where UNDP also supports the electoral commission, the size of the overall voters list increased by 43 per cent, and by 100 per cent for female voters, over the previous list.

In the long-term, permanent commissions are more cost-effective than those that are created anew for each election. Permanent bodies that do not require recruitment and training of large numbers of new staff are also likely to be more cost effective than temporary structures. Without long-term capacity development, many countries will continue to struggle to conduct elections without external assistance.

1.2 Electoral assistance is a strategic entry point for broader governance programming

Successful elections are critical to establishing political legitimacy within countries seeking to make a transition towards democracy. By supporting elections, UNDP helps countries prepare for accountable governance and cultivates the relationships required to support governance reform efforts in sensitive areas such as human rights, representative democracy and judicial independence.

Sometimes, local elections can be the entry point for electoral assistance at the national level. For example, in Indonesia UNDP's coordination of an internationally recognized election in June 1999 led to a national effort to reform the country's parliamentary machinery. Similarly, UNDP's limited involvement in Nigeria's local elections in December 1998 foreshadowed a more significant assistance in the presidential elections in February 1999. This paved the way for the adoption of a comprehensive "Governance for Poverty Reduction and SHD" programme, which focused on strengthening democratic governing institutions, human rights and decentralization. Current assistance to the local elections in Timor-Leste is also expected to segue into eventual local governance support to help the elected officials carry out their functions. At the same time, local governance can serve as an entry point for electoral assistance. If UNDP becomes accepted as a trusted partner through its collaboration on local governance, it may be invited to provide advice on more sensitive issues such as the electoral system.

Another target entry point in the governance area is the strengthening or reforming of the civil registry. This can greatly reduce the cost of elections because electoral rolls can be easily generated from a reliable civil registry rather than initiating an entirely new registration exercise each time.

1.3 Coordinating donors and mobilizing resources in preparation for an election

Multi-party elections are complex and expensive undertakings that often require a sophisticated governance capacity and a level of resources beyond the reach of many developing countries. External technical and financial assistance can therefore be crucial, particularly for first-time elections undertaken by transitional countries. In this regard, UNDP has often assumed a central role through its strategic position as convener of donor countries for external electoral assistance. By taking the initiative in its capacity as facilitator of donor coordination (as in the cases of Guyana 1997, Mozambique and Indonesia 1999, Yemen 2000, Sierra Leone 2001), UNDP can play a significant role in mobilizing foreign assistance—including among non-resident donors—to a national electoral process.

What are the best means of achieving this? UNDP, and other actors, often prefer cost-sharing arrangements, as in Afghanistan, to the establishment of multi-donor trust funds, since cost-sharing entails a more decentralized structure that places the UNDP country office in charge of managing donor financial support. Cost-sharing agreements can also be used to operationalize partnerships between a group of donors and UNDP. The arrangement can be expressed in a memorandum of understanding such as the one drawn up in Tanzania, which captures the broad objectives of cooperation – and the roles and responsibilities of the partners – but does not create a basket fund per se. In addition, a new, more streamlined option has also become available: using the country window of the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF). This is governed and managed exactly as a cost-sharing project would be. By comparison, the more complex multi-donor trust funds (as in Indonesia) or basket

funds (as in Mali—see Annex 3) usually involve “sub-trust fund agreements” which require separate accounting and skilled staff to deal with earmarking individual donor’s funds.

1.4 Supporting the implementation of technical assistance programmes for elections

Resident Representatives/Resident Coordinators and the UNDP country office staff play a central role in the delivery of electoral assistance to countries, given their experience and knowledge of the country and their established relationships with government officials, bilateral donors, non-governmental organizations and political parties. UNDP manages donor funds and normally provides funds of its own for electoral support, advises the election commission on donor and technical issues, assists NGOs working on civic and voter education with funds and technical advice, provides logistical support to consultants, and coordinates with EAD and the technical advisor on all technical matters pertaining to the elections. The technical assistance can range from comprehensive assistance covering all aspects of the election, as in Mozambique in 1999, to targeted assistance, such as a civic education campaign or strengthening the election commission’s communications capacity, as in Nigeria in 2003. UNDP provides some element of support to the implementation of technical assistance in virtually every electoral support project.

1.5 Providing logistical support to the work of international observers

It is important to note that the United Nations cannot observe elections if it is involved in offering assistance to an electoral process and unless it receives a mandate to do so from an intergovernmental body (e.g., General Assembly or Security Council).¹⁰ Work in this domain, therefore, centers on the coordination of international and/or domestic observers rather than United Nations observation per se. EAD takes the lead role in the design, staffing and implementation of observation activities in cooperation with UNDP. As a result, UNDP has coordinated numerous international observer missions as part of its electoral assistance work. Based on a request from a Member State, EAD and UNDP may establish a small secretariat in the host country to coordinate and provide logistical support to international election observers that together comprise a joint international observer group or JIOG. The JIOG is sponsored by member states and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. UNDP and EAD can share the responsibility for organizing a secretariat with another organization or country. JIOGs have been organized in countries including Yemen, Cambodia, Nigeria and Kyrgyzstan. Observations typically begin just prior to the registration period and continue throughout the campaign period, concluding with the announcement of the election results. UNDP also provides assistance to non-JIOG observer groups, such as the Commonwealth or the OAS, which was the case in Guyana in 1997.

UNDP’s extensive field presence and country knowledge are valuable assets to observer missions. UNDP briefs observers upon arrival in a country; arranges logistical support, including cars, maps, routes and emergency procedures; coordinates the deployment of observers on election day; facilitates the collection and analysis of information gathered by observers; and organizes a debriefing after the elections for observers to exchange experiences.

1.6 UNDP’s electoral assistance is most effective given a lead-time of at least one year prior to elections

An appropriate amount of lead-time is key to providing comprehensive electoral support. Depending on the size and type of assistance, the most successful electoral projects were initiated at least one year prior to the elections. Projects with shorter lead times run the risk of having to cut corners in order to meet short deadlines and can result in mistakes, higher costs of procurement, inadequate consultation time and shortening the duration of important activities such as training. Sufficient lead-time is also important to reduce the cost of an election. Election materials will inevitably cost more and procurement

¹⁰ See The SG’s report of 19 October 2001 (A/56/344), which states in paragraph 28, “In other cases, requests are received for United Nations observers; only in rare instances does the Organization provide such assistance, for which a mandate has to be given to the United Nations by the General Assembly or the Security Council.”

options will be more limited when the delivery time is compressed. Governments facing upcoming elections should be made aware that a timely request for assistance will be better managed by the UN system, and will result in more effective resource mobilization and subsequent delivery of support services. Inversely, as per the Note of Guidance, only very limited support—if any at all—can be provided to countries that make requests at the last minute. Substantive electoral assistance is not viable less than four months before election day.

1.7 Providing electoral assistance in post-conflict settings

While elections are part of the broader process of democratization, ill-timed, hurried, badly designed or poorly run elections can actually undermine that process in fragile post-conflict environments. Because of this, great attention needs to be given to the details of elections in post-conflict situations, including the context, the steps needed, and the level of security surrounding the process. There are three crucial influences on post-conflict politics in most countries. First, there is the question of timing: in general it is better to avoid holding national elections immediately after a conflict. Instead, a period of one or two years provides time for political consensus to build for having elections and for peacetime political routines and issues to come to prominence. This was precisely the approach of the government, the international community and the UN in Sierra Leone, where UNAMSIL and UNDP implemented presidential elections two years after the end of hostilities, closely monitored and supported by the Security Council. Second, there are the mechanics of elections themselves: who runs the elections? How are voters enrolled? What electoral formula is used? All of these decisions impact upon the types of party constellations that form and the kinds of appeals they make to voters and thus, the nature of campaigning. In Rwanda, for example, a long transitional and constitutional process was designed to ensure that the final electoral system gives voice to all groups, including women and minorities, and wins broad public acceptance. Third, there is the often-underestimated issue of the effect of political parties on elections. Especially in the cases of weak civil societies, political parties are the key link between the masses and the elites, and play an absolutely crucial role in building a sustainable democratic polity. The aim of post-conflict electoral assistance should be to promote the development of party organizations with real links to the community, democratic internal structures, and broad, multi-ethnic programmes.

1.8 Strengthening the link between electoral assistance and human development/poverty alleviation

Elections are prerequisites for the establishment of strong governing institutions and good governance, which, in turn, are prerequisites for poverty alleviation. Elections are also direct vehicles for realizing people's participation in the governance process, and advancing their most significant concerns (e.g., poverty alleviation) through it. Successful decentralization programmes that empower people at the community level are best underpinned by free and fair local elections. As programme countries move into the more advanced stages of democratic development, local electoral support is an area poised to benefit from growing UNDP involvement. UNDP is focusing more on planning and implementing electoral assistance initiatives with the explicit goal of promoting an enabling environment for sustainable human development and poverty reduction.

2. Approaches and Techniques

While the areas discussed below are not the only elements of electoral assistance, they do represent the major ones where requests for UNDP assistance are concentrated and are likely to continue to be in the future. Some of these areas are more notable than others, in terms of the volume of assistance UNDP provides and their strategic significance.

2.1 Electoral systems

The design of an electoral system has many long-term consequences for democratic governance, and the choice of electoral system is one of the most important political decisions for any country. Electoral systems are the primary vehicles for people to exercise choice and citizens' voices to be heard, and are

the main medium of representational governance. The shape of an electoral system can influence other aspects of the political system, such as the development of political parties, and it has an important bearing on whether citizens will be closely enough linked to their political leaders to demand real accountability, representation and responsiveness. Electoral systems have profound implications for the poor and other marginal groups, helping determine the extent to which their voices will be heard and their power enhanced.

An electoral system is designed to do three main jobs. First and most fundamentally, it translates votes cast into legislative seats or one-person office(s) won. Second, it acts as the conduit through which the people can hold their elected representatives accountable. Third, it defines incentives for those competing for power to couch their appeals to the electorate in distinct ways. In divided societies, for example, where language, religion, race or other forms of ethnicity represent fundamental political cleavages, particular electoral systems can reward candidates and parties who act in a co-operative, accommodating manner to rival groups or they can punish these candidates and instead reward those who appeal only to their own group.

Electoral systems are often categorized according to how proportionately they operate in terms of translating votes cast by electors into seats won by parties. A typical three-way structure divides such systems into plurality-majority, semi-proportional, and proportional representation (PR) systems. Plurality-majority systems typically give more emphasis to local representation via the use of small, single-member electoral districts than to proportionality. Amongst such systems are plurality (first-past-the-post), runoff, block and alternative vote systems.

By contrast, proportional representation systems – which typically use larger multi-member districts and deliver more proportional outcomes – include ‘open’ and ‘closed’ versions of party list PR, as well as “mixed-member” and “single transferable vote” systems. Semi-proportional systems offer yet another approach, as well as various mixtures of plurality and proportional models (such as the “mixed” models by which part of the parliament is elected via PR and part from local constituencies – a common choice in many new democracies over the past decade, especially in bicameral parliamentary systems). Although proportional systems may be better at representing minority opinion, they may not be as strong as some systems from the majority-plurality strain, featuring single-member districts, at building links of accountability and representation between the elected and his/her constituency.

There are also a range of specific institutional devices that can be used to target under-represented groups such as women and the poor. In recent years, a number of countries such as Rwanda, Jordan, Uganda, Argentina, India, Bangladesh, Eritrea and Tanzania have experimented with the use of quotas to boost women’s representation. In addition, countries as diverse as the Philippines, Lebanon and Mauritius have worked specific provisions for the poor (or other specific sectoral groups) into the design of their electoral systems.¹¹ However, provisions for ethnic balance may require some formal identification of ethnicity as part of the electoral process, which may often be undesirable. The applicability of such schemes also depends in part on the structure of the electoral system, and they are often easier to introduce in PR systems.

In terms of practice, most experts would agree that there is no “best” electoral system, and that the choice of system needs to be made with desired goals in mind (e.g., proportional election outcomes, strong local district representation, margin of choice for voters above political parties’ nominations, etc). While some electoral systems are certainly more likely to produce, say, proportional electoral results than others, the overall consequences of electoral systems are highly context-specific. For example, a party whose vote is thinly distributed over a wide area is likely to be disadvantaged by constituency-based plurality-majority systems. However, a party with a regionally concentrated vote can easily be over-represented by the same systems.

¹¹ See Annex 3 for more examples.

2.2 Electoral administration

Some countries locate election administration responsibility within a government portfolio like the interior or home affairs ministry, while others situate this responsibility within other institutions of governance, such as the public records office, tax department or even the postal service. Dedicated electoral management bodies (EMBs), where they exist, also feature important differences—some are temporary, others permanent; some are wholly or partially partisan, others non-partisan; and some have a centralized structure, while others are decentralized. However, comparative experiences to date, and a global study sponsored and published by UNDP,¹² emphasize that independent and permanent electoral management bodies represent a clear good practice in terms of global electoral administration, where the associated short- to medium-term costs can be met, where such bodies enjoy public trust and where they are stable. Their perceived independence from political interference lends credibility to the electoral process, which is a crucial determinant of the success of any election, and a core permanent, professional staff that grows in election years can, in the long run, be more cost-effective than an ad hoc or temporary one.

Administration: Who does what, where?

A 2000 review of 148 countries found that 53% had their elections organized by independent electoral commissions; 27% conducted elections under the supervision of an independent electoral authority; and 20% had their elections run exclusively by the executive branch. *Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance*, López-Pintor, Rafael for BDP/UNDP, 2000.

A truly independent commission is one that is able to operate effectively without direct ministerial control, including over its financial and administrative functions. It is also, ideally, one comprised of non-partisan appointees. In practice, many independent commissions around the world do not have complete financial independence and may be comprised of party representatives rather than non-partisan appointments, but they are still able to operate free from government interference or control.

As a commission's degree of independence can vary, its permanence can also be manifested in a variety of ways. A permanently staffed electoral administration is costly, and in some countries it is not realistic to retain a skeleton staff between elections. Over the longer term, however, permanent commissions are a more cost-effective option in many circumstances, and are much better avenues for building up substantive expertise in electoral administration. Many of the world's oldest independent electoral commissions (such as India's) have accumulated a capacity for mobilizing resources and a demonstrated record of expertise in electoral administration. Such evidence makes the permanent bodies model the "gold standard" for electoral administration.

At the same time, it is important to note that neither independence nor permanence can guarantee the credibility of an electoral management body. A non-credible system does not confer democratic legitimacy upon those elected. In some cases, permanent and/or independent electoral management bodies can fail if, for example, they are formally independent but not credible, or they are permanent but unstable because they lose members, and therefore institutional memory, after each election.

The composition of electoral management bodies is also important. In some countries, electoral management bodies are comprised not of independent civil servants, judges or other officials, but rather of the political parties contesting the elections. This practice is widespread in some areas, and can provide a form of "multi-partisan independence" if party representation is carefully balanced to ensure the body functions. However, this model can lend itself to politicization and deadlock, underlining the importance of carefully composing electoral management bodies.

Given the risks and vulnerabilities described above, strengthening the capacity of electoral management bodies is one of UNDP's major forms of electoral assistance, to help build sustainable democratic governance. In the electoral arena, it takes many shapes, including large-scale event planning, logistical support, and conflict-resolution training. But assistance to electoral management bodies can also

¹² López-Pintor, Rafael, *Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance*, UNDP, New York, 2000.

expand to other areas of public administration not necessarily election-related, such as financial planning, budgeting, technical support, procurement, human resources and strategic development. The UNDP multi-donor support programme to the Electoral Commission in Benin is an example of good practice in strengthening the electoral administration, as is UNDP's support to the Cambodia National Election Commission.

2.3 Voter registration

Elections are a unique area of public governance, large-scale events in which most adult citizens are able to take part, and requiring national organization and coordination. Because of this, and the need to collect, collate, manage, and protect from misuse, the data on all eligible voters, voter registration is a key aspect of election administration. This is also one of a number of sub-areas within electoral administration that are particularly influenced by the increasing use of new technology. Because in many countries the voter's roll represents the only form of civil register in existence, it is often used for purposes beyond the electoral event itself (to take a rather unique example, the voter register in East Timor was used to identify missing persons following the militia attacks that followed the 1999 UN plebiscite on independence). Equally important to individuals is the fact that the voter registration exercise is an opportunity for citizens to gain a piece of identification if electoral identification cards are issued.

One key element of voter registration is the delimitation of electoral boundaries. As is the case with electoral administration, different approaches around the world are taken to the issue of drawing constituency boundaries. For example, some countries hand this task over to the representatives of politicians and political parties themselves in an effort to "balance" any outcomes between sides. In other countries, civil servants, judges or similar non-political appointments undertake the delimitation. Comparative experience strongly suggests best practice in this area is to make the delimitation process as transparent and independent of political pressures as possible. This usually means having an independent body comprised of neutral appointees, which conducts its hearings in public and is able to take submissions and other suggestions from all interested persons. For example in Niger, public consultations on decentralization laws supported by UNDP led to a participatory delimitation process, involving public hearings of the citizens and local authorities throughout the country. Notably, electoral boundary delimitation is usually linked to a census and thus occurs only periodically.

The overall process of voter registration, by its nature, involves collecting in a standardized format specific information from individual voters, and then collating and distributing this data in a form that can be used at election time, in order to ensure that only eligible voters participate in the process and also to guard against multiple voting, impersonation and the like. The complexity of these issues, and the laborious nature of the task itself, means that voter registration is often one of the most expensive, time consuming and controversial parts of the entire electoral process, and a common source of requests for assistance.

One good practice in that is often a focus of UNDP voter registration assistance is instituting a permanent or continuous electoral register, one that is regularly updated to reflect population movements, new voters, births and deaths, as opposed to registers that are periodically created anew for each election. In the 2003 elections in Cambodia, for example, UNDP supported a new voter registration process that established a permanent voter list – to be updated annually – with 94 per cent of the electorate registered. As is the case in many other areas of electoral administration, the compilation and maintenance of an effective voter register lends itself readily to the application of new technology, particularly the computerization of electoral data, though a number of countries have not yet moved in that direction. As a result, when requesting electoral assistance from UNDP, countries commonly seek out help with computerizing the voter roll, and other related tasks necessary to adopt new election technologies.

The costs associated with various methods of voter registration are neither simple nor straightforward to calculate, since many other factors have an important bearing on overall costs. The desirability of computerizing electoral databases, for example, has to be balanced against the reality, particularly in

the poorest countries, that optimum use of new technology may not always be the most effective way to ensure a workable and cost-effective register of voters. For example, opportunities for electoral fraud can actually increase with computerization, via computer hacking and other manipulation of electronic data. Due consideration of the possibilities and the limitations of information technology is thus central to sound voter registration.

2.4 Civic and voter education

Civic and voter education are overlapping yet distinct processes. Voter education is aimed at potential voters and is an important element in developing an environment within which free and fair elections can take place. It is particularly important in emerging democracies. The goal of voter education is to assist the election administration in its task of delivering a credible and cost-effective election. An effective voter education programme, one that is focused on the technical aspects of the election and aimed at encouraging people to make free choices, can prevent violence and intimidation, particularly during the campaign and on election day. Civic education, on the other hand, is aimed at citizens at large in order to sensitize them to their rights, roles and responsibilities within a democracy.

Civic vs. Voter Education

Voter education focuses largely on the mechanics of election day—why to vote, how to vote, where to vote, etc. Civic education, on the other hand, is a broader concept focusing on a citizen's rights and duties in a democratic society. It is most usefully mainstreamed into school curricula, media messages, etc. Electoral support provided by UNDP that is targeted at a range of institutions and processes—such as electoral management bodies, media, political parties, voter education and other areas—can potentially serve as a springboard to civic education initiatives in non-election years that can help sensitize citizens and enhance their participation in democratic life as a whole, and in elections in particular.

Voter and civic education programmes are among the most commonly requested and potentially influential areas of UNDP's electoral assistance activities. Over the longer term, successful civic education programmes can increase political participation in diverse areas of governance across a broad cross-section of society. For example, in most developing countries there are identifiable groups – such as the poor, women, indigenous people, and others – that collectively tend to under-participate as voters and be under-represented as candidates and elected representatives at elections. Targeted civic and voter education programmes, aimed specifically at raising the participation of these groups can thus be a particularly effective strategy for advancing the long-term interests of the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

Successful civic and voter education programmes should typically aim to create a general awareness and understanding of the electoral and democratic processes of a country. This is usually achieved by providing citizens with relevant information – through education and various creative media – encouraging them to defend their rights, promote their interests in electoral and other democratic fora, and contribute to society through civic actions. Civic, and even voter, education does not end with elections, however. For example, in 2002-2003, UNDP sponsored post-election voter education programmes in Lesotho to consolidate voters' understanding of new electoral legislation being introduced by political parties and members of the public. UNDP also provided support for the creation of a post-election civic education strategy in Cambodia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan. Such awareness-raising programmes, which inter alia highlight the rights and responsibilities inherent in democratic citizenship, can empower people to influence governing institutions, hold their representatives and government officials accountable, and take initiatives to promote their community's development.

2.5 Coordination of international electoral assistance

Another area in which UNDP is increasingly being asked to take a lead role is in the coordination of international assistance. Effective coordination is crucial in situations where several bilateral and

multilateral donors are providing technical and other electoral assistance to a country. In most cases, UNDP plays the lead UN role at the country level as a coordinating mechanism for donor assistance, and as a forum for coordinating the activities of a broader range of international and national actors. UNDP is well placed to play this role, given its mandate and country presence, and frequent leadership in long-term electoral assistance projects strengthening electoral commissions and other institutions. Coordination can take several forms, including serving as the central coordination point for all electoral assistance, and coordinating international or national election observers.

UNDP has coordinated all electoral technical and financial assistance in a number of countries, including funds pledged by the international community towards the elections. This was the case in Indonesia, where UNDP coordinated and managed more than \$60 million of the \$90 million pledged by the international community towards the elections. This was also UNDP's role in the UNAMSIL case, where UNDP coordinated support to the presidential elections in Sierra Leone. Similar UNDP-managed funds have been set up by UNDP and the government of Mali to support the 2002 presidential and legislative polls, and by donors and the election commission in Tanzania in anticipation of 2005 elections in that country.

UNDP is also often asked to play a central role coordinating election observers. A wide range of international and regional actors now regularly observes elections, particularly in fragile or transitional electoral contests. Major actors in this field include the United Nations itself, along with regional bodies such as the European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), Commonwealth, and others. Democracy-promotion NGOs also regularly participate, such as the Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and, today, a flourishing array of domestic observer groups in most countries. This proliferation of election-observation missions means that there is increasing pressure on respected and non-partisan agents such as UNDP to provide coordination of these various observer groups. An example of this kind of coordination and support was the role played by UNDP in Bangladesh during the parliamentary elections in 2001. In that election, the UNDP country office played the role of "implementing agent" for the European Union's own electoral observation mission.

2.6 Electoral dispute resolution

A perennial area of concern and request for assistance in the electoral arena is the resolution of electoral disputes. The legal framework for elections should always provide effective mechanisms and remedies for the enforcement of electoral rights. Just as the right to vote is a fundamental human right, so too is the right to a remedy for violation of the right to vote. Thus, the legal framework for elections must set forth detailed and sufficient provisions protecting suffrage rights, as well as the many other potential areas of dispute that inevitably arise before, during and after elections.

Around the world, there is wide variation in the ways electoral disputes are resolved. At least six types of approaches have been identified; the first three are far more common:

1. resolution by the electoral organization that also organizes elections
2. resolution by a dedicated tribunal or body that is not tasked with organizing elections
3. resolution by the judiciary or by a special branch of the judiciary
4. resolution by the parliament or the executive
5. use of international tribunals and commissions to resolve electoral disputes
6. alternative dispute resolution.

Despite this variation in approaches, best practice in this area should provide, at a minimum, that every voter, candidate, and political party has the right to lodge a complaint with the competent election commission or court when an infringement of electoral rights has occurred. Best practices also show the appropriate election commission or court rendering a prompt and fair decision. Moreover, the electoral law should provide for the right to appeal decisions to the appropriate higher court or commission.

The law must include reasonable deadlines for the body tasked with resolving disputes to consider and

make a determination on a complaint, and to communicate the decision to the complainant. Some complaints can be determined immediately; others will take weeks. The resolving body must be able to deal with complaints that have the potential to seriously derail an ongoing electoral process as a matter of urgency. Deadlines must therefore allow for a degree of flexibility, taking into account the level of the election commission or court and the nature of the complaint.

Although the above principles are minimum standards that must be included in the legal framework, there is considerable variation in the way electoral disputes are handled from region to region. It must therefore be remembered that an individual country needs a high degree of flexibility when it is adopting or determining the most suitable legal structure for an electoral dispute settlement mechanism. Thus, the role of electoral assistance in this field is to work within a country's or region's own approach and traditions, while at the same time seeking to achieve the kinds of objectives that the best practice outlined above would achieve. For example, following the highly contested 1997 elections in Guyana, UNDP supported the implementation of the CARICOM-brokered "Herdmanston Accord" to address the electoral disputes and their underlying causes. In Cambodia, UNDP supported political players to undertake a major reform of the law and provided the authorities with a number of suggestions intended to streamline the electoral process and reduce its costs.

3. Practical Guidance

While each election presents new challenges to the providers of external technical and financial assistance, and each UNDP country office operates in a unique, national context (politically, historically, culturally, etc.), several practical issues cut across most instances of UNDP electoral support. Although no perfect models exist, the following suggested steps could help answer many commonly raised questions by UNDP staff working in the area of electoral assistance:

3.1 Review the UNDP-UNDP Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance and understand the responsibilities of UN actors

The Note of Guidance, issued jointly on 17 January 2001 by UNDP and UNDP (<http://portal.undp.org/server/nis/4649027220113235>), provides the background for the UN's efforts in providing electoral assistance. It describes the roles of different UN organs in delivering assistance, the types of assistance the UN can provide, and the preconditions required for electoral assistance and it outlines the procedures UN Resident Coordinators must follow to receive assistance from the EAD and other UN organs.

The document establishes that the United Nations Resident Coordinator has, in most cases, a crucial role in the coordination of electoral activities at the country level. However, major mission operations will usually be managed in-country by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), with the Resident Coordinator playing a supportive role. In all situations where there is not a Special Representative, the Resident Coordinator will be the principal liaison between the Government and the United Nations System.

The Note of Guidance between UNDP and UNDP is in line with a series of General Assembly resolutions on strengthening the role of the UN in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization. The first of these was A/RES/46/137 (17 December 1991) and typically every two years a follow-up resolution is passed following the submission of the Secretary-General's report on elections.¹³ These General Assembly resolutions can serve as an important starting point for UNDP to discuss elections, particularly when the country has voted in favor of the resolution(s) or been part of the consensus around them.

¹³ Recent resolutions are A/RES/56/159 and A/RES/54/173 and can be found on the UN documentation website at: <http://www.un.org/documents>.

3.2 Invite the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) to conduct an assessment mission to determine the suitability of UN/UNDP involvement

Providing support to an election can, in some cases, be a politically risky undertaking. In accordance with the UNDPA-UNDP Note of Guidance, UNDP should inform UNDPA (EAD), as the designated UN elections focal point, of any requests for electoral assistance by the host country before offering support of any kind. A political situation assessment, which can be undertaken through an assessment mission or a desk review, can help determine whether the environment in a country is suitable for the organization of free and fair elections. If the political situation in a country is volatile and/or elections that meet international standards are unlikely to be organized regardless of the level of external assistance then the UN Focal Point, on behalf of the entire UN system, will issue a decision against the provision of any type of UN electoral support. Where an assessment mission has been deemed necessary and undertaken, UNDP should provide EAD staff members with a detailed political briefing and schedule appointments for them with appropriate actors, for example representatives of political parties, the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the press, business and civil society.

3.3 Carefully identify and outline projected timeline and work process needs and compile in a comprehensive checklist to serve as an input to the project document

Working backwards from the projected election day or period, country offices should outline a timeline of key events and work processes required in order for UNDP to provide electoral assistance, and eventually incorporate these into a draft project document. This step can be complex and time-consuming, and as a chief coordinator of external electoral assistance, UNDP country offices may find it difficult to project the steps needed and the fixed costs of an election. Some generic considerations include the need to mobilize resources, to budget for these (e.g., such things as, inter alia, consultants for a needs assessment of the electoral commission; initial capacity support for the establishment of a dedicated programme management unit; salaries of electoral commission personnel; election equipment and materials; transportation; registration period materials and logistical support; civic and voter education; international and national consultants providing technical assistance; national and international elections observers; drivers and interpreters; etc.); to put in place proper monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems; and to review management arrangement options.

3.4 Determine substantive needs at all stages of the electoral process and their financial implications and include in the project document

When UNDPA/EAD is undertaking a needs assessment mission, it may be advisable to combine this with a project formulation mission. Joint needs assessment/project formulation missions are at times a good practice, as they can combine the political and strategic expertise of UNDPA and UNDP with a long-term institutional strengthening approach, and can also save valuable time in the formulation process. In cases where an on-site assessment is not deemed necessary, or where UNDPA/EAD undertakes a desk review, it may be advisable to retain a consultant to help the country office identify the substantive needs for supporting the electoral process, and the financial and operational implications. UNDPA/EAD maintains a roster of international experts who can provide technical assistance to elections.¹⁴ In addition, UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy, via the Democratic Governance Practice and/or SURFs in the field, draws on in-house expertise and external partnerships to support electoral systems and processes.¹⁵ Such consultants and resources will be helpful in preparing the UNDP electoral assistance project document, as well as in providing advice when drafting a detailed time-schedule. The country office may also need to recruit experienced staff (both international and national) to establish and/or staff an independent electoral assistance secretariat, or to

¹⁴ The UN General Assembly tasked the Focal Point for electoral assistance to "develop and maintain a roster of international experts who could provide technical assistance...[and] assist in the verification of electoral processes." A/RES/46/137.

¹⁵ UNDP's Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFF) for 2004-2007, approved by the Executive Board, sets fostering democratic governance as one of the key goals of UNDP and identifies electoral systems and processes as one of the seven contributing service lines to this goal.

work with and advise the programme country's electoral commission.¹⁶ The country office may request funds and contributions in-kind for (i) the voter registration process, (ii) civic education (international and national trainers), (iii) long- and short-term election observers (international and national), (iv) accountants/finance officers, and (v) electoral officials, including poll workers for election day. (Note: the wages of civil servants involved in elections should be handled through a separate government budget.)

3.5 Prepare a realistic and flexible time-schedule in conformity with the country's electoral law that includes necessary steps, with goals before and after election day

The best approach is to start electoral projects early and to always keep the lines of communication open with government officials, international donors, political parties, media and non-governmental organizations. To prepare a schedule of projected activities, the country office should use the electoral management body's electoral calendar or, if one is not available, create its own calendar, beginning with the drafting of the electoral law, and including the registration period, the campaign period, election day, and the post-election period. Depending on the size and scope of the assistance, a technical advisor will often take the lead in many of the planned activities. As noted earlier, UNDP country offices should begin designing an electoral support programme at least one year prior to the elections. At that early point in the electoral process, the office should also begin meeting with donors to mobilize funds, and with the resident international community to garner its support. Experience has shown that a good practice is for the country office to encourage government officials to focus on the electoral process significantly ahead of time, especially if a request for assistance will be made and if the voter registration process needs to be updated. UNDP practitioners should also procure election materials early in the process to ensure cost efficiency. Ideally, UNDP offices should establish partnerships with the electoral management body, and with international and local NGOs, with significant lead-time. A last-minute civic education campaign will not be nearly as effective as one implemented over the course of many months.

3.6 Leverage funding for the project document through multiple sources and approaches (cost-sharing, multi-donor trust fund, parallel financing, and the UN trust fund)

UNDP country offices should try not to limit their resource mobilization efforts to one source of financing. As noted earlier, UNDP country offices often prefer cost-sharing arrangements to the establishment of "multi-donor trust funds"; cost-sharing entails a more decentralized structure that places the country office in charge of managing donor financial support. On the other hand, while open trust funds often require separate accounting, donors may find this type of relationship more amenable to their needs. One compromise option between the two is of opening an earmarked country window for electoral assistance within the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund, allowing for both flexible and expeditious management as well as maximum accountability to the donor(s). Parallel financing, such as direct in-kind support from donor countries (e.g., supplying vehicles or election materials), is another form of external support that practitioners should pursue where possible. Finally, the UN maintains a trust fund for electoral observation that is sometimes used as a channel for earmarked donor funding for specific observation missions.

3.7 At times, it may be advantageous to include national electoral management body members in regular donor meetings

Discussions regarding electoral matters can be most effective when national electoral officials are included. As the lead coordinator of donor meetings, UNDP often invites national electoral officials to participate in some of the regular donor meetings. These meetings present an opportunity for greater dialogue between national election officials and donors, on technical and resource mobilization issues as well as on electoral concerns.

¹⁶ Mutual Support Initiatives (MSI), or COCO-COLA (Country Office to Country Office Collaboration), where experienced staff from a UNDP country office having provided recent electoral assistance are released and seconded to a country office implementing an electoral assistance project, can also be engineered by the Democratic Governance Practice.

3.8 Review options when selecting an executing agency

The executing agency is responsible for the overall management of the project, including issuing contracts and procuring the goods and services associated with the provision of external assistance. Country offices have the following options: 1) Direct execution (DEX) by the UNDP country office, often the preferred choice for electoral projects, is particularly useful to ensure the independence of projects in highly sensitive environments (note, that authorization to use DEX must still be sought by the country offices from Headquarters); 2) UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS); and 3) National execution (NEX). As per the Note of Guidance between UNDP and UNDP/PA, special caution should be exercised in the national execution of electoral assistance projects. This modality should be limited to cases in which there has been full consultation on the issue and there is consensus regarding the impartiality and capacity of the executing agent. Although NEX is the preferred means of building national ownership and capacity as per UNDP policy, these can be built through other methods of execution. In complex political situations or in an electoral environment, DEX will often be the alternative of choice because it features an independent executing agent that can stand outside of, and lend credibility to, the process.

3.9 Put necessary systems in place to ensure efficient and accountable management of electoral assistance funds

The provision of electoral assistance may require the UNDP country office to manage and account for large amounts of currency, particularly for first-time elections or when the foreign donor community maintains a limited presence in a country. Country office experience has shown that this can be a taxing burden on existing staff. Additional accountants and finance officers, who are competent and trusted, may need to be hired and carefully trained, or temporarily “loaned” from other country offices which have managed election-related projects in the region or elsewhere.

3.10 Help procure election equipment and materials if necessary

Some countries, particularly those undertaking democratic elections for the first time, request assistance from the UN in the form of support for election-related materials, including such items as ballots, ballot boxes, voting booths, indelible ink and other materials necessary for the organization of the vote. These are expensive, albeit necessary, election costs that are often reduced in subsequent elections, as ballot boxes, voting booths and other materials can be reused. Some donors in particular prefer to give this form of in-kind assistance for its direct and visible effects. UNDP itself does relatively little direct procurement of election supplies, although in some cases it may be asked to do so by a government or commission if there are concerns about national procurement regulations. Otherwise, UNDP can broker support offered by donors to electoral management bodies, being mindful of the potential political sensitivities. UNDP country offices receiving such donor offers should also refer them to the UN Secretariat.

3.11 Ensure that appropriate security measures are in place for elections, as necessary

Elections can be highly charged processes in the most peaceful of countries and potentially incendiary in countries emerging from conflict or where low-intensity conflict persists. As part of the overall preparation for elections, UNDP should, in its role as coordinator of the RC system, work with the relevant actors to assess the security situation surrounding the elections and ensure that the proper UN security measures are in place to protect staff in the field, any consultants working on behalf of the UN, independent electoral observers being coordinated by the UN and so forth. Context permitting, there is also the possibility that UNDP support national institutions, such as the police, to improve their capacity to maintain law and order through the elections.

3.12 Maximize international, and particularly national, partnerships at every stage in preparing for and following through an election

No one external actor, including UNDP, maintains the financial, political and technical resources to address all the electoral support needs of a programme country. Many partners, both national and international, are critical to the preparation of free, fair and peaceful elections, and UNDP is well positioned to facilitate the building of mutually beneficial relationships in support of an electoral process—among national actors and also between international and national actors. Partnerships can help prevent redundancy in the work of multiple actors, but to achieve this, it is important for UNDP to develop a strong understanding of, and a level of trust among electoral support groups, and to move beyond simple “contractual relationships” under UNDP auspices. It is important to build relationships with national and international partners alike, particularly in a complex political environment. Doing so can help to forestall post-electoral disputes, and charges of UNDP bias in the elections, and is integral to fostering long-term capacity in the country. In the context of electoral support, UNDP has benefited from strong country-level partnerships with organizations including national NGOs, the media, bilateral donors, the European Union, the OSCE, the UN Electoral Assistance Division, and international NGOs such as the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). Along with national NGOs involved in organizing voter education programmes, the UNDP country office should pay special attention to its relationship with the electoral commission, in an effort to build long-term capacity within the country for the organization of future elections.

3.13 Utilize the multi-faceted nature of electoral assistance and its potential as an entry point to other areas of support

Electoral assistance is aimed at improving the conduct of the electoral process. But it does not exist in isolation from other areas. For example, involvement in the reform of electoral procedures for parliamentary elections is intimately linked to legislative assistance programmes. Providing assistance to local elections is obviously an important part of local government and decentralization programmes. Hence, providing electoral assistance can have a direct impact on subsequent UNDP efforts in areas such as local governance, parliamentary development, access to information and e-governance, and public administration reform.

Annex 1. Opportunities in Programming

✓ Have you¹⁷ reviewed and understood the UNDP-UNDP Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance and the responsibilities of UN actors with relation to electoral assistance?

✓ If not already part of a pre-existing programme of governance assistance, have the national authorities requested assistance to the electoral process?

✓ Have you comprehensively mapped the substantive and work process needs for electoral assistance?

✓ Has the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), in consultation with you and the relevant UNDP/HQ units, determined whether a needs assessment mission—either desk review or on site—is necessary? If so, have you invited EAD to conduct such an assessment?

✓ Have you and partners conceptualized the type of electoral assistance? Does it flow into or build on other planned or ongoing UNDP democratic governance assistance? Has consideration been given to how electoral systems and processes can be strengthened over the long term?

✓ Have key partners—national, regional and/or international—been a part of the conceptualization process? Who are the key stakeholders? What are the risks and variables involved? How does what UNDP plans to do fit into what other partners are doing?

✓ Is a coordination mechanism in place to ensure that partners in electoral assistance meet and/or regularly share information and progress towards results? Has UNDP's role in coordination been defined?

✓ Have you formulated a project document in line with UNDP's simplified corporate requirements?¹⁸ Is the electoral project associated with a clear outcome and have outcome indicators been formulated to track and measure progress? Does the outcome fit into the relevant country programme and strategic results framework?

✓ Have resources been mobilized for the electoral assistance? Has UNDP's role in mobilizing and/or managing the resources been defined? Have you explored options for resource management and execution and weighed their pros and cons in the particular context? If you have selected direct execution, has an assessment of country office capacity for the extra workload been made?

✓ Have you retained the appropriate programmatic staff and/or financial capacity to manage electoral assistance projects? Have you created a Programme Management Unit (PMU)? If so, is it appropriately staffed and capacitated?

✓ Is electoral observation an issue? Has the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs been contacted to take the lead in this area?

✓ Have you identified other areas of democratic governance support through the provision of electoral assistance—in, for example, civic education or political party support, or in other service lines such as parliamentary development, access to information and e-governance, local governance and decentralization, access to justice and human rights or public administration reform?

¹⁷ The reference to “you” in the checklist below is to the UNDP country office practitioner.

¹⁸ Refer to the simplified project document format, Circular PROG/01/02 <http://intra.undp.org/circular/>.

Annex 2. Resources for Electoral Assistance

1. UN-DPA and UNDP Resources

1.1. UN Focal Point, through the Electoral Assistance Division – www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead

The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs is responsible for coordinating activities of the United Nations system in the field of electoral assistance. The Division advises and assists the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs in his capacity as the focal point for United Nations electoral assistance activities. Queries may be directed directly to: ead@un.org.

1.2. UNDP Governing Institutions Policy Advisors

UNDP is now well equipped to advise programme countries on issues relating to democratic governance and through its Bureau for Development Policy Democratic Governance Advisers, who are based in the sub-regional resource facilities (SURFs) and at headquarters.

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1.3. UNDP Democratic Governance Practice Network (DGPN)

The Democratic Governance Practice Network provides an electronic link of UNDP practitioners working on, or interested in, governance issues. The DGPN enables practitioners to share insights and advise on issues of interest and importance to their work. There are currently over 500 members from each continent. To subscribe to DGPN, please contact the Knowledge Network Facilitator, Kim Henderson, at Kim.Henderson@undp.org or send a message to surf-gov@groups.undp.org with "subscribe" as the subject heading. If you have a query related to electoral assistance or you want to share a good practice on elections within the organization, post it on the Practice Network!

1.4. UNDP Democratic Governance Fellowship Programme at Oslo Governance Centre

The Oslo Governance center is an integral part of the Bureau for Development Policy's support services. The Oslo center awards an annual Democratic Governance fellowship programme. The fellowship programme provides staff members with opportunities to spend between 1-2 months in residence in Oslo, where they can reflect on and write up their experiences on governance issues, including electoral assistance. More information on the fellowship programme can be obtained by

contacting the Oslo Governance Centre at: Oslogovcentre@undp.org.

1.5. UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF)

Electoral systems and processes is one service line of the Democratic Governance Trust Fund. Resources for this Thematic Trust Fund support innovative and catalytic activities. Projects up to \$350,000 to be completed within one calendar year are eligible for funding under the DGTTF. Typically the approval process for the DGTTF begins in September of the prior calendar year. More information on the DGTTF can be located on the BDP website at: (intra.undp.org/bdp/index.html). Queries should be directed to the Democratic Governance Practice Manager Magdy Martinez-Soliman at magdy.martinez-soliman@undp.org, or the DGTTF Project Associate Bathylle Missika-Wierzba at bathylle.missika@undp.org.

2. Partners and other actors in the field

Over the past few years, UNDP has signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding with organizations that provide services in the electoral assistance sector. These include:

2.1. The International Foundation for Election Systems – www.ifes.org

IFES provides professional advice and technical assistance in promoting democracy. Working in over 100 countries, it lends its expertise in elections, rule of law, governance and civil society.

2.2. International IDEA – www.idea.int

International IDEA was established to promote sustainable democracy worldwide, engaging in a wide variety of activities designed to advance democracy and to improve the quality of democratic governance, nationally and internationally.

2.3. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) – www.ndi.org

NDI calls on a global network of volunteer experts, providing practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

Other actors in the field include:

- The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE: www.osce.org/odihr
- The International Republican Institute (IRI): www.iri.org
- The Westminster Foundation for Democracy: www.wfd.org
- The Carter Center: www.cartercenter.com

Annex 3. Good Practice Examples

1. UNDP Examples

1.1 Selected Country Case Studies (<http://portal.undp.org/server/nis/4649027220113234>)

- A Multi-faceted Approach in Fiji
- Basket Funds: The Experience of Mali
- Cambodia's Experiment with Equity News
- East Timor and Political Parties
- Post-Conflict Electoral Assistance
- Support to Yemen's EMB
- Using Quotas
- Working through UNVs to support Kenyan Elections

1.2 UNDP and Electoral Assistance: Ten Years of Experience (available from DGG on request)

1.3 *Essentials* on Electoral Assistance (<http://www.undp.org/eo>)

1.4 Reports or Briefs on Elections

- Cambodia, 2003 (<http://www.undp.org/governance/electoral.htm>)
- Bangladesh, 2001 (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2001/october/2oct01/>)
- Indonesia, 1999 (<http://www.undp.or.id/publications/election1999/index.asp>)
- Nigeria, 2002 (<http://www.unnigeriaelections.org/>)
- Rwanda, 2003 (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2003/may/30may03/>)
- Sierra Leone, 2002 (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2002/april/4apr02/>)
- Yemen, 2003 (<http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2003/may/21may03/>)

2. Selected Country Examples from Partners

2.1 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

Country-specific reports (http://www.idea.int/publications/pub_country_main.htm)

2.2 National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

Country-specific reports (<http://www.accessdemocracy.org>)

2.3 International Foundation for Election Systems

F. Clifton White Resource Center (http://www.ifes.org/research_comm/fcwrp.htm)

2.4 Electoral Institute of Southern Africa

Country examples from Southern Africa (<http://www.eisa.org.za>)

Annex 4. Basic Bibliography and List of Acronyms

1. Basic Bibliography

1.1. UNDP/BDP Practice Notes and Technical Notes

In addition to this Practice Note, other UNDP/BDP Practice Notes are available at www.undp.org/policy/practicenotes.htm. Of particular interest may be the Note on Parliamentary Development (2002) and the Note on Civic Education (2004). There are also a number of Technical Notes on related subjects available, such as “The Impact of Electoral Design on the Legislature” and “Political Parties in the Legislature”, which can be found at www.undp.org/governance/legislatures.

1.2. Electoral Assistance Division guidelines

The Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) of the UN Department of Political Affairs has produced a range of reference resources for UN electoral assistance. The web document *Main Types of Assistance Activities* (www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/website3.htm) sets out the main kinds of electoral assistance activities that the United Nations engages in. *United Nations Electoral Assistance: A System-Wide Endeavor* (www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/website7.htm) sets out the system-wide nature of UN electoral assistance, tapping the complementary expertise and capacities of several organs of the United Nations family. EAD also offers limited training to UN staff in elections, for which UNDP staff are normally eligible.

1.3. Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance

Probably the most substantive UNDP publication to date on the topic of electoral assistance is *Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance*, a UNDP-IFES collaboration drafted by Professor Rafael Lopez-Pintor, which was published in February 2000. This book sets out the importance of independent and permanent electoral management bodies through assistance for legal reform; institutional restructuring; professional development; greater public information and outreach capacity; and resource management. Other related notes and presentation materials on this subject are at www.undp.org/governance/publications_full.htm#electoral.

1.4. International IDEA Publications

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has produced a number of useful handbooks and manuals on elements of the electoral process. Probably the most useful of these is the *International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design*. This is a thorough and well-produced document setting out the different kinds of electoral systems used throughout the world, the effects of different electoral system choices, and the criteria by which different institutional criteria should be chosen. It includes numerous case studies of electoral system reform and a list of all the electoral systems used throughout the world.

1.5. IFES publications

The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) also produces a number of relevant publications for electoral assistance. Most of these are freely available over their website at www.ifes.org/research_comm/publications.html.

1.6. OSCE publications

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), an office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has produced a number of specific guidelines for electoral assistance, available from the ODIHR website at www.osce.org/odihr. These include:

- Resolving Electoral Disputes
- Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections
- Assisting National Minority Participation in the Electoral Process

1.7. Joint Projects

In addition to UNDP's cooperative work with the various organizations listed above, there are also several web-based information projects that are being jointly developed by the UN, IDEA and IFES. Two

of the most prominent of these are the ACE project and the EPIC project:

The Administration and Cost of Elections Project (ACE)

The ACE Project is a joint endeavour by International IDEA, IFES and UN-DESA to provide a globally accessible information resource on election administration. This project can be accessed at www.aceproject.org.

Election Process Information Collection (EPIC)

The EPIC project is a joint endeavor by International IDEA, IFES and UNDP to provide comparative and country-by-country data on election systems, laws, management and administration. It can be accessed at www.epicproject.org.

2. List of Acronyms

BDP	Bureau for Development Policy
DESA	(UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DEX	Direct Execution
DGG	Democratic Governance Group
DPA	(UN) Department of Political Affairs
EAD	Electoral Assistance Division (of DPA)
FPTP	First Past The Post (electoral system)
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
IDEA	(International) Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
JIOG	Joint International Observer Group
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NEX	National Execution
PR	Proportional Representation (electoral system)
OAS	Organization of American States
SHD	Sustainable Human Development
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SURF	Sub-regional Resource Facility (of UNDP)
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services