



## Concept Note

### Lessons Learned on the Longer-term Impact of UN Electoral Assistance

#### 1. Background and Rationale

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Within the UN, a number of actors are involved in providing electoral assistance. Chief among these are the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) – the head of which serves as the overall focal point for electoral assistance in the UN; the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) – in peacekeeping contexts; and UNDP – which provides technical assistance, including advisory support and coordination, to requesting countries. Other UN entities involved in electoral assistance are UNOPS, UNV, OHCHR, UN Women.

As an organization concerned primarily with reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs, UNDP supports elections because democratic governance – of which elections are a fundamental component – promotes human development and in turn reduces human poverty. Today many technical assistance initiatives offered by UNDP are increasingly targeted at institutional development of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in the periods between electoral events, taking the electoral cycle approach. In 2010, UNDP provided electoral assistance to 60 countries in all regions, and over half of all such initiatives focus on the electoral cycle approach. UNDP aims to ensure that elections are credible and fully owned nationally, that there is awareness of elections being part of a broader democratic governance framework, that elections provide a vital means to safeguard human rights, exercise choice and express opinions, and that electoral assistance aims towards eventually eliminating itself. To advance these goals, the UNDP helps countries acquire the necessary skills to organize elections that are both well run and enjoy the confidence of electoral stakeholders.

There is an increasing trend that electoral assistance in the field is delivered over a long period of time, in some cases, more than a decade over multiple electoral cycles. However, to date, lessons learned and good practices of longer-term impact of UN electoral assistance, such as contribution to countries' democratization and achievement of development results as well as to principles of sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and human rights, have not been consolidated systematically. Therefore, it has been difficult for electoral practitioners to apply lessons learned from other countries in coherent and harmonized manner to plan and implement electoral assistance initiatives with a view of long-term sustainability.

In one of the decisions of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee Review of Electoral Assistance in October 2010, UNDP, with DPA and in consultation with relevant UN partners was tasked to lead a lessons learned exercise on long-term UN electoral assistance focusing on principles including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights.

It is in this context that UNDP initiates a lessons learned research for a publication on the longer-term impact of UN electoral assistance, with an intention to identify good practices that can be shared with UN staff implementing electoral support in the future and help in policy formulation. The Lessons Learned publication is expected to provide guidance for a coherent and harmonized approach to the UN's longer-term electoral assistance focusing on principles including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights. This publication will also look at the electoral assistance from the perspective of aid effectiveness, in line with principles of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, i.e., ownership, harmonization, alignment, managing for results, and mutual accountability. This lesson learned exercise is part of an agenda of various knowledge products and policy guidance that UNDP and DPA are committed to produce in 2011-2012. It will endeavor to incorporate lessons learned on women's representation and more general gender mainstreaming, in particular drawing on the findings of a separate UNDP publication being produced in 2010 on this topic.

***The Lessons Learned on the longer-term impact of UN Electoral Assistance will address the following questions:***

- a) What has the UN done and what can the UN do better to ensure electoral processes reflect the principles of sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights? Has long-term electoral assistance been cost effective, contributed to strengthening human rights, and increase of national ownership?
- b) Did long-term electoral assistance contribute to sustainable capacity development of EMBs and national counterparts, inclusive participation, sustainable electoral processes and achievement of overall national development objectives in the long run? Under what wider country conditions did long-term electoral assistance contribute to countries' development objectives? What are the good and bad practices as well as lessons learned?
- c) What can the UN do better in transitional and post-transitional countries to translate technically efficient elections into broader democratic gains?
- d) How have transitions from peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions to UNDP been handled in terms of the handover of electoral assistance? Have different modalities been utilized and did some work better than others?
- e) What are the exit strategies for electoral assistance? In cases where electoral assistance has been eliminated altogether or significantly downsized throughout the years and different electoral projects, how has this been achieved? What are the benchmarks to aim for?
- f) What are the strengths and weaknesses of different implementation modalities and procurement options for electoral assistance, with a view to making progress toward principles of Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness?
- g) What is UNDP's niche for long-term electoral assistance given its democratic governance and capacity development mandate?

***The overall objectives of the Lessons Learned exercise are to:***

- a) Provide a brief overview of contributions of the UN's long-term electoral assistance to countries' democratization and achievement of national development objectives.

- b) Analyse how basic principles, including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and human rights are addressed in the transition of UN's electoral assistance from mission contexts to hand over to UNDP.
- c) Analyse to what degree the UN's long-term electoral assistance is informed by the above principles.
- d) Provide good and bad practices from long-term electoral assistance that is provided for a decade or more, and over multiple electoral cycles, including where possible on gender mainstreaming and social inclusion.
- e) Provide a report and lessons-learned for the UN's coherent and harmonized approach to long-term electoral assistance based on principles including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights and guidance for electoral practitioners in general to work according to principles.

## **2. Outcomes**

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The Lessons Learned exercise will provide guidance to practitioners working in electoral assistance, and electoral cycle support in particular, both within and outside of UNDP. Specifically, the proposed Lessons Learned publication will produce the following outputs:

- a) Overview of long-term electoral assistance, its results and contributions to the national democratization and achievement of development objectives.
- b) Analysis of the degree to which UN electoral assistance is informed by principles of sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and human rights.
- c) Five to seven country case studies.
- d) Recommendations to electoral practitioners for planning, implementing and phasing out long-term electoral assistance based on principles including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights.
- e) Guidance on the UN's approach to long-term electoral assistance.

## **3. Target Audience**

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The key audience for this document is UNDP country offices. However, this Lessons Learned publication (knowledge product) will also be useful for practitioners working in electoral assistance in general, and electoral cycle support in particular, both in the UN (EAD/DPA, DPKO, UNOPS, UN Volunteers and UN Women) and outside of the UN (International IDEA, IFES and regional organizations). In addition, it is expected to benefit a wider group of development practitioners, including development partners.

## **4. Expected Results**

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The proposed Lessons Learned publication will help electoral practitioners to plan and implement long-term electoral cycle support projects in a more effective and sustainable manner in line with principles including sustainability, cost-effectiveness, national ownership and strengthening human rights, and to achieve the expected development objectives. In addition, it will serve as a reference for wider development practitioners by providing them with lessons learned from longer-term electoral assistance projects that can be fed into

planning, implementation and evaluation of development initiatives in countries where they work.

### ***5. Dissemination of the publication***

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The Lessons Learned publication will be distributed in soft and hard copies. A dissemination strategy will be developed in consultations with communications office for internal and external audiences, including the presentation of the product at key conferences and events. In addition, development on case studies and overall product will be uploaded on the UNDP Teamworks so that practitioners can have access the case studies and the general report. Case studies will be added to the Online Toolkit on Electoral Assistance. Election related workshops will also be utilized as opportunities for dissemination. Furthermore, for regions that have multiple case studies, i.e. Asia and Africa, publication of regional knowledge product based on the case study will be considered through consultation with regional electoral advisors and UNDP Regional Service Centers.

### ***6. Management Arrangements***

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#### ***Methodology and Team Composition***

Five to seven countries will be selected with geographical balance for case studies. The selection criteria of the countries will be:

- 1) There is sufficient information available on the UN's electoral assistance and the evolution of electoral processes in the country;
- 2) 4-5 cases from countries where electoral assistance has been provided for approximately a decade or more; including some where a number of UN actors have been involved;
- 3) 1-2 cases from countries where transition/hand over of the leadership of electoral assistance from peacekeeping or political missions to UNDP took place in a last few years; and
- 4) The proposed country office is in agreement to participate in such exercise.

Note: All UN actors in the selected countries will be interviewed.

As a preliminary research for the proposed lessons learned exercise, the Democratic Governance Group (DGG) of Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) has conducted desk review of 13 countries in which the UN has been involved in electoral assistance for a decade or more. Those countries include Bangladesh, Benin, Cambodia, Georgia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Mexico, Mozambique, Tanzania, Timor-Leste and Yemen. Please see Annex 2 of fact sheets prepared from these desk reviews and the list of documents gathered.

The lessons learned exercise team will be composed of:

- **A lead author/researcher:** The lead author should participate in all country cases and be in charge of writing an inception report and draft table of content. S/he will be also responsible for the drafting of the report and executive summary. S/he should have excellent writing skills, a background in evaluation, and experience in electoral assistance (experience with mission environments is good but experience with UNDP will be particularly useful). Since one of the objectives of this exercise is to look at how electoral assistance has contributed to the larger democratic governance processes in the country, a background in democratic governance beyond elections would be an asset.

- **A country specialist per case study**(possibly a national), who will support the lead author on its research and writing of the country case.

If available and possible, the team will also include:

- **A representative from DGG/BDP's electoral team** (Electoral Advisor DGG/BDP, HQ Policy Specialist, Programme Analysts and/or Regional Electoral Advisors)
- **A representative from Electoral Assistance Division (EAD)/Department of Political Affairs (DPA).**