

List of potential risks in the provision of electoral assistance

Macro Level Risks:

- **Changes to the existing political culture, power structures or legal framework.** For example, new appointments to the EMB can have an impact on relationships with government and stakeholders and on the culture of transparency and on their professional needs. The reduction of institutional memory of electoral processes may affect the speed of implementation of the electoral calendar. Legislative amendments can have a huge impact on the timeline and rules of the game. New census data and new boundary delimitation can create tensions between parties, and a push to register previously unregistered voters may tilt delicate power balances.
- **Government or political forces' resistance to or support for electoral reform processes that could have an impact, positive or negative, on the credibility and acceptability of the outcome.** Constant dialogue and ongoing evaluation of the political environment is critical to mitigate potential negative fallout from reform processes.
- **Internal conflict, violence and intimidation.** Violence and conflict can deter people from participating in the process; prevent delivery of election materials; disrupt political campaigns; delay civic and voter education initiatives; prevent attendance at polling stations; lead to allegations of partisanship of security forces; and affect the acceptability of the outcome of the poll. Where violence is an issue, it should be addressed initially by researching its causes and then designing targeted initiatives such as police training, security dialogues, voter and civic education, conflict resolution, communications hubs, local peace committees, facilitated dialogue between political parties and media, agreement on codes of conduct, and other means of conflict mitigation.
- **Physical environment and conditions.** Difficulties caused by the physical environment or climate conditions, such as a severe rainy season, may delay the delivery of election materials, prevent people from reaching polling places or hinder the rapid transmission of results after the vote. Such occurrences can give rise to suspicion that results are being manipulated, which may therefore cast doubt on the confidence of the process and lead to violence. Elections should be scheduled in the most advantageous season for participation.
- **Procurement of election materials.** Cumbersome or poorly designed tendering processes are particularly vulnerable to manipulation. They may also delay implementation and procurement and increase costs. UNDP's Office of Procurement Support can assist with transparent tendering processes when given sufficient lead time. UNDP Programme Managers should bear in mind that for all new projects, an advance procurement plan is necessary. Discussing this plan timely with relevant involved actors is crucial for timely procurement. Where the project calls for large procurement and the UNDP Country Office does not have adequate capacity, procurement training should be provided to staff.

- **Appropriate technology.** If appropriate, the introduction of new technology can make electoral processes more efficient. However, the introduction of new technology shortly before the elections can also raise suspicions and create a lack of confidence, or may be impractical for various reasons. Several issues need to be taken into consideration when contemplating technological upgrades. They include weighing actual vs. perceived benefits of introducing new technology, legal implications, the perceptions of voters and other stakeholders, feasibility, appropriateness, implementation time frame, cost effectiveness, maintenance, sustainability, balance between security and transparency, and integration with existing skills, electoral practice and procedures. Some of the strategies to use technology without jeopardizing the electoral process include involving stakeholders, surveying the political environment, surveying cultural issues, carrying out feasibility studies, presenting the benefits clearly, and being transparent about procurement procedures, time of deliveries, costs and risks. It may also be useful to carry out pilot and evaluation tests that can be used also as civic education, public outreach and consensus-building measures.
- **Difficulties created by lack of funding.** Delays in the receipt of funding from government or donors may inhibit the EMB's ability to carry out voter registration and education, procure materials on time, and pay ad hoc staff. All of these negative developments can reduce confidence in the process. Donors need to be aware of such conditions so they can respond in an adequate manner. Yet on the other hand, funding shortfalls or slow receipt of donor funds may inhibit the capacity of the programme to deliver its components. Efficient transmission and tracking of funds from donors to UNDP creates confidence in the management process and in the efficiency of the assistance provided.

Other UN/UNDP Risks Considerations:

Furthermore, UNDP should consult with other UN departments, notably the Department of Safety and Security (DSS), in regards to security concerns, and DPA/EAD, in regards to issues related to impartiality and credibility. Based at least partly on such consultations, UNDP can therefore determine the possibility and likelihood of the organization's actions in the election field having the following impacts:

- **Endangering staff, officials, observers and members of the population in general.** In post-conflict countries security has been a major issue and a significant cost. In extreme circumstances private security firms can be engaged. Even in more stable environments security risks are tangible. The UNDP Field Security Officer should always be involved closely with the electoral initiatives; appropriate travel clearances, security-in-the field training and other interventions must be in place. The security status of contracted project staff (not only international consultants but also local project staff or seconded government staff) and whether or not they fall under the UN immunities and privileges and are required to participate in, for example, security drills and warden systems, must be known to all interested parties.
- **Jeopardizing UNDP/UN impartiality or credibility.** The UN's impartiality is one of its greatest assets. At the same time, the UN is a value-based organization informed by the

UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21 of which states that ‘the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedure’. In some contexts, UNDP may provide a more useful service to programme countries and national stakeholders by *not* providing electoral assistance and instead retaining its good offices to mediate or resolve conflicts that ensue from the electoral process.

- **Affecting existing power structures within the country.** All democratic governance assistance is, by its nature, political — elections included. This does not mean that UNDP should avoid democratic governance work under a guise of impartiality, but rather that it needs to acknowledge and be aware that everything from public administration reform to political party support is political and affects the power balance and dynamic in a country. For example, UNDP needs to avoid acting or being seen to act in a partisan manner that favours certain political parties, interests or candidates over others. It is important that under no circumstances should UNDP actually have a direct impact on the results of the elections or be perceived as having done so. Those vital objectives can best be achieved by emphasizing that UNDP support is solely provided to help improve legal, technical and operational aspects of the process and produce results that are based on the free and true expression of the will of people.
- **Influencing transparency.** Unfounded criticism can be headed off by ensuring transparency of processes, creating clear accountability structures, establishing effective communications capacity and building allegiances and loyalties among project participants.