

GPECS II



Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support II

Democratic Elections



August 2015

Democratic Elections An integral Element of Inclusive Political Processes

Politicians, academics, and development practitioners all widely acknowledge that inclusive, participatory governance is a requisite for sustainable and peaceful human development. In the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda, this is reflected in Goal 16 which reads, 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'. SDG 16's targets focus on effective, accountable and transparent institutions; responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making, and non-discriminatory laws and policies.

In order to support the implementation of the post-2015 development framework, UNDP works across a variety of contexts, including fragile, conflict-affected, and transitional settings as well as in established democracies, and strives to capacitate inclusive political institutions and processes. In order to best support member states to achieve SDG 16's targets, UNDP has adopted an integrated approach to supporting inclusive political processes (IPP) that aims to strengthen political processes and institutions for improving citizen participation, voice and accountability and (re-) build a strong(er) and more inclusive social contract.

To implement this approach UNDP supports policy development and programmatic approaches to enhance the capacities of key political and civic institutions and groups. Core focus areas of activity include:

- **Civic engagement**, focused on both strengthening civil society capacities and expanding and protecting spaces for citizen participation in political and public life, especially for vulnerable or marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, LGBTI and indigenous peoples;
- **Constitutional reform processes**, supporting dialogue and mediation, outreach, public education, and the institutional development of constitution-making bodies;
- **Electoral cycle support**, to enhance the credibility, transparency, effectiveness and sustainability of electoral institutions, stakeholders and processes;
- **Parliamentary development**, capacitating parliaments to better discharge their constitutional law-making, oversight and representation mandates, as well as increasing the capacities of civil society actors to act as intermediaries in political advocacy; and
- Advancement of **women's equal participation** and decision-making in political processes and institutions.

Constitutions comprise the overarching legal framework which sets out the basis of the social contract between a state and its citizen. They establish the institutions of government and their powers vis-à-vis each other and the people, affecting all aspects of policy and society. Constitutions provide the foundation on which governance and peace is built. Hence, it is essential that they have the buy-in and ownership of society. In support of national constitutional reform efforts, UNDP supports member states and civil society counterparts to design and manage inclusive constitutional reform processes,



including through support for the establishment and operation of constitution-making bodies, technical training and advisory services for the members of such bodies, civic education and public consultation programmes, civil society advocacy and capacity development and engagement of marginalized groups. UNDP also facilitates the provision of high quality technical advice to national partners on substantive constitution issues, such as power-sharing, federalism/decentralization, human rights, gender equality and public accountability.

Crucial stakeholders during these processes are **parliaments**, which have constitutional mandates in relation to lawmaking, oversight and representation. Parliaments are pillars of democratic governance, with a critical role in spurring and sustaining national action towards the SDGs. They are representative bodies, with authority to oversee government action, and they serve as forums for dialogue or partners in negotiations. Parliamentary development is a mechanism that benefits the poor and other disadvantaged groups by increasing their political representation and increasing government accountability to the public. Inclusive and accountable **political parties** are a key complement to effective parliaments, providing the human capital around which parliaments form.

The ultimate means through which citizens voice their preferences and choose their representatives are elections and hence **electoral cycle** support is an integral tool for democratic governance. Elections are regularly conducted in most countries. In some cases, they have become sustainable and sophisticated processes managed by well-developed electoral administrations. Yet, many countries continue to face challenges related to the integrity and credibility of elections. Key electoral cycle processes, such as civic education, voter registration, boundary delimitation, polling and tabulation of results, as well as electoral law reforms, campaign regulations and the inclusion of marginalized groups, provide major challenges to Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). Increasing the capacities of EMBs and other national electoral stakeholders responsible for the credibility and the inclusiveness of the electoral process,

is an important contribution of UNDP's wider efforts to strengthening sustainable and inclusive democratic societies. UNDP offers strategic assistance to member states to support long-term planning and the conduction of elections. UNDP's electoral cycle support takes a holistic approach to foster inclusive political processes, leveraging synergies with UNDP's support for constitution making processes, parliamentary development, advancing women's political participation and decision-making empowerment and civic engagement/civil society.

As the only intergovernmental organization with an explicit governance mandate, UNDP is in a unique position to work with public authorities to advance **civic engagement**. Experience has shown – time and again – that UNDP can effectively leverage a significant capital of trust – often built over decades of engagement with partner countries – in order to pursue work in politically-sensitive areas, such as that of state-civil society relations. Furthermore, UNDP has a proven track record of building on key positional assets – such as neutrality, access and broad-based acceptance – to promote dialogue between government and civil society actors (as well as between different segments of society) even when this dialogue would have been otherwise unlikely due to a host of social and political circumstances. More specifically, there is great scope to strengthen individual inclusive political processes by establishing linkages between each of them, which is a further key feature of UNDPs IPP work.

In the Strategic Plan 2014 - 2017, UNDP has prioritized women's participation in decision-making and gender equality as one of its main objectives. The IPP team is leading on **women's political participation** and ensures political process such as constitution making, parliamentary programming, civic engagement and election process are inclusive and gender sensitive. In pursuit of this work, UNDP engages with key stakeholders in government and civil society, such as political parties, parliaments, women's networks, faith-based organizations and other civil society actors.

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