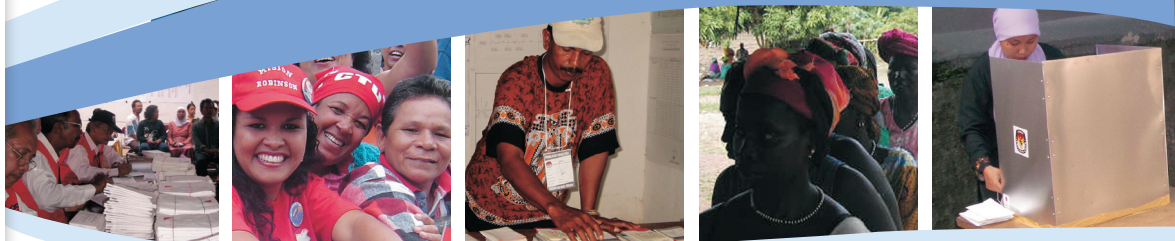


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The Electoral  
Knowledge Network



## ACE “Focus On...” Series

*Making Electoral Assistance Effective:  
From Formal Commitment  
to Actual Implementation*

BY

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## Abstract

*This ACE “Focus On ...” addresses the issue of effective electoral assistance. It builds upon International IDEA’s publication of the conclusions of the “Effective Electoral Assistance Conference” held in Ottawa, Canada, in May 2006, under the auspices of International IDEA and the Canadian International Development Agency. This event coincided with the global launch of the new version of the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, which unveiled new potential applications of ACE in electoral assistance programmes to the community of electoral practitioners, assistance providers and development agencies.*

*Seven years ago, the first official recognition of elections as a “process” rather than an “event” was not followed by an immediate shift in approach by electoral assistance providers and development agencies. The evolution from event-driven support to process and demand-driven support in electoral assistance programs has proved to be a long one, for a number of associated factors. This “paradigm shift” in approach has now taken root. However, there is still considerable work to be done before this evolution can be completed.*

*This “Focus On...” argues that the work that still needs to be done is essentially capacity building, both at the development agency and partner country level. The initiatives implemented over the last three years in the field of electoral assistance by the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme and International IDEA, and the recent establishment of the EC-UNDP “Joint Task Force on Effective Electoral Assistance” are analysed in this context. This represents a first assessment of the way in which electoral assistance is delivered on the ground, and the effect that these new ideas are having in shaping other development agencies’ priorities in this field. Cost-effective knowledge services and capacity building tools like the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and BRIDGE are playing an increasingly decisive role in making electoral assistance more effective.*



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## Introduction

Electoral assistance can be defined today as the legal, technical and logistic support provided to electoral laws, processes and institutions. It spans a broad spectrum - from the establishment of the legal framework for the administration of elections, to inclusive electoral systems and voter registration processes, support to the institutions called to administer and adjudicate upon electoral processes, through the provision of financial resources, materials, equipment and expert advice, as well as technical and financial support to civil society engaged in civic and voter education, election observation and media monitoring, including technical assistance to political parties.

The provision of this type of assistance implies as well the handling of a very complex and delicate set of interactions among Electoral Management Bodies, assistance providers, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, partner country governments, CSOs, political parties and vendors. The appreciation of the sensitiveness of this delicate set of relationships requires the development of specific skills that go well beyond the pure technical advice.

In this context, by “Effective Electoral Assistance” we mean all the initiatives and activities that are intended to improve the quality and impact of electoral assistance to partner country electoral institutions. In this sense, electoral assistance is part of the wider democratic development of the partner country, in accordance with the five key principles of “ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability” that inform the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

Electoral assistance as defined above is still a discipline in its infancy, despite the fact that election assistance activities have been part of the external relations’ agenda of several established democracies since the end of World War II. Only very recently has electoral assistance been recognised as a branch of democracy development assistance (“*Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance*”, Lopez-Pintor 1999 and “*International Electoral Assistance: A Review of Donor Activities and Lessons Learned*”, Reilly 2003) and there is still a relative scarcity of literature on electoral assistance and academic research dedicated to it. This is

reflected in the limited availability of comparative documentation in terms of historical background, content, methodologies and potential approaches to electoral assistance.

It was only after the end of the Cold War that the importance of supporting the establishment of functioning and transparent governance institutions was widely acknowledged as a priority for the creation of more stable, peaceful and economically sustainable democracies. This arose during a period of formation of new countries established after the break up of authoritarian regimes and in countries transitioning from military regimes, and support for the institutions and processes related to elections was very much a part of this development. Since then, states at the bilateral level and, more often multilaterally, have been keen to provide significant financial support to elections in several countries, with important progress being made in the process.

However, after the initial enthusiasm caused by the so-called “Third Wave” of democratisation which began in the mid-1970s but advanced apace in the 1990s, problems began to emerge. In studying





transitions in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, a striking dichotomy emerged in many cases between the provision of apparently successful election assistance and the concomitant failure of recipient states to make progress in the overall democratisation process. In many cases, the transition from electoral democracies to parliamentary democracies was never fully accomplished.

This “Focus On” highlights how the lack of progress in this area may be attributed to the failure of all development partners to fully understand the integral relationship between *electoral* assistance (as opposed to *election* assistance) and democracy development objectives. Indeed, it was believed that the focus of democracy assistance could quickly move to other areas of democratic development, such as rule of law, or parliamentary support programmes after the first wave of democratic elections.

The resulting recognition that concepts such as ‘effectiveness’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘capacity building’ were the way forward in electoral assistance was made by several development agencies around the turn of the Millennium<sup>1</sup>, but very often the officials involved struggled to identify effective methods that could turn the above mentioned concepts into effective implementation policies. Many development agency officials dealing with electoral assistance expressed frustration over the pressures created by short pre-election time frames, in combination with large expenditures and with the sudden drop-off of interest for the partner countries’ institutional development in the post electoral period.

Long-term institution building programs in the electoral area were at first simply not considered, as the focus was usually on the election as an event. International support was typically not available



for sustained activities in this sector and longer-term assistance was deemed difficult to measure and more easily influenced by external factors or unforeseen events. In contrast, short-term, ad hoc support to specific election events remained extremely attractive, as it provided easily identifiable and measurable (though much more modest) outcomes, provided high visibility at a political level and had proven to be easily justifiable to domestic and international constituencies.

In the past three years, some key global players in development assistance such as the European Commission (EC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International IDEA have undertaken concrete steps to make a more holistic approach to electoral assistance possible in the practical implementation of electoral projects. The immediate objective behind these initiatives is the intention that emerged within the EC and UNDP to rationalise their interventions in this area and harmonise them with their overall objectives in promoting democratic development. The longer-term objective that informs all these activities, particularly committed to by International IDEA, is to provoke definitive changes in the manner electoral assistance is conceived, designed, identified and implemented by all development agencies and assistance providers. These efforts have been accompanied by the emergence of a methodological and linguistic distinction between *election* assistance and *electoral* assistance. This distinction defines the former as the provision of support targeting the Election Day, and the latter as a more integrated and holistic form of long term support to electoral systems, processes

<sup>1</sup> See especially UNDP Practice Notes on Electoral Assistance and Processes of 2001 and 2004 and EC communication 191/2000 on Electoral Assistance and Observation.



and institutions. In this context, the most notable development has been the design of a new planning and training tool by the EC and International IDEA electoral specialists, called the electoral cycle.

This paper will describe some of the new activities and initiatives undertaken by the above mentioned institutions in an attempt to make electoral assistance effective, as well as the related efforts to conceptualise the linkages between electoral assistance, democracy development and the necessary development of more inclusive political frameworks and democratic culture. This description will follow a brief overview of almost two decades of electoral assistance and an analysis of the challenges and constraints which emerged towards the end of the 90s.

The main aim is to demonstrate with concrete examples that the building of strong and transparent electoral administration capacity is a primary and invaluable form of investment for the long-term democratic development of the partner countries and that ad hoc contributions to election events, whilst still needed and politically attractive, yield positive results only if embedded within a larger and more complex framework of democratic assistance initiatives.

In this effort to promote a concept of electoral assistance that is demand-driven and directed

towards the long-term strengthening of democratic processes and institutions, the role of technological innovation as a powerful but still precarious instrument for increasing transparency and accountability is considered, as well as the crucial importance that existing low-cost capacity building and professional development tools can play in effective electoral assistance programmes.

## Brief History of Electoral Assistance – Three leading actors

*Article 21 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides the legal and moral justification for electoral assistance. Since the Declaration's adoption and proclamation in 1948, the notion of international electoral assistance has undergone various transformations and been interpreted in various different ways. Nevertheless, it has always been firmly rooted within the wider domain of "democracy assistance" efforts.

Almost all established democracies had, by the 1960s, included election assistance in the framework of their democracy assistance initiatives in favour of developing countries; as such assistance had been identified as an important stabilising factor, a facilitator for economic development and a useful foreign policy instrument. At the same time, election assistance has also been used to justify interventions and even interference in countries of specific strategic interest. An early form of electoral assistance was that lent to political parties in the 1960s and 1970s in many countries of Southern Europe and Latin America by the US government or by other agencies such as the German or British political party foundations (see "*Aiding Democracy Abroad, the Learning Curve*" Carothers, 1999). Subsequently, established democracies began providing support for constitutional referenda and transitional elections through their respective development cooperation agencies or more often, through specific contributions to multilateral institutions. Apart from the 'Balkan Parenthesis', where for a very specific set of circumstances the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE) was entrusted with the organisation of elections by the *Dayton Peace Agreement* for Bosnia and by the *Rambouillet Accords* for Kosovo, one can clearly single out three actors that shaped the way electoral assistance has been justified and delivered since the 1960s: the United Nations, the United States and, from the mid-90s, the European Commission.

The UN's involvement with electoral activities began in earnest in the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>2</sup> when the *Trusteeship Council* assisted with the observation or supervision of some 30 plebiscites, referenda or elections in various regions of the world. By the late 1980s, UNDP had financed several small-sized projects that provided some form of assistance on specific technical aspects of electoral processes and on the establishment of the related infrastructure necessary to conduct elections. Also at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the UN had begun to engage in major electoral missions of three kinds – the organisation and conduct of elections (such as through the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia through UNTAC in 1993); the supervision and control of elections (such as in Namibia through UNTAG in 1989); and the verification of electoral processes (such as in El Salvador through ONUSAL in 1994).

These activities, along with rising demand from Member States for technical assistance by the UN, led to the introduction in December 1991 of a General Assembly (GA) Resolution 46/137 on "Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Principle of Periodic and Genuine Elections". Since then, the Secretary-General has *reported biannually to the GA* on "appropriate ways and means of enhancing



<sup>2</sup> The first UN involvement in electoral processes dates back to the end of 1940s with the observation of the first elections in the Korean peninsula.



the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, in the context of full respect of the sovereignty of Member States.” GA resolution 46/137 also called for the UN to designate a senior official to act as a Focal Point for electoral assistance activities inter alia to ensure consistency in the handling of requests of Member States organising elections, to assist the Secretary-General to coordinate and consider requests for electoral verification, and to channel requests for electoral assistance to the appropriate office or programme.

The GA resolution also recommended that an office be created to support the Focal Point in these functions, and since 1992, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) has filled this role. All UN electoral assistance must follow a request made by a recognised national authority and most assistance delivered in cooperation with national actors in non-crisis situations has relied heavily on UNDP’s financial and personnel resources. Also important, however, are the major activities that have been implemented through the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in the context of peacekeeping missions and, increasingly, in an integrated “one UN” manner that draws on the mandates and expertise of different agencies of the UN family in a given country.

UNDP’s field presence and traditional custodianship of the UN Resident Coordinator system proved important facilitating factors for the implementation of the UN electoral assistance: UNDP resident officials provided established relationships with government, bilateral development agencies, non-governmental organisations and political parties, as well as logistical infrastructure, country knowledge and financial resources for the mobilisation of assistance. The support provided from the late 1980s through the late-1990s, however, did not benefit from long-term planning, but was often directed at obtaining the maximum results in the shortest possible timeframe.

Similarly, towards the end of the 1980s the US started to offer electoral assistance through the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID), the Department of State and the National Endowment for Democracy. This development occurred after Presidents Carter and Reagan made democracy

promotion a central strategy of the US foreign policy. Initially, the emphasis of the assistance was heavily placed on election observation missions and political party support - with a private foundation like *The Carter Center* specialising in electoral observation, and institutions such as the *National Democratic Institute* (NDI) and the *International Republican Institute* (IRI) more active in political parties’ development. It was in 1987 that USAID also began to consider the establishment of a more technical-oriented and professional NGO, dedicated exclusively to providing assistance to the organisation of the technical aspects of electoral processes in developing countries. This was when *IFES* was established as the International Foundation for Election Systems (see for a detailed account “*Every Vote Counts*”, IFES 2007). Since then, USAID has generally maintained a sort of division between the political party and civil society organisations (CSOs) development work (generally entrusted to specialised institutions like NDI and IRI, and the technical assistance activities in support of electoral processes that are generally entrusted to IFES. Thanks to a sound and technical-oriented approach to electoral assistance, IFES has grown in



these twenty years to become the most respected NGO in this field, providing electoral technical assistance across the globe in a very large range of electoral-related activities and always dedicating resources for the professionalism and independence of Election Management Bodies (EMBs).

The EC has been active for a decade and a half in the field of electoral assistance, and its activities have always been firmly established within the larger domain of democracy promotion, as set forth in *Article 6 of the European Union Treaty*. Over this period, the forms through which this support has been provided have evolved considerably and become much more substantive than mere financial contributions to projects designed and managed by other international institutions and agencies. The EC began funding electoral support missions in 1993 with the observation of the first multi-party elections in Russia, and in 1994 with the first multiracial elections in South Africa. In 1994 the EC also provided significant financial and technical support to an electoral event of specific relevance to its foreign policy - the Legislative and Presidential Elections in Mozambique, the first elections in the country after the end of the civil war and the related Peace Agreement. Since then, EC electoral support activities have grown considerably in their number and scope: the Palestine Authority Presidential Elections in 1996 were supported both in terms of technical assistance and observation. Since then, electoral assistance projects were mainly supported through the development cooperation funds, but continued to be programmed on an ad hoc basis without any standardised and strategic approach for a number of years. In this context, EC Regulation 976 of 1999 and the *EC Communication 191 of April 2000 on "Electoral Assistance and Observation"* marked a significant step towards the conceptualisation of electoral assistance and observation as complementary activities and towards the harmonisation of the interventions.

After a period where electoral assistance activities remained somewhat uncoordinated and not very visible at the global level, the EC is now a leading global actor in providing electoral support, both in terms of electoral assistance and electoral observation. The creation of a quality support unit within the main implementation arm of the EC, Europe Aid, steered the steep increase of funding designated to electoral assistance operations (from 2004 to 2006, about 320m EUROS), with senior level attention increasingly focused on the specific challenges of supporting elections in post-conflict scenarios. In parallel the EU Election Observation programme has built on its initial achievements and consolidated a reliable methodology that can be applied consistently anywhere in the world. Since 2000, the EU has deployed some 50 observation missions in 35 different countries, which have contributed greatly to the mitigation of conflict and the deterrence of election fraud.



## The hard lessons of the 1990s

Since the first large UN-led electoral missions at the end of the 1980s, electoral assistance has played a significant, sometimes fundamental role in the democratisation processes of many countries undergoing political transitions. However, the period of regime changes that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union was characterised by enthusiastic and often unconditional support for electoral processes in Eastern Europe and in many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia. This enthusiasm for elections spread despite the fact that international assistance was very often uncoordinated, promoted inappropriate or unsustainable electoral systems and procedural models and indeed sometimes served to recycle former warlords as legitimately elected leaders.

Development agencies often provided conspicuous financial contributions for particular electoral events (generally requested by the partner countries). The support for rushed and costly election processes, using temporary institutions and massive deployment of international expertise was based on the belief that fast elections could be the panacea for transitional countries' structural and economic problems and set a sort of democratic virtuous circle in motion in the partner country.

Instead however, they often made the achievement of the partner countries' long-term development goals far more difficult. By promoting this type of intervention, the international community often locked the transition countries into an artificial and unsustainable "democratic development process" steered from outside and not from within, with high financial and technical demands, but without letting the "assisted" countries benefit from the skills and knowledge transfer which is an essential component of technical assistance projects.

In the conduct of the so-called 'second generation' of elections after a regime transition, a two-fold pattern developed: a) on one end of the spectrum, some countries were left to their own devices by the international community in a crucial but overlooked phase of their democratic transition, having been prematurely identified as being firmly on the 'democratic path' or no longer considered a political priority; b) at the opposite end of the spectrum, development agencies and assistance providers stayed the course in certain countries, but started from scratch every time there was an electoral event and a request for electoral assistance. In doing so, development agencies also tended to make their own identification of the needs that should be addressed, although this did not always match with the priorities perceived by the partner countries.



In both situations, development agencies were forced to rethink their approach. However, the almost complete absence of proper coordination between different bilateral and/or multilateral development agencies systematically impacted on the lack of effectiveness and sustainability of the electoral assistance efforts. Even if the partner country's Electoral Management Body (EMB) had defined its needs clearly, the interest expressed by different development agencies to 'flag' their support to a highly visible and attractive event often led to overlaps and gaps in meeting the actual needs. Traditionally, short-term targeted training of polling officers, ad hoc electoral material and voter education were the items preferred by development agencies, despite the fact that in most cases they were not sustainable and did not produce lasting effects that contributed to the overall process of development and democracy building in the partner country.

With the end of the 1990s, the initial wave of enthusiasm for supporting electoral processes gave way to a more reasoned and realistic approach. In many cases, international electoral assistance was crucial to prevent undemocratic forces from performing mass manipulation of the results, to strengthen the legitimacy of emerging democratic groups and parties and to persuade ex-combatants to accept the rules of the democratic game. Nevertheless, serious disappointments were also recorded in terms of the expected democratic developments in countries where elections had been made possible with international funding and expertise. This led major electoral assistance providers to acknowledge that a positive evaluation of elections had to be based on a larger scale of parameters, of which the peaceful conduct of polling and the sound logistic organisation of the electoral event was one very visible factor, but certainly not the most fundamental one. These hard lessons convinced assistance providers that "*a successful electoral process is built upon the legitimacy of the institutional frameworks*"<sup>3</sup> and that these

frameworks are made of a number of crucial and interlinked components. Persuading development agencies' decision-makers proved to be a tougher task.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Ellis, "From Optimism to Realism: Ten Years of Electoral Development", in International IDEA, "Ten Years of Supporting Democracy Worldwide", IDEA 10th Anniversary Publication, May 2005, page 100.

## The Wake-Up Call of the New Millennium

At the turn of the Millennium, electoral assistance providers began to engage more consistently with donors to analyse, in greater depth, the impact of their support to elections in post conflict, transitional and emerging democracies in terms of their long term democratic and economic development. UNDP, in particular, undertook a review of *a decade of its experience in electoral assistance*, from 1990 to 2000, which can be considered the first comprehensive evaluation made in the field of electoral assistance. The result of this review revealed that elections were too often supported as isolated events. Electoral support was not linked to other aspects of democratic governance such as constitution building, as well as political and electoral system design, despite the fact that electoral assistance often offered an ideal entry point for assisting partner countries on other democratic governance efforts. The UNDP's review presented the clear conclusion that the relationship between electoral systems and political party systems, and the need to involve stakeholders through dialogue, were often insufficiently understood or not fully considered in planning electoral assistance support, pointing for the first time to the responsibilities of the international community. UNDP followed up its 10 year review with *more specific studies*, while a number of other

development cooperation agencies like the UK's *Department for International Development* (DFID) and the *Swedish International Development Agency* (SIDA) undertook similar critical reviews of ad hoc support to electoral processes and the need to place electoral assistance more clearly within larger democracy and governance efforts.

Despite the gradual widespread acknowledgement of the need to move away from the event-driven support approach, the hard reality of foreign policy proved to be a difficult obstacle to overcome in planning longer term electoral assistance projects. At times, support to sudden elections or referenda after an unexpected regime change or a breakthrough in a long-drawn conflict was not necessarily compatible with efficient and effective planning, not even with the execution of an inclusive and transparent electoral process, unless massive international presence was deployed. In many other cases, a fundamental dichotomy persisted in the approach of many development agencies (and in the consequent formulation of assistance programmes) between the desirability of investing in capacity development and the political imperatives to achieve the best results within the shortest possible timeframe.

The assumption made by many development agencies was that “*democratization tends to unfold*





*in a set sequence of stages*<sup>4</sup>, and that the institutional design that had been previously put in place with international technical assistance might eventually be found by the new rulers of the partner countries as not respondent to their needs. Many developing countries in between elections moved away from the initially established democracy trajectory and reformed their political and electoral systems. These changes were sometimes the result of a genuine democratic development process within the partner countries; at other times these changes were imposed by the new rulers in the attempt to consolidate their hold on power. The consequence in both cases was often a severe underestimation of the technical and financial implications that such reforms had in the organisation of new elections, and hence belated requests for support to the international community that had to be met at the political level in order to maintain the partner country on the “democratic path”. In these situations, the role of international politics may mean that electoral assistance was to unwittingly serve national political agendas rather than primarily assisting the partner country in improving electoral systems and processes within the framework of advancing democratic governance.

In the face of growing consciousness of its limited effectiveness, this type of assistance was repeated again and again, and the event-driven approach often frustrated the efforts of those development agency officials who had been advocating a different strategic course. Electoral reforms therefore became a double-edged sword: on the one hand they were advocated for and encouraged to enable the partner country to follow its own democratic development; on the other hand, they were also very much feared as often requiring an unforeseen amount of technical and financial assistance and increasing concerns about the sustainability of electoral processes.

Independent international observation missions played an important role in shifting the mindset of

electoral assistance providers from the event-driven approach to a more cyclical one. Evaluations and reports produced by election observation missions represented a valuable tool for better assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral process in a given country and of their reform processes.

Electoral observation in the New Millennium had in fact already considerably evolved from the so called rubber-stamping missions of early 1990s to become a rather sophisticated and complex undertaking, especially due to the initiative of the European Union, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (OSCE-ODIHR) and independent foundations like the Carter Center.

Observation missions organized by the above mentioned actors are now deployed after timely needs assessment missions and apply a tested and *precise methodology* as well as an internally agreed code of conduct modelled on the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation*. Non-partisan election observation by international and domestic observer organisations can greatly contribute to enhancing the integrity of election processes by deterring irregularities and fraud, by promoting public confidence in the electoral process, by mitigating potential for election-related conflicts in the pre-electoral period, and most importantly, can provide grounded recommendations for improving the democratic reform process. Today there is a growing tendency for international and domestic observer organisations to monitor second and subsequent legislative and presidential elections. Furthermore, missions are deployed to observe local elections and referenda, with the aim of promoting genuine, cost effective and transparent elections. This includes the strengthening of democratic institutions and respect for human rights and the rule of law, which also benefit from development cooperation programmes. However, although observation missions produce detailed reports highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral processes, such reports have rarely been used for defining and structuring future electoral support programmes. This is often due to a limited understanding by election observation missions of development cooperation mechanisms and its implications for the complexities of electoral administration structures in partner countries.

4 Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm”, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, N.1, January 2002.

## Facing Electoral Realities: Too Much Assistance, Too Late

The lessons that several development agencies learned through the various evaluation processes described above, balanced with the constraints faced by assistance providers in applying these conclusions in practice, have been the subject of further detailed initiatives and studies promoted mainly by International IDEA, the EC and UNDP, with the aim of making electoral assistance effective beyond the technical delivery of the electoral event. The aim of these initiatives has been to clearly state the issue to those stakeholders and development agencies still not facing the reality that they are providing too much assistance too late, when their contributions only serve as “quick fixes” and do not address structural problems.

In this respect, the *Ottawa Conference* organised by International IDEA and CIDA in May 2006 represented a defining moment in the establishment of a new approach to make electoral assistance effective and meaningful for the overall democratic development of partner countries. It was formally acknowledged that even though concepts such as ‘effectiveness’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘capacity building’ had been recognised as the way forward, turning the concepts into reality in implementation had proven difficult. Support for institution building is by its very nature a longer-term exercise, and therefore less visible or perhaps less politically attractive in the event that elections may be some years in the future. Furthermore, progress in institution building is difficult to measure, easily influenced by external factors and unforeseen events, and not always fully informed by or linked to wider governance programmes. The potential consequence of neglecting the strengthening of institutions between electoral events is that “open and democratic” elections can take place in semi-authoritarian states in which the opposition is given space only during that brief period while the world is watching. Similarly, institution-building activities must be supported by corresponding improvements in pluralism and the rule of law, if they are to generate real changes.

Such practices might also have led in some cases to the misuse and abuse of development agencies support. For example, development agencies’ officials

could be pressured to apply available assistance funds to immediate but unsustainable expenses, rather than to long-term beneficial investments (see paragraph on embracing technology). Moreover, delays in development agencies reaction in identifying assistance needs and planning their responses could be used by recipients to exercise yet more pressure.

To move towards sustainability - an important and often underestimated step - is to engage stakeholders in defining what needs to be done after and between electoral events. There should be full consultation and as much consensus as possible among all stakeholders (including governments, political parties, the media, civil society organisations dealing with democratic governance, academics and think-tanks) with regard to political frameworks, legal frameworks and electoral systems and related activities. This will encourage commitment and compliance by political and electoral stakeholders at all levels both during an electoral event and after it.

To this end, development agencies have the responsibility to ensure that the objectives of electoral assistance programmes support the longer-term objectives of a democratisation strategy in the partner countries. In turn, democracy and good governance programmes need to be in line with the priorities and plans as articulated in national programmes of development assistance (poverty reduction/poverty eradication programmes) and should be an integral part of the development agencies-partner government dialogue.





## The Electoral Cycle Approach

Together, development agencies and partner countries should plan and implement electoral assistance within a framework of democratic governance by thinking ahead 10 years, rather than reacting to each electoral event as it occurs. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to acknowledge at both the political and operational levels that every time a decision to support an electoral process is made, such a decision entails involvement and commitment to the democratic evolution of the concerned country far beyond the immediate event to be supported. Any decision to keep offering ad hoc electoral support, while this might still be acceptable at the contingent political level, must be accompanied by the consideration that it will not solve the democracy gap in any partner country, but will instead trigger a more staggered process of development cooperation. Indeed, the core mistake of past electoral assistance projects did not rest in the provision of ad hoc short term support, but in the belief that such support would suffice to ensure the sustainability of the following electoral processes, the independence and transparency of the EMB concerned and the consequent democratic development of the partner country.

These considerations, together with the recognition that obstacles to the implementation of long-term assistance remained, led International IDEA and the EC to the development of a visual planning and training tool that could help development agencies, electoral assistance providers and electoral officials in partner countries to understand the cyclical nature of the various challenges faced in electoral processes: this tool has become known as *the electoral cycle approach*.

Elections are composed of a number of integrated building blocks, with different stakeholders interacting and influencing each other. Electoral components and stakeholders do not stand alone. They are interdependent, and therefore the breakdown of one

aspect (for example the collapse of a particular system of voter registration) can negatively impact on every other, including human and financial resources, the availability of supplies, costs, transport, training and security, and thus on the credibility of the election itself. In turn, if an electoral process suffers from low credibility, this is likely to damage the democratisation process of the partner country and block its overall development objectives.

The cyclical approach to electoral processes and electoral assistance was designed by EC and International IDEA electoral specialists working on the first pilot module for training development agencies officials dealing with electoral assistance projects. The concept rapidly gained consensus among practitioners and development agencies. Its conceptualisation was completed with the publication of the *EC Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance*, the *International IDEA Handbook on Electoral Management Design* and the UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide. This approach has been officially endorsed by the EC and UNDP for every common electoral assistance project through the signing of the “*Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Electoral Assistance*” <http://www.undp.org/governance/docs/Elections-Pub-EAGuide.pdf> in April 2006. The document recognises that “*electoral assistance has to take stock of all the steps of the electoral cycle and that inter-election periods are as crucial as the build up to the elections themselves, thus requiring regular inter-institutional contact and support activities before, during and after election periods, for the sake of lessons learned and inter-institutional memory aiming at improved electoral processes in beneficiary countries*”. These guidelines are already acting as a catalyst in aligning other development agencies with the strategy and features of UNDP-managed electoral assistance projects.

The aim of this “Focus On...” is not to describe the notions underpinning the electoral cycle approach, but rather to describe how it has rapidly become a cornerstone of the efforts to make electoral assistance more effective. Since its first conceptualisation in 2005, there have been several electoral assistance projects

which were successfully implemented or designed (Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Togo, Sierra Leone) in accordance with the principles set forth in the Operational Guidelines and informed by the electoral cycle approach. It has also become a model for both planning electoral assistance projects, for developing capacity within national EMBs and for raising awareness among stakeholders.

An adequate understanding of the various components, stages and entry points of an ideal electoral cycle should also be used to better plan and respond to any sudden call for urgent electoral support and clarify from the outset what is achievable and needed in the short-term, as well as identifying what must be the objectives of different, longer-term initiatives. The recognition of the different needs and deliverables related to each stage of the electoral cycle is essential for appropriate programme identification, formulation and implementation, as well as development agencies and stakeholder coordination. The establishment of joint monitoring and quality support mechanisms at top levels between the EC and UNDP for the improvement of the implementation of field operations (through the establishment of the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance, JTF) is a further step towards the consolidation of the principles for making electoral assistance more effective. The focus of the JTF is on identification, formulation, implementation, support and monitoring of all EC-UNDP electoral assistance projects, whenever needed and demanded by EC Delegations and/or UNDP Country Offices. The lessons learned are consolidated and codified so that they can be effectively applied to the implementation of new electoral assistance projects, joint EC-UNDP training activities, and the ACE project in the Practitioners' Network.

The electoral cycle approach has also proved to be a formidable learning tool for electoral officials. Effective electoral assistance requires adequate

transfer of know-how, through long-term capacity building that enables electoral administrators to become more professional and to better understand, plan for and implement their core tasks (see paragraph on institutional strengthening and professional development). The electoral cycle approach is a key instrument to facilitate understanding of the interdependence of different electoral activities, helping EMB officials to plan and allocate resources for specific activities in a more timely fashion than in the past. In particular, it places an important emphasis on the post-electoral period as a significant moment of institutional growth, and not just as a vacuum between elections.

Lastly, elections do provide an important and secure entry-point for wider interventions to support democratic governance development, such as the strengthening of civil society, the promotion of human rights (including issues of gender, minorities and indigenous peoples), support to parliaments, media and political party development, reinforcement of the rule of law and justice, and more opportunities for political dialogue and conflict mitigation. Electoral assistance programmes should thus be designed to be broader than the traditional concept of an electoral assistance plan. The electoral cycle approach is valuable in engaging other stakeholders in the process and providing them with tools to improve their assessment of times and roles for their action. Consequently, financial support should be linked to a longer-term and integrated strategy, which should include the electoral period as one phase of a longer-term democratisation process.



## Setting Up an Effective Electoral Assistance Project: From Identification to Evaluation

Of the various stages in an electoral assistance project's life, the planning, identification and formulation stages are perhaps most critical to effective electoral assistance. Despite the wide acceptance of this axiom, automatic coordination in identification and formulation among the various development agencies involved is often not a given. The electoral cycle approach provides development agencies with a basic understanding of what the entry points in a given electoral process are. They should come together at the beginning of every new cycle and dispatch coordinated electoral needs assessment missions: ideally, this should even happen at the end of the previous cycle. Development agencies often need to be reminded by both assistance providers and national partners that targeted assistance must be determined and made available at an early stage: this is when the clarification of the different timelines for the various electoral activities within the electoral cycle becomes crucial.

UNEAD has increasingly been conducting electoral needs assessment missions jointly with UNDP to inform the project identification and formulation stage, ensuring that the political and electoral assessment is fully taken into account in project design. In several cases, UNEAD, UNDP and the EC have organized joint assessment and formulation missions, with more coherent and coordinated approaches emerging as a result. The enlargement and standardisation of this practice will be crucial for ensuring adequate coordination from the outset.



Needs assessment visits should include discussions with all relevant stakeholders, and provision of feedback on why their identified requirements have or have not been included in assistance programmes. The work of the needs assessment team becomes fundamental for good planning of electoral assistance projects, and not merely for the identification of technical assistance needs but also for providing adequate consideration to management and environmental constraints that are country specific (e.g. conflict prevention). Lessons learnt, conclusions from post-election reviews and recommendations from observers' final reports should all be properly considered in developing needs assessments for the following electoral cycle. In addition to early planning, proactive rather than reactive programming, including the formulation by development agencies of contingency plans to meet late or emergency requests for assistance, is more cost-effective and has more impact. Lastly, the importance of sharing the needs assessment conclusions and adopting a common terminology among development agencies and electoral assistance providers can greatly enhance cooperation in the formulation of the respective assistance programmes.

Planning and identification activities would benefit enormously from the development of standard situation tool kits for electoral needs assessments missions that take into account all aspects mentioned above, and should be utilised in conjunction with stakeholders such as EMBs, civil society organisations (CSOs) and observers. Such tool kits would include a menu of options for assistance during each stage of the electoral cycle, linked to risk assessments and identification of the costs and benefits of implementing or not implementing items on the menu.

As for the content development activities of electoral assistance projects, national stakeholders should be encouraged to take the lead in determining priorities and linking them to national development goals using international advice where appropriate and



within the context of standard development cooperation mechanisms. The design needs to consider the practicality of multi-faceted programmes in light of the local availability of management capacity, and whether better outcomes could be achieved by having multiple programmes of narrower focus within a coordinated, holistic framework for democratisation assistance.

It is important that electoral assistance, with its diverse components, provide support which is well balanced between that provided to institutions managing the electoral process and other institutions such as the media and grass-roots CSOs. Successful assistance programmes generally encourage the formation of NGO umbrella groups for voter/civic education activities and technical assistance to domestic observation to balance the support provided to the national EMB. Support to electoral dispute resolution mechanisms and training for the media on the electoral cycle is often omitted from such programmes, but is vital in building trust in the electoral process and in promoting understanding of the continuous publicity needs of EMBs and other electoral actors. The specification of the objectives of electoral assistance projects should then be aligned with the wider democracy and good governance programmes that the development agencies have commonly agreed with the partner country in consideration of the national programmes of poverty reduction/eradication, and should be inserted in the political dialogue with the recipient government.

The implementation of programmes is obviously central to their effectiveness, but it is important to set clear objectives from the outset. In this respect, the recruitment of electoral experts requires better coordination between the various actors involved and greater attention to identifying the most appropriate professional profiles, if quality and effectiveness are to be ensured. Overall, the mechanism that has shown the best results is the multi-level assistance coordination system that covers political, managerial and technical



levels. In addition, participation of the partner country institutions in the technical coordination mechanisms is essential, but needs to be planned before the implementation starts. The typical cash-flow crisis in the middle of the implementation period can be avoided by linking the disbursements to specific benchmarks and deadlines in the electoral cycle. Stakeholders' interest must also be stimulated and sustained by requiring multi-stakeholder participation in information sharing, for example through EMB/political party/CSO liaison mechanisms.

The most neglected component of electoral assistance programmes remains monitoring and evaluation. This is partly due to the objective difficulty of evaluating progress in the partner country's democratisation process in the short-term. Even so, the electoral cycle approach offers a platform to development agencies to remain engaged in a continuous manner throughout this delicate process, where important breakthroughs can be achieved in improving the quality of the ensuing phase of assistance. Operational auditing, external and internal peer reviews, results-based monitoring and evaluation tools and independent or multi-stakeholder post-election reviews all help to make electoral assistance programmes more effective and promote and assist in their evaluation. Assistance programmes should adopt the results-based management approach, with indicators agreed by development agencies, implementers and recipients. International IDEA, UNDP and the EC are at the forefront of this activity and are committed to developing a new evaluation methodology for electoral assistance in line with the 12 principles of the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* of March 2005.





## Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Development

It is now widely understood by all those involved that electoral assistance has to take stock of all the steps of the electoral cycle: this approach, however, presents challenges of its own that are still to be fully appreciated. Chief among these are the problems caused by post-electoral fatigue among electoral officials, institutions and development agencies' decision makers alike; and political indifference in the post-electoral period towards any type of electoral, political and administrative reform that impacts election administration. A recurrent problem is the underestimation at the political level of the financial and administrative consequences that accompany decisions labelled as purely technical (for example, the decision to go ahead with a crucial electoral administrative reform like the transition from an ad hoc voter register to an integrated permanent civil registration). Analysis of the various challenges facing attempts to improve the effectiveness of electoral assistance shows that professional development of electoral officials must be factored in as a permanent activity by assistance providers and partner institutions. This offers the best chance of ensuring institutional sustainability for the electoral institutions of the partner countries and a successful gradual disengagement strategy for the development agencies of the development agencies countries.

Changes in electoral procedures and increasing sophistication of the processes are such that even the most experienced staff cannot rely on experience alone in order to adequately perform their tasks. Furthermore, EMBs must cope with the typical "brain drain" that often leads the most qualified staff to move to better paid positions in the private sector or with international organisations, and the consequent loss of institutional memory. However, the benefits of training and professional development activities are not immediately tangible and offer little visibility for development agencies, unlike ballot boxes or voter education and information materials. EMBs in partner countries generally have a difficult time persuading governments to approve budgets that contain sufficient funds for these activities. It is a typical area where external assistance is requested, sometimes at a very late stage in an electoral cycle, when electoral officials are already too absorbed by operational duties related to the upcoming electoral event. Furthermore, a lack of qualified personnel in other sectors of the partner country's structure can be an additional factor preventing the sharing of other partner countries' resources in electoral processes.

Effective electoral assistance in this sector should mean greater awareness of the professional development and institutional capacity needs of recipient EMBs rather than focusing solely on training needs for procedures related to a given electoral event. Organisational and staff development (OSD) for the EMB's long-term staff should address their capacity-building and skills requirements, and also take into account staff career development. OSD aims to unify the EMB's strategic objectives and the skills required to attain these through the career development goals of its staff. Staff development may take a number of basic forms, such as customised short-term informal training, mentoring of staff by senior EMBs or another organisation's officials, and long-term formal training in the form of courses or academic development programmes.

The tendency for electoral assistance providers and development agencies to focus too much on national elections, envisioning top-down democratisation, also requires careful reconsideration. Local elections can be as important as national ones for the democratic development of a partner country and also require targeted capacity building programmes.

One of the key issues for effective assistance is the promotion of legislative reforms that provide the EMB's highest officials with the means to protect institutional memory and continuity. This can be achieved by introducing staggered terms for EMB members or a clear delineation of responsibilities between the Electoral Commission (or Board of

Commissioners) and the EMB Secretariat. It is crucial to help the EMB develop a coherent vision for its role between elections – which may form part of long-term electoral reform proposals. The possibility of enhancing the career development of EMB staff should be identified and supported, including if possible international secondment.



## Existing Knowledge and Capacity Building Services

EMB activities directed at building internal capacity and strengthening the institution (as well as electoral assistance projects which use advisers and consultants with experience in other countries), need to be structured to ensure skills transfer and capacity building - in order that the project's achievements do not depart with the advisers. In this context, each EMB's capacity development plan must take advantage of the instruments and mechanisms that are already available for sharing and disseminating knowledge and capacity building services at very affordable costs, and development agencies should pay attention to the constant development of such instruments. Effective electoral assistance passes through regular inter-institutional contact and knowledge networks comprising electoral experts, electoral officials and electoral assistance providers.



To meet all of the challenges posed by the changing needs and increasing sophistication of the administration of elections and in order to make electoral assistance more effective, the *ACE Electoral Knowledge Network* has considerably expanded its range of activities in the past two years. From the

original concept of an on-line repository of electoral knowledge, it has evolved into a much more dynamic endeavour that contains an informative section called "*Elections Today*" with articles that cover recent electoral events or a theme in election management, an enlarged, updated and more comprehensive "*ACE Encyclopedia*" on almost all relevant aspect of the electoral process with more than 10,000 pages of documentation and a continued emphasis on sustainability, professionalism and trust in the electoral process.

Other key features of the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network are the "*Comparative Data*" section and "*Electoral Materials*", where users can find comparative information and examples of how electoral activities and processes are managed elsewhere. The most dynamic features of ACE are concentrated in the sections "*Electoral Advice*", where around 200 electoral experts provide on-demand advice to fellow practitioners, academics and electoral officials from all over the world, and "*Regions and Countries*", containing updated electoral information on almost all countries by affiliated resource centres. Both sections are managed by International IDEA with funding from the EC and the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF).

Even though still in its pilot phase, the advice provided by the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network to electoral planners through this network of experts has had an impact on how a number of recent electoral assistance projects have been formulated and are being implemented. The sharing of successes and failures of electoral support initiatives in different legal and institutional frameworks avoids the repetition of mistakes made elsewhere and the typical "re-invention of the electoral wheel" that has plagued so many electoral assistance projects in the past. The establishment of the ACE Regional Centres in geographically strategic locations worldwide has enlarged the global dimension of ACE by adding specific regional-focused activities and perspectives on various facets of the electoral process well beyond the mere collection of information at the country and regional level. The ACE Regional Centres



should serve as knowledge hubs for the generation, sharing and application of electoral knowledge to future electoral assistance projects characterised by a demand-driven and partner country-led approach which will be highly contextualised to the regions and countries in which it will be applied. In addition they should foster the regional cooperation between electoral administrators that has proved to be a useful tool to enhance the credibility and sustainability of electoral processes.

Also part of the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network is the creation of a Capacity Development Facility intended to promote partnerships between EMBs for the purpose of sharing lessons and building capacities jointly. The Capacity Development Facility is being undertaken as a pilot in Southern Africa by EISA with the support of UNDEF. Initially, it will focus on the creation of capacity development tools and methodologies based on ACE knowledge services, such as the encyclopaedia and comparative data, and will provide technical support to EMBs and facilitate participation by EMB staff in training programmes and peer exchanges for improved electoral administration.



Furthermore, new complementary knowledge services products offered by initiatives like “*I Know Politics*”, an on-line workspace dedicated to the promotion of women’s participation in politics and equal gender representation in elected institutions, and the Reconciliation and Resource Network exemplify the growing importance and potential application of these instruments in building the capacity of recipient countries’ stakeholders.

The other significant instrument already in use for quickly and cost-effectively building EMB internal capacity is the *BRIDGE* project. *BRIDGE* stands for Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections, and it is the most comprehensive professional development course available in the field of election administration, already utilised in 25 countries for more than 3,000 election officials. It offers an excellent platform for the timely delivery of a capacity building program. Non-prescriptive and participatory, *BRIDGE* has recently been expanded and updated by 50 experts from all regions, adding diversity of practical experiences and underpinned by the latest publications on specific topics (including IDEA’s Handbook series, UN/UNDP’s series of Handbooks, and the body of content generated through the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network). The *BRIDGE* curriculum framework has two Foundation Modules and 21 other modules divided into three thematic areas: Electoral Architecture, Dealing with Stakeholders and Electoral Operations. While the primary *BRIDGE* target remains EMB officials, its modules and methodology are easily adjusted and tailored to the needs of other categories of stakeholders such as parliamentarians, media, civil society, universities and security forces. It can also be tailored for specific reorientation and professional development courses for electoral assistance providers and development agencies. Particularly following post-electoral review, *BRIDGE* could play a prominent role in effective assistance programming by institutionalising best practices and including recommendations of observers and stakeholders in strategic planning and institutional reform.

## Embracing technology

Any effort to make electoral assistance more effective must tackle the issue of the increasing use of technology in electoral processes. The accelerating development of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) applications available for electoral purposes and the appeal that such applications have for the partner countries' EMB are factors to be reckoned with by all development agencies, electoral assistance providers and practitioners.

ICT has already dramatically changed the way elections are conducted in many developed countries, and it must be accepted that this process will go on and affect more and more emerging democracies, including post-conflict countries, regardless of their level of preparedness to introduce such applications. In general terms, ICT applications in the electoral process can be categorised into three broad groups: a) communications, telecommunications, radio, networks and the Internet; b) computer hardware and software, word processing/spread sheets, database management systems; c) specialised electronic/mechanical devices, non-electronic innovations and materials.

In this context, the basic question for all those engaged in the electoral management and assistance field no longer centres on whether technology developments are acceptable in electoral processes, but rather on what kind of technology is suitable for a specific country, taking into account its level of infrastructure and its electoral system. The biggest challenge is how to ensure a sustainable, appropriate, cost effective and transparent use of technology in post-conflict elections and in fragile or emerging democracies. There is obviously no fixed solution that can be applicable everywhere, different situations

requiring different solutions. As a general rule, the level of technological upgrades suitable for a given partner country should always be directly related not only to the capacity, but also to the trust and independence enjoyed by its EMB, as these are the elements that will determine their acceptance by the public and, as a consequence, increase trust in the electoral process.

However, there are other factors that influence the decision making process in choosing to implement a new ICT solution, and they are not always sound ones. Sometimes undue influence in favour of one solution or another is exerted by interested vendors, or even by development agencies who wish to introduce a technology similar to the one in use in their own country. At other times, it might be political groups in power that view the use of technology as the ultimate and the most effective method to control the electoral process. Advances in technology are not to be feared as the major factor for change, although such developments have created new opportunities for political and economic interest groups. In this framework, development agencies, practitioners, academics and electoral assistance providers have an important role to play in influencing the technological choices to be adopted in a given electoral process.

Technology can build credibility by improving the speed and efficiency of the electoral process. How its application relates to the EMBs' key obligations – legality, neutrality, transparency, accuracy, and service-orientation – is less certain. Too much attention to technology applications may also divert the EMBs from other important matters, and may drain development agencies' or EMB budgets. Costs associated with system defects, poor design or testing may leave development agencies captive to increasing costs in order to save what they have already invested in. There is a need to "skill up" staff to implement sustainable systems, and this may not be easy given the short timetables involved. In addition, technology will have an impact on voters – in terms of the perceived integrity of the electoral process – and





possibly also on the community, for example, when centrally supplied voting machines replace locally constructed wooden ballot boxes.

From an implementation perspective, best practices on when and how to introduce and implement technological upgrades in a given electoral process, and on how to avoid falling into vendor-driven traps, can be found in the ACE Encyclopedia under the “*Elections and Technology*” topic area and in Chapter 3.7 of the *EC Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance*, as well as in Chapters 3 and 6 of the UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide. The latter also offers a wider perspective for development agencies on what technological changes are sensible to support in a partner country. A good understanding of the electoral cycle helps to identify the best circumstances in which a partner country’s EMB can embark on a technological upgrade. An important consideration is that these circumstances may not be in line with the typical development agencies’s planned financial commitment shortly before an election.

Effective technology upgrades cannot be introduced without an honest evaluation of the degree of IT literacy and infrastructure that already exists in the partner country. However, long-debated issues like feasibility and technical and financial sustainability in the long-term can be properly addressed through transparent and open tendering procedures (inclusive of pilot and validation tests), and through serious training and capacity building measures to be required as part of the service. Nevertheless, a fascinating debate remains open on whether it is appropriate to introduce a level technology that is aligned with the existing capacity of the partner country or whether such capacity should be increased for the purposes of introducing a technological upgrade that can serve the partner country beyond the immediate needs of the electoral event. This debate is particularly heated over crucial aspects of the electoral process, such as voter registration, voting operations, vote tabulation and results aggregation. There are also much less controversial areas, such as communications and logistics, voter and civic education, and even training, where technology can be introduced more smoothly as a tool to improve effectiveness and product delivery and without involving the legislative power.

All the above considerations about the correct and adequate use of technology apply specifically to an

area of rapidly growing interest which has significant financial implications: the introduction of biometric features in specific segments of the electoral process: voter registration and voting operations. More specifically, the notion of Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) is used to refer to software applications capable of establishing the identity of an individual through fingerprints by the use of biometric functions. AFIS requirements have been recently included in several voter registration processes, and in some cases these requirements have been included in the legal provisions governing voter registration. AFIS systems are in fact increasingly considered to be the definitive solution to voter impersonation and multiple voting practices. They are especially popular in post-conflict countries and emerging democracies with either very limited or non-existent forms of civil registry identification, such as DRC, Togo, Guinea Conakry, Angola, Nigeria, Mozambique and Pakistan, and are under consideration in a very large number of developing countries.

The one aspect of introducing technology applications in electoral processes that has been strongly neglected to date is the socio-cultural dimension. Often the heavy investments in technology are not supported by adequate attention to confidence building activities aimed at explaining to the stakeholders and the electorate the purpose and the functions, as well as the security control mechanisms, associated with every technology upgrade. The generation of new distrust can sometimes be the most difficult problem to overcome in transitioning to a new system and might lead to a dangerous loss of credibility for the electoral institution. Too much may be expected all at once from technology upgrades – improved security, transparency and efficiency – and public expectations may be unrealistic.

The “UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide” addresses the issues highlighted above and offer practical recommendations on how electoral assistance providers and electoral officials can engage vendors and stakeholders in a debate leading to the selection of the most appropriate products and the eventual establishment of synergies with civil registration and census activities at the best price – through transparent procurement procedures, resisting the hard sell and not being forced to resort to “least worst options” by time constraints.

## The Way Forward

The electoral cycle approach has gained almost unconditional support as identification and planning instrument both among electoral assistance providers and EMB officials from all over the world. Nevertheless, it presents a number of challenges and requires delicate advocacy and sensitisation work with the development agencies community. This work is directed at firmly shifting the emphasis from generic endorsement for long-term assistance policies to concrete commitments, especially for capacity development and institutional strengthening programmes that make the outcomes more sustainable and are aligned with the overall development objectives of the partner country.

The response to the current challenges calls for the refinement of the current assessment, identification, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation tools. The objectives are to identify the electoral reality with respect to any proposed initiative or requested support, including the time necessary to adequately deliver results, required resources, security and logistic constraints and financial implications. The appreciation of the constant impact that electoral assistance exerts on the democratic development of any country should be borne in mind when a new multi-year strategy of assistance is planned by the relevant development agencies, in coordination with partner country institutions. In this context it is crucial to give adequate consideration to the available entry points for assistance in the medium and long term.

Programming interventions for the purpose of electoral assistance should be based on a clear recognition of what phase of the electoral cycle the partner country is in, and what is required to promote democratic development and good governance. There is now more attention paid to the complementary aspects of electoral assistance and election observation - as two separate but interdependent pillars for electoral and democracy support, and to promote the establishment of the necessary synergies between the two activities. These synergies would ensure that election observation missions benefit from the experience gained through electoral assistance projects, and

that the recommendations of election observation missions be duly taken into account for future electoral assistance interventions. Much of the attention of leading actors in electoral assistance such as UNEAD, UNDP, EC and International IDEA is focused on the development of new assessment methodologies that take into account these complementarities – in order to better identify, plan and implement beneficiary-driven assistance programmes and missions.

The Ottawa Conference, while drawing on expertise and conclusions provided at previous events (such as the *UNDP Practice Meeting on Electoral Assistance of November 2004* and the EU Conference on Election support of September 2005), was instrumental in identifying the necessary tools to make the shift from long-term electoral support rhetoric to concrete commitments. The key to making this a reality is the enhancement of development agencies capacity to identify, plan and advocate with their own governments for more targeted and diversified support to electoral institutions. In consequence, the major recommendation was the call for the production, globalisation, adaptation and dissemination of resource material for developing awareness and understanding of the principles and practical implications of effective electoral assistance, including the production of a set of resource material and guides on the various topics.

In the past two years, several activities have been designed and implemented by the EC, UNDP and International IDEA targeting a more effective and timelier formulation, implementation and evaluation of electoral assistance projects, in line with the concepts of enhanced development agencies coordination of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. In the second half of 2006, International IDEA, UNDP and EC experts designed a training course and a *related manual* that is designed to raise EC and UNDP officials'

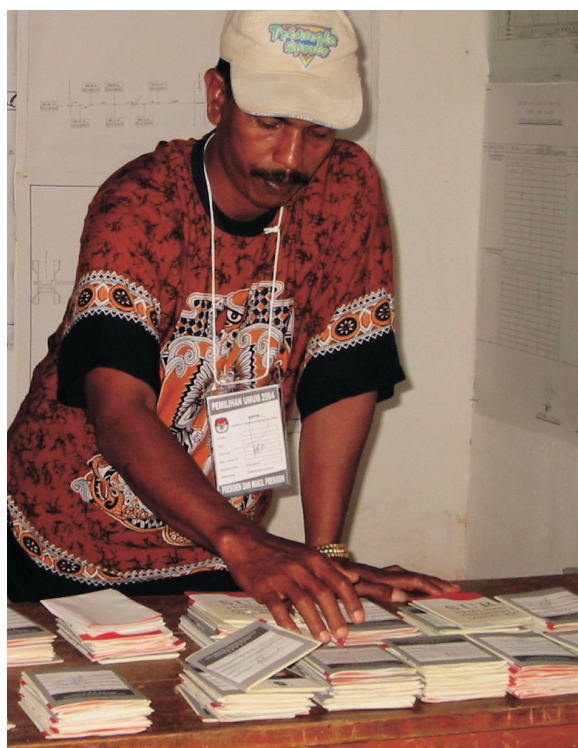
awareness of the complexities of electoral processes and the specific issues underpinning electoral assistance. In this context, three major joint training events for EC and UNDP officials took place in (Brussels in September 2006, Dar Es Salaam in November 2006 and Brussels again in October 2007), all in cooperation with International IDEA. The content used for developing the training modules is based on the *ACE Encyclopedia*, and the three fresh publications in this field - the *International IDEA Handbook on Electoral Management Design*, the *EC Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance* and the *UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide*. The methodology is a customisation of the *BRIDGE methodology* tailored for EC and UNDP policy and implementation officers working on electoral assistance.

The success of these training programmes has been the springboard for the consolidation of the EC-UNDP-IDEA partnership in developing tools and policies for making electoral assistance more effective. This programmatic partnership also inspired the “Global Training Platform on Electoral Assistance” proposal, presented at the Annual Joint Donors’ Competence Forum (“*Train 4 Dev*”), the mechanism through which development cooperation agencies from around the world decide annually their common priorities for the capacity development of their own officials. The “Global Training Platform on Effective Electoral Assistance” is based on the unique experience gained through the joint training courses. It aims to make the training modules flexible and adjustable to the specific needs of every development agency seeking to improve its officials’ ability to plan and identify more sustainable approaches to electoral assistance. It can also be used for the capacity development of Regional EMB Associations, single EMBs, universities and practitioners.

The methodology employed for the joint training courses on effective electoral assistance has now been modified to cater for larger audiences and can be applied to wider initiatives in the domain of democratic governance and public administration

reform. The Global Training Platform builds on the material codified and produced within the Practitioners’ Network component of the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network for content development and knowledge generation. The training methodology will draw upon the unique experience that UNDP and IDEA gained with BRIDGE and the insight gained by UNDP with the *UNDP Learning Resource Center*. The training programme is comprised of a five day “face to face” course, alongside longer and more flexible e-learning and blended versions. The courses will also provide a mechanism for evaluation and immediate feedback for further improvement and encourage participants to contribute at a later stage with their own direct experience.

The above described initiatives are now inscribed in the more official inter-institutional framework of the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force. The continued collaboration between EC, UNDP and International IDEA also aims towards the drafting of ‘Global Effective Electoral Assistance Principles and Parameters’, to be achieved through debate and consensus building amongst development agencies, practitioners and experts from different parts of the world.



## Conclusions

There is still a long way to go before electoral assistance can be declared completely effective. Mistakes will continue to be made, especially in presence of high political pressure to deliver elections as early as possible. It is still relatively early days in the field of electoral assistance, and the way forward will be a constant learning experience. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that key electoral assistance providers and development agencies have engaged in recent initiatives designed to facilitate the achievement of democratic development objectives through electoral assistance projects. In particular, the gap between “learning the lessons” to “applying the lessons learnt” is now closing.

Effective electoral assistance primarily means long term institutional strengthening and capacity development. Twenty years of electoral assistance have demonstrated that there is no short-term method to support a democratic transition. The international community must be ready to stay the course if the democratic development of a partner country does not follow the originally envisaged path. Short-term election assistance projects are unlikely to disappear from the foreign policy agenda of established democracies, and indeed, they should not be entirely discouraged. The solution is to frame them within a wider assistance context, with a clear understanding from the outset of their real deliverables and limited impact on the democratic development of the partner country.

Development agencies capacity can be built up through a more long-sighted approach, embodying openness towards electoral systems and processes that differ from those adopted in western democracies, and the facilitation of initiatives that are driven by partner countries’ institutions, with a specific focus on south-south exchanges. Knowledge and capacity development services such as ACE and BRIDGE are cost-effective and readily available tools for professional development and the dissemination of regional based knowledge. Each new electoral assistance project and electoral mission should make more use of these services, from the moment of programme design and deployment. EMBs should be made aware that these services are

available at relatively low costs and require limited implementing capacity. These instruments should be included as key components in every electoral assistance project, to be utilised independently of the more operational component of the assistance project, including making them available in several languages other than English.

Capacity development is a matter that concerns development agencies, in some cases, even more than partner countries. The Global Training Platform Is developing training courses modeled after the Joint EC-UNDP-IDEA training events that can be easily customised to the specific needs of the agency or institution requiring the training services. Planning an effective electoral assistance project is an extremely complex undertaking, best achieved at the multilateral level. In this respect, development agencies coordination of aid and initiatives requires much more than simply identifying the technical needs. There remains insufficient capacity to identify and plan a well-coordinated and targeted electoral assistance programme. The training proposal that is being developed with the Global Training Platform will address many of these issues. Anticipating requests for assistance in a sustained long-term support process rather than reacting to periodical requests - this is the crucial Gordian knot to be cut.



## Links Relevant to Effective Electoral Assistance

The following list provides some useful references relevant to the topics analyzed in this “Focus On....”

### I. ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE

#### IDEA

- Effective Electoral Assistance: Beyond Election Day
- Ottawa Conference, May 2-4, 2006
- Effective Electoral Assistance 4 Day Training Course for Donors

#### UN/UNDP

- UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide
- EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance
- UNDP and Electoral Assistance - 10 years of experience
- UNDP Essentials: Electoral Assistance
- UNDP Electoral Systems and Processes Practice Note (2004-01)
- UNDP Practice Meeting on Electoral Assistance, Manila 2004
- UN Department of Political Affairs/Electoral Assistance Division: Types of Assistance
- UN Volunteers and Electoral Assistance

#### EC

- EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance
- European Commission Electoral Assistance and Observation
- European Commission Methodological Guidelines on Electoral Assistance
- Governance and Democracy on External Cooperation Programmes
- Development Policies and relations with Africa Caribbean and Pacific States

#### AusAID

- Good Governance

#### CIDA

- IDRC – International Assistance to Democratic Development : Some Considerations for Canadian Policy Makers

#### DFID

- Elections and The Electoral Process: A Guide to Assistance
- Guide to Political Systems and Elections

#### SIDA

- Democratisation and Armed Conflicts, 2003

#### USAID

- Managing Assistance in Support of Political and Electoral Processes

#### NED

- Backlash Against Democracy Assistance

#### World Bank

- Assessing Governance: Diagnostic Tools

#### Research Articles

- Elklit, Jorgen and Reynolds, Andrew, A Framework for the Systematic Study of Election Quality (2005-04), in: Democratization, Vol. 12, April 2005
- De Zeeuw, Jeroen, How to make democracy assistance more effective? Recommendations for doing it differently, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute, The Hague
- Diamond, Larry, Advancing Democratic Governance; A Global Perspective on the Status of Democracy and Directions for International Assistance,
- Perlin, George. International Assistance to Democratic Development, Institute for Research on Public Policy
- Reilly, B., 2003, 'International Electoral Assistance: A Review of Donor Activities and Lessons Learned', Working Paper 17, Democratic Transition in Post-Conflict Societies Project, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague
- Santiso, Carlos, Democracy Assistance : Untying the Gordian Knot, IIG

## II. DEMOCRACY SUPPORT AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

### Civic Education

- IDEA: Initiatives for Encouraging Higher Voter Turnout (2006)
- UNDP: Civic Education – A Practical Guidance Note
- USAID: Approaches to Civic Education

### Cost of Electoral Processes

- CORE: A Global Survey on the Cost of Registration and Elections, is a step-by-step guide to election processes around the world. It explains what measures need to be in place, from voter registration to ballot-box security, and at what price, before the first ballot is cast.

### Democracy Building and Conflict Management

- IDEA Constitution Building Processes
- IDEA : Democracy, Conflict and Human Security : A Policy Summary (Fall 2006)
- IFES : Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Project
- EISA : Conflict Management, Democracy and Electoral Education

### Disability and Elections

- ACE Focus on Disability
- IFES: Global Initiative to Enfranchise People with Disabilities

### Domestic Observation

- OSCE/ODIHR: Handbook for Domestic Election Observers

### Electoral Management and Institution Building

- Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance, UNDP
- Electoral Management Design Handbook, International IDEA

### Electoral Standards

- Inter-Parliamentary Union: Free and Fair Elections

### Electoral Systems

- Electoral System Design Handbook, International IDEA

### External / Out-of-Country Voting

- Voting from Abroad, Handbook on External Voting, International IDEA

### Gender and Elections

- ACE: Women and Elections: Guide to Promoting the Participation of Women in Elections (2005)
- IDEA: Designing for Equality: Best Fit, Medium Fit and non favourable combinations of electoral systems and gender quotas, 2006
- ISA: Gender Checklist
- iKNOW: International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
- Win With Women
- OSCE/ODIHR: Handbook on How to Monitor Women's Participation in Elections
- UNDP: Gender and Electoral Assistance Factsheet
- UNDP: Enhancing Turnout of Women Voters - REVISED (2004-05)

#### **Governance and Democratisation**

- IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment
- UNDP: Governance Indicators: A User's Guide
- UNDP, Oslo Sources for Democratic Governance Indicators:
- USAID: Promoting Democratic Governance

#### **Legal Framework**

- IDEA: Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework of Elections
- OSCE/ODIHR: Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections

#### **Media Development/Media Monitoring**

- NDI: Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections

#### **Parliamentary Development**

- UNDP: Practice Note

#### **Political Parties**

- IDEA: Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns.
- IFES: Ensuring Equal Rights in the Elections Process.
- NDI: Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives
- UNDP: Handbook on Working With Political Parties

#### **Procurement**

- UNDP-IAPSO Procurement Guide

#### **Professional Development**

- The BRIDGE Project

#### **Regional Focus: International Organisations**

- African Union: Establishment of an Electoral Assistance Unit
- Asia Foundation: Elections
- EISA
- OAS: Supporting The Electoral Process
- OSCE/ODIHR: Elections

#### **Technology**

- Presentation, ICT and Elections, UNDP Global Practice Meeting on Electoral Systems and Processes, Manila 2004.
- ACE Focus On E-Voting

