INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS PROJECT IN THE ARAB STATES REGION (2012-2013)

The '**Inclusive and Participative Political Institutions in the Arab States Region**' Project was designed in early 2012 to directly strengthen the mechanisms for political inclusion in countries affected by the 'Arab Spring', both as a contribution to supporting national democratic transitions, as well as building the capacities of key political institutions to respond to and manage potential conflicts and crises during the period of transition and beyond. Activities were implemented in 8 countries, namely: Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT), and Somalia.

. *Members of Somalia's new Parliament hold a vote*
Credit: UNDP Somalia

LESSONS LEARNED

1. *Supporting the development of inclusive and effective political institutions* (parliaments, constituent assemblies, and political parties) *is critical to respond to people's expectations for voice, development and accountability:* This requires a constant engagement with political actors on the ground, a high level of trust-building measures, responsiveness to quickly deliver on very technical demands and adaptability to volatile and highly fluid political environments.

2. *Inclusion matters and needs to be tailored to the local context:* The level of political inclusion and exclusion plays a vital role in how a transition evolves. The level of inclusion of women, youth and marginalized groups in political processes and institutions has not fully matched the demands and expectations on the ground. Inclusion has been gradual, new venues for dialogues have been created, but these measures remain insufficient. In terms of effectiveness, much remains to be done in terms of empowering women and youth to play a critical role in political parties, parliaments and constituent assemblies.

3. *Constituent Assemblies:* It is important to support their legal frameworks, including the development of rules of procedures ensuring that the "ground rules" are established. In countries that do not have a tradition of public consultations and dialogue, it is critical to provide space for such processes while the constitution is being developed. Prioritize quality over quantity: ideally, extensive nation-wide consultations should be held, but it is more important that the focus be on high quality consultations than on a large volume of events.

4. *Parliaments:* Ownership of the support by the parliament is critical. This can be demonstrated by means of a strategic plan endorsed by the parliament. Identify key, sustainable changes that will have an impact on the public's perception of the parliament and the democratic system in general. Use a variety of tools to advocate for such changes, knowing that it may require a long-term commitment to see the changes come to fruition.

5. *Political Parties:* Transitioning to a democratic system may bring a proliferation of political parties and leaders, some of which will rise and fall (or merge) within the first year. It is critical to maintain contact with as many actors as possible to be flexible in providing support as the situation evolves, actors change and allegiances move.

Social context is a major factor in designing support for parties. Clan and tribe-based political engagement are significant factors in the Arab region and any support envisioned must take into account contextual realities.

6. *Electoral systems matter:* They define the type and level of representation in the parliament and can ensure or discourage dialogue amongst various groups that are demanding a voice during the transition. Every election is also an opportunity to strengthen women's political participation and make progress toward gender equality and parity targets established in international agreed commitments.

7. *Greater women's representation for policy change:* While the number of women parliamentarians has for the first time ever reached 17.8% in the Arab States region in 2014 (single/lower house), discriminatory legal frameworks remain in place, and much remains to be done to address structural challenges in terms of representation.

8. *A need to address the crisis of representation:* It is recognized that the impact and quality of parliamentary representation need to be improved in the region. Building strong avenues for constructive engagement and dialogue between elected officials, the media and civil society need to be promoted. Codes of conduct are one illustration of such effort, particularly when they are respected. Social media can also offer new methods of engagement.

9. *Institutional responsiveness to generate participation is key:* The quality of the consultative process depends on the ability of authorities to take into account and integrate the views and observations of the different groups and stakeholders in the society. Public awareness campaigns and consultative processes are important first steps but ensuring meaningful participation needs to look at the impact on policy development or change to integrate such views.

10. *UNDP and development partners should be less risk averse* when working with political institutions in the region, and their programme and support needs to be more flexible in order to be able to respond to the quickly changing environment.

11. *Ensuring more systematic and timely institutional and context analysis (ICA):* Institutional and Context Analysis must be refreshed on an ongoing basis, particularly given the rapid changes occurring in the countries in the region. Different scenarios should be available to rapidly reorient planned activities.

Top 10 Key Results:

✓ General National Congress established in **Libya** and supported in developing the rules of procedures of its first session; established the new Secretariat and its organogram, provided initial training for the newly elected members on good law-making practices, and supported local constitutional dialogue sessions in 15 regions in advance of the establishment of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly.

✓ Institution of the Federal Parliament established in **Somalia** and strategic support provided for the development of a Strategic Plan and to set up a new Secretariat, including through a young graduates programme, committee support and development of a parliamentary outreach and dialogue strategy.

✓ Parliamentary strategic plans and communication plans developed in **Morocco** and **Iraq**.

✓ Political development strategy and implementation plan developed and approved by Parliament in **Jordan**, including legal reforms governing participation (Elections Law, Political Parties Law, Municipalities Law, and Press and Publications Law).

✓ Gender legal review for the promotion of gender equality conducted in **Lebanon** and 3 priority laws addressed by the Woman and Child Committee.

✓ Policy implementation strategies developed on women and youth participation in party structures and elections in **Lebanon**.

✓ Gender Strategy and Action Plan developed in **Jordan** to foster women's participation in the electoral cycle including: a political parties' legal framework review, mapping of women participation in political parties, and trainings for women on political participation in local governance.

✓ Action Plan for women parliamentarians launched in **Algeria**.

✓ Establishment of the Youth Palestinian Legislative Council in the **OPT** with 132 members, 45 of whom are young women (35 %).

✓ Launch of the Arab Parliamentary Knowledge Network on **AGORA** (www.agora-parl.org) and first ever on-line induction course available in French and Arabic for newly elected Members of Parliament.