Tech for Democracy

UNDP

# GUIDANCE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
# UNDP iVerify

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The purpose of this document is to deliver overall strategic guiding principles and considerations for fostering information integrity and countering disinformation during elections. This document builds on the current global research in the areas of information pollution and ensuring information integrity during elections.

Understanding the complexity of today's information space presents an enormous global challenge, particularly given the abundant online information and its impact on electoral processes, in which citizens around the world exercise the right to self-determination. Many argue that misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech often pollute the information landscape, threaten peace and security, and "disproportionately affect those who are already vulnerable" (UNDP, 2022).

Although it might be desirable to believe there is a framework that allows feasible comparison of country systems and their capabilities to withstand information pollution during elections, challenges, and approaches to countering it are often unique. Countries around the world do not and should not approach solving information pollution challenges the same way.

First, the country's geopolitics, its political system, size, and homogeneity highlight obvious differences. Additionally, a tradition of self-determination by citizens, a history of accountability of government to citizens at all levels, a perception of comprehensive governing laws with effective reinforcement, prior acts of contested, disputed, or annulled elections, a general level of traditional media literacy and online information literacy in society, the presence of independent media and an overall media development context – all of these factors might influence a society's overall capability to resist information pollution.

While it might seem logical to Western democracies to see certain capabilities located within a public sector or a government agency, many countries with a colonial past might have good reasons to rely on external trusted parties to build and bolster capabilities to counter disinformation (Pamment, 2022). Simply put, no single template exists for countering information pollution during elections. Rather, systems ought to be designed to be flexible and adaptable so as to cope with various vulnerabilities and threats as they arise in real time and based on the context and resources available.

Hence, the following general guiding principles and considerations are offered. They are the result of reflection and feedback on previously implemented programmes designed to counter information pollution around the world.

# GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Combine strengths and build synergies among all stakeholders involved in ensuring information integrity and in countering information pollution and hate speech. Establish a working, engaged network of all stakeholders who work on identifying and debunking disinformation, including CSOs, professional associations, independent media organizations, election-related governmental and non-governmental organizations, and various independent commissions.

2. Utilize existing capacities by integrating ongoing initiatives, leveraging new initiatives or interventions to encourage a coordinated effort on the long term, beyond the election cycle, taking advantage of the post-election period to introduce enhancements based on lessons learned and evaluations.

3. Contribute to information, resource and knowledge sharing by establishing an online digital repository that allows all relevant actors (from disinformation analysts to government responders) to access data, reports and knowledge products about where information pollution is likely to emerge, which narratives and artifacts (e.g., accounts, groups, hashtags etc. that have already been associated with disinformation) exist, how they change over time, and which counternarratives and tools are used and prove successful.

4. Work on a sustainable solution that benefits from and builds on existing technologies while also recognizes the importance of community resilience and information literacy capacity and incorporates the human aspects of resisting information pollution.

5. Consider the media landscape of the environment in which elections take place. Ensure contextual understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the media and the presence, role, and function of independent media in the country.

6. Recognize the value of media and information literacy programming outside election cycles and its overall long-term impact on countering information pollution during elections.

7. Identify community-focused initiatives to counter information pollution, including but not limited to capabilities to learn how to

spot disinformation and how to inoculate against it. Embrace the fact that community resilience is among the most effective ways to ensure long-term success of countering information pollution during elections. Build community resilience against information pollution, starting with digital and information literacy. Provide opportunities for the widespread involvement and participation of citizens in processes that aid information integrity efforts: engage citizens in interactions with fact-checking platforms. Provide the opportunity for citizens to develop a sense of ownership of verification platforms.

8. Work with opinion leaders, including but not limited to journalists, CSO representatives, religious and traditional leaders, and other trusted members of the community to secure the validity and credibility of the solutions, their popularization, and the wide recognition of verification initiatives during election cycles. Trust is essential for successful implementation of these solutions.

## Considerations for countering information pollution during elections with the help of programmatic initiatives such as iVerify

1. Implementers should have a common understanding of the desired results and learning in alignment with national priorities. There should be a shared agreement among the constellation of UNDP offices about the vision for information integrity initiatives such as iVerify, including its use, objectives, learning outcomes, and its place in the larger efforts to ensure electoral integrity.

2. Creating a network of partners to ensure widespread use of the fact-checking two-way mechanism and sharing widely the availability of tools such as iVerify in real time with multiple stakeholders will contribute to information integrity efforts in the online/social media space and will attract attention of a wide number of partners who can potentially utilize iVerify as part of their ongoing efforts. For instance, rather than positioning itself as the main effort to counter disinformation, iVerify can in some contexts serve information integrity best as a complementary tool to other well-recognized initiatives. Coordinate with multiple CSOs and media organizations and associations to identify the best and most efficient way to implement iVerify in each context, and also emphasize the importance of utilizing iVerify beyond election cycles.

3. Technology is important – but collaborating with other stakeholders and identifying a network of those who work on ensuring information integrity during elections in each environment could be just as important and valuable in the long-run to counter information pollution during the elections. The growing influence of AI in observing and analysing digital data on disinformation and the use of predictive power to counter disinformation is appealing. However, there are limitations to machine learning as machines still do not know many local languages, particularities of cultural interactions, the media landscape and the information context, and priorities in terms of theme and topic that are prone to mis- and disinformation. AI also has a very limited understanding of the community resilience capabilities of any given society. It is not enough merely to put a technologically viable system in place – it is essential to ensure a human element within the system.

4. Meeting regularly during election cycles and understanding the most prominent disinformation narratives and tropes that emerge across various platforms, including online, will allow for a more rapid, accurate, and effective response in real time. Groups of stakeholders, from all parts of the country, from multiple ethnic populations and covering all regions and languages, should meet to review and discuss the results of social media listening and monitoring for disinformation. That way stakeholders can also share verified information with their networks and encourage them to correct and address incorrect data shared on social media channels. Regular gatherings to discuss trends, tropes, and discourse narratives with an eye to spotting disinformation will aid the information integrity efforts during elections.

5. Building relationships and working closely with local media is crucial for success. Although iVerify is a platform designed to help fight online/digital information pollution, the influence of traditional media should not be forgotten, especially in the context of nations in transition, where there is still a heavy reliance on local radio and television for information. Verified stories can and should be shared via local and regional media as well as on social media and platforms such as iVerify since many people, particularly outside urban areas, may not have easy or affordable access to online information or social media platforms.

# REFERENCES

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