Democratic Governance

Development is "a momentous engagement with freedom's possibilities."
Amartya Sen, Nobel prize-winning economist in *Development as Freedom*

Whether a nation succeeds in reducing poverty, or whether it even tries, has everything to do with the quality of its institutions and policies—and the extent of its accountability to its citizens. Development is, after all, the process of improving the choices available to people and societies—a process which extends from economic options through social and political ones. Progress toward democracy has accelerated over the last decade. From **Indonesia** to **Nigeria**, more citizens gained a real vote in 1999 than 1989.

But elections are only part of the answer. Neither democracy nor development is sustainable without transparent and accountable institutions, professional and competent policymakers, and laws and frameworks governing economic and political life openly and fairly. And as economic development comes more and more to rest on individual ingenuity and entrepreneurship, success in encouraging growth, as in defeating poverty, depends on giving the poor a real voice and real protections—a true stake in the communities where they live.

UNDP uses its expertise and experience to help governments manage power more effectively and deploy it more justly. To build and strengthen democracy, UNDP promotes judicial reform and access to justice by training judges, law enforcement officials and journalists; strengthening legal aid systems; and

Voters undergoing identification checks for Mexico's 2000 presidential elections.

funding public awareness campaigns. UNDP trains and advises legislatures and helps prepare for and hold elections. During **Mexico**'s groundbreaking 2000 presidential elections, UNDP financial and technical assistance helped give citizens new confidence that their votes would count—by enabling 48 non-governmental organizations (NGO) networks to monitor the elections. In **Bangladesh**, UNDP provided 98 million manuals, booklets and forms for voter registration and trained about 829,000 personnel for voter registration and elections.

In more than 60 countries, UNDP focuses on strengthening human rights because they are inseparable from the quality of governance. In **Venezuela**, UNDP is working with an oil company and Amnesty International to give every judge and public defender more knowledge and understanding of human rights laws, regulations and issues.

Often, the best way to improve both the quality of services and the accountability of government is decentralization—bringing government closer to the people it serves. UNDP has helped countries develop plans to decentralize government functions and train local officials to take on greater responsibilities—and UNDP is looking at decentralization issues in 39 percent of the countries it serves. In **India**, UNDP has helped support the world's largest experiment in local self-governance with training and resources for local leaders, of whom there are now more than three million.

One major challenge is ensuring the participation of women. In **Uganda**, UNDP is working with the Forum for Women in Democracy to strengthen the involvement of grassroots women's organizations in the budget process.

To improve government's effectiveness, UNDP trains people in civil service and helps
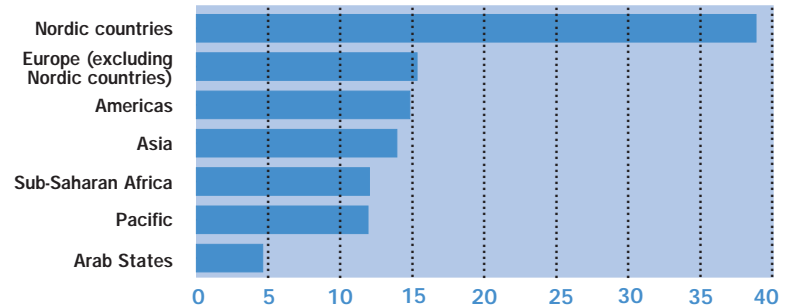
Training in self-governance for women in India.

improve accountability and fight corruption. UNDP helped bring donors together to support **Nigeria** as it established an Anti-Corruption Commission and drew up an action plan.

Finally, good governance requires committed, informed citizen participation. UNDP supports non-governmental groups as they build themselves up to participate in policy formation, advocacy and oversight in their countries. In **Mauritania**, for example, UNDP supported the creation of a Civil Society Cyberforum that brings together journalists, mayors, and NGOs. Through the Partnership for Transparency Fund, UNDP aids citizen efforts to fight corruption in **Brazil, Bulgaria, Latvia** and **Trinidad and Tobago**.

Wherever governments and societies are making the difficult transition to better and more democratic rule, UNDP is there. UNDP provides consulting services and resources based on sound experience, global presence, and absolute commitment to meeting local needs and concerns. ■

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS WORLDWIDE

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union

UN VOLUNTEERS: PARTNERING AGAINST POVERTY

The UN General Assembly proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers. UNDP manages the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, the human face of development partnership in more than 140 countries. UNV sends skilled, dedicated people around the world to make progress happen on the ground, and to put flesh on the ideal of global solidarity for development. Since its founding, UNV has sent more than 20,000 volunteers to the field. More than 4,500 serve every year—70 percent of whom come from developing countries themselves. The programme matches professionals with governments where their skills are needed; with communities looking to develop self-reliance; with humanitarian relief operations; and in support of elections, peace-building and human rights. In 2000, UNV was designated the lead agency for a new initiative of the UN Secretary-General, UNITeS (United Nations Information Technology Services) to involve volunteers in helping to bridge the digital divide. This year, volunteers will be retraining former combatants in Niger; coordinating post-flood relief efforts in Mozambique; and registering residents for the 2001 elections in East Timor. That last effort is UNV's largest-ever, with more than 800 committed volunteers coming from Canada, Kosovo and many other places to provide hands-on expertise. UNV also helps developing countries build their own networks of volunteer organizations. For more information, or to volunteer: www.unv.org.