

Democratic Governance: Bringing home the power to change

THE EFFECTS of poor democratic governance are inextricably linked to poverty, HIV and AIDS, civil wars and climate change. Indeed, development cannot happen unless governments – at all levels – are responsive, transparent and accountable to their citizens, especially the poorest and most marginalized. In 2008, UNDP's global democratic governance team contributed to the work of 129 UNDP Country Offices with initiatives strengthening national parliaments and provided direct support to countries. Demand grew from programme countries for support in enhancing public policy dialogues and participatory decision-making, especially at the local

level; countries have also requested assistance in developing institutional governance capacity in order to address a host of issues, from demining in a post-conflict setting to the particular challenges posed by HIV and AIDS. Additionally, UNDP is currently responding to requests from 70 programme countries for support in aligning democratic governance with international principles, especially in terms of promoting the rights of vulnerable groups, including women.

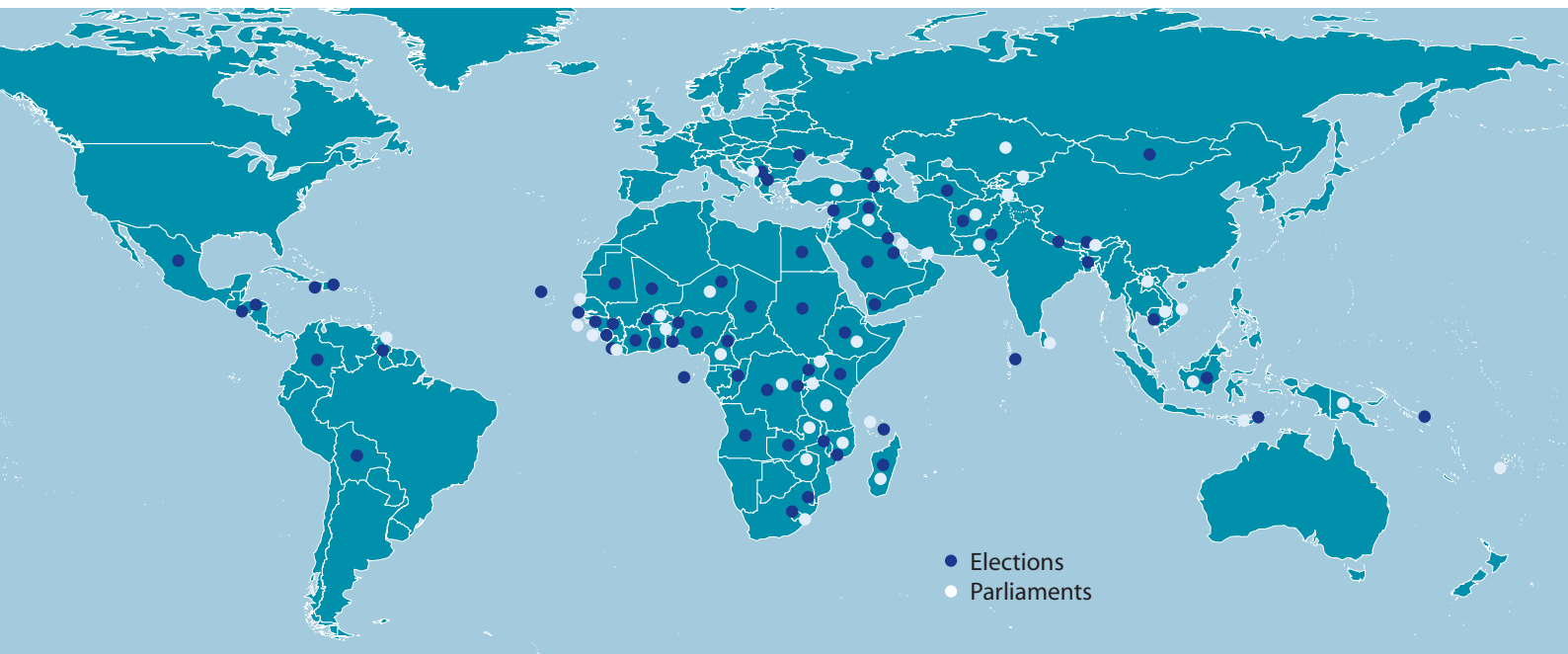
UNDP has a number of initiatives that address governance issues on both a broad regional level, as well as national and local levels. In 2008, UNDP provided a combination of technical, financial and policy support to nascent or struggling democracies, including the **Maldives**, **Papua New Guinea** and **Tanzania**. The Deepening Democracy in Tanzania



A UNDP-supported election call centre in Afghanistan received nearly half a million calls by the end of 2008.

UNDP SUPPORTS ELECTIONS AND PARLIAMENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE 2006–2008

Every two weeks, UNDP works with a government on an election somewhere in the world.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Appears without prejudice to the question of sovereignty.

Source: UN Cartographic Unit and Bureau for Development Policy/UNDP

Programme, supported by UNDP along with the Government and international donors, provides technical and financial assistance to institutions – including the parliament, electoral management bodies, political parties, civil society and the media – essential to the strengthening of the multiparty system there, which was reintroduced in 1992. UNDP activities have ranged from reviewing the legal and institutional framework for democratic development in the country to supporting the voter registration process.

UNDP is instrumental in promoting the opportunity of citizens to participate in political decision-making, particularly those of women and the poor. UNDP supports, on average, an election every two weeks, while at the same time encouraging more women to enter politics and investing in a free and informed media. For example, this past year, UNDP has played an instrumental part in major democratic elections in **Bangladesh** (see page 18) and **Iraq**. In **Zambia**, UNDP collaborated with the Electoral Commission of Zambia in late 2008 to transform a potentially contentious presidential election – following the sudden illness and death of its president

– into a successful and peaceful one, all with little notice and within a 90-day timeframe. UNDP had a pivotal role in harmonizing and managing international support for the elections and helped the Commission in the selection and training of 50,000 electoral officers and in the basic procurement of essential materials like ballot box seals, staining inks and ballot papers.

In **Lebanon**, UNDP supported electoral reform efforts through a number of activities, including the launch of a national public awareness campaign on electoral reform and the printing and dissemination of over 50,000 copies of draft law booklets in Arabic, English and French to libraries, universities and the public. Along with the Lebanese Council of Women, UNDP sponsored 27 thematic and regional workshops, including 12 on women's participation in parliamentary elections.

UNDP believes that only carefully planned and managed decentralized governance will give communities the opportunity to influence decision makers, and those decision makers the capacity to act in response. That is why in the **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, UNDP is partnering with

the Ministry of Local Self-Government, in addition to various municipalities, to improve the quality of public services at the local level. For example, three rural municipalities of equal size established joint administrations for urban planning, tax collection and local inspections. In addition, the programme updated the taxpayers' database in five of these municipalities, which increased the number of taxpayers by 30 percent, while also sponsoring a local awareness-raising campaign on citizen tax rights and obligations. UNDP has started implementing the programme in five more municipalities. In **Nigeria**, UNDP is working with the Government to build a strong, broad-based tax regime that can facilitate the

shift away from tariffs and other trade barriers by fostering alternative sources of public revenue and by improving the fiscal infrastructure to collect those revenues efficiently, transparently and accurately. Tax reform is a key part of Nigeria's economic and public sector reform, especially as a way to reduce the current overwhelming disparities between the rich and the poor and to diversify economic revenue generation from an over-dependence on oil revenue to non-oil sources such as customs tariffs, value-added tax and sales tax. As a result of the project, a user-friendly taxpayer data warehousing system was established so that Nigeria's Internal Revenue Service can keep track of taxpayer data; staff were then trained

UNIFEM: DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY TO WOMEN

Women are extremely vulnerable to shifting patterns in global markets in the absence of measures that protect them. This vulnerability came to the forefront during the food crisis since women not only assume primary responsibility for feeding their families but also contribute as much as 50 to 80 percent of agricultural labour in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Similarly, women's employment and migration are also shaped by global trends. The "brain drain" from South to North of people with tertiary education has recently become feminized, with more professional women migrating than men. This has implications for women's economic leadership in developing countries.

These and other findings are presented in *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009, Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*, released by the **United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)**. UNIFEM's biennial flagship publication reveals that much stronger accountability mechanisms for tracking progress on gender equality are needed in order to meet national and international commitments to women's rights. To date, women are outnumbered four to one in legislatures around the world; over 60 percent of all unpaid family workers globally are women; women still earn on average 17 percent less than men, and about one-third of women suffer gender-based violence during their lives. In some parts of the world, one in 10 women dies from pregnancy-related causes even though the

means for preventing maternal mortality are cost-effective and well known.

Gender gaps on this scale are symptomatic of an accountability crisis. The report points out that accountability mechanisms work for women when they can ask for explanations and information from decision makers and, where necessary, initiate investigations or get compensation. Women must be included in oversight processes, and advancing women's rights must be a key standard against which the performance of public officials is assessed and, if necessary, sanctioned.

Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009 provides an assessment of each of the MDGs from a gender perspective and focuses on five key areas where urgent action is required to strengthen accountability to women: politics and governance, access to public services, economic opportunities, justice and the distribution of international assistance for development and security. In each of these areas the report details means of building state capacity — or good governance — from a women's rights perspective. Yet the publication also points out that multilateral aid and security institutions can do much more to meet their own commitments and standards on gender equality. To date, no agreed system-wide tracking mechanism exists within multilaterals such as the UN and the international financial institutions to assess the amount of aid allocated to gender equality or women's empowerment.



In partnership with the Governments of Italy and Lebanon, UNDP is supporting dialogue between Lebanese and Palestinian youth in the country's northern region.

in the use of the system and the database was linked to the country's Corporate Affairs Commission for regular updates on newly registered companies. The project also published a report that provided an analysis of collected taxpayer data, a listing of potential taxpayers and strategies for improved tax compliance.

In **India**, meanwhile, UNDP is providing technical support and expertise to the central government in the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act through the creation of a technical advisory group that includes experts in monitoring, training and communications and management information systems. The Act is an unprecedented piece of poverty-fighting legislation

that guarantees 100 days of work every year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work at minimum wages; otherwise, workers will be paid a daily unemployment allowance. Among other results, UNDP has promoted greater awareness on entitlements under the Act and has improved transparency through innovative pilots to monitor wage payment through ATMs and smart card technology in rural areas in five states: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. In order to improve implementation, UNDP is also facilitating partnerships between the Government and a host of professional institutions.



Bangladesh is a densely populated developing nation that has borne the brunt of climate change effects as it continues to be buffeted by worse than usual cyclones, floods and monsoons year after year. Although its economy has shown itself to be a resilient one in the past, the recent international financial and commodity crises are threatening its development goals as its gross domestic product (GDP) growth begins to slow and workers' remittances from abroad drop off.

Last year, UNDP proved itself a key partner in the long and complex preparations for December's parliamentary election, the first in seven years. If a stable, trusted government is a crucial component of achieving development goals, then the election came none too soon as Bangladesh faces weak economic growth due to the global economic downturn. Widespread and systemic efforts at election reform resulted in a high rate of transparency and voter participation. In association with nine donors and the Bangladesh Election Commission, UNDP helped to create a credible photo voters list, which resulted in a state of the art electoral roll of over 81 million people. UNDP was particularly instrumental in providing technical assistance and, as a result, 500,000 election workers were trained in the use of more than 10,000 laptops with webcams and fingerprint scanners. Beyond the numbers, the initiative enabled a significantly freer and fairer electoral process that is paving the way for a deepening of democracy in Bangladesh.

Significant problems exist in Bangladesh with rule of law, corruption and access to justice, all of which affect the poor, women and young people the most. Four years ago, UNDP initiated a police reform programme in cooperation with the Bangladesh Police and the Ministry of Home Affairs and donor partners that aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the national police, especially in the areas of crime prevention, investigations and human resource management and training. With the first phase coming to a close, the initiative has seen a number of significant changes, including the establishment of over 20,000 community police organizations dedicated to building a closer relationship with local people; the creation of the Bangladesh Police Women's

network; the adoption of gender guidelines by the police; the training of 3,000 police officers in investigative techniques, leadership and management skills; and the establishment of a special national unit dedicated to combating human trafficking. Recent surveys, including one conducted by the Asia Foundation, show that people in Bangladesh believe that police performance has improved over the past two years.

Meanwhile, experts are predicting that as sea levels continue to rise, Bangladesh could lose up to 15 to 18 percent of its land area, making 30 million people environmental refugees by 2050. For an already overpopulated and land-scarce country, the social upheaval resulting from climate change-induced mass migration could have devastating effects, making UNDP's work there all the more crucial.

There is an urgent need to improve its emergency response planning at the district and lower levels in addition to increasing its leaders' ability to make decisions that can save lives and livelihoods and preserve security. To that end, UNDP has partnered with the Government and international donors to enact the Bangladesh Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. The Programme has established a vast network of more than 75 government, CSO and institutional partners, as well as UN organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Programme has helped establish a national disaster management legislative and regulatory framework addressing risk reduction and response. Over 25,000 people have received disaster management training and, perhaps most significantly, nationally accepted risk assessment and reduction planning guidelines for use by all non-state organizations were developed. The Programme launched a major earthquake risk assessment for three of Bangladesh's major cities, established a national Disaster Management Information Centre with telecommunication links to all 64 district headquarters and the Department of Environment now includes a Climate Change Cell, dedicated to converting global forecasts into national impact statements.

A Bangladeshi police officer helps an infirm woman at a polling station during the 2008 elections.