

Free and Fair Elections



Project: *Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development Support for the Election Commission of Nepal*

> Background

The Election Commission is the Government body responsible for managing local and national elections in Nepal. Since 1990 the commission has run four general elections (1991, 1994, 1999 and 2008) and two local elections (1992 and 1997). These have been well run within the constraints of the limited financial and human resources.

For each of these elections the commission received substantial donor support, including for the 2008 elections where the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) funded a nationwide voter education programme, training for election officials and the deployment of polling officials on election day. Also, UNDP, with funding from the United Nations Peace Trust Fund (UNPTF), assisted the commission to establish an Electoral Observation Resource Centre to manage the many local and international election observers.

However, long term support for building up the capacity of the Election Commission has been lacking as almost all support has gone to holding individual elections. UNDP's focus internationally is now shifting to providing longer-term support delivered in the periods between elections.

> The project

The Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development Support for the Election Commission of Nepal project aims to build up the capacity of the Election Commission to efficiently hold participatory, peaceful and credible elections. It is a new kind of initiative for Nepal as it is being run between elections — in the period between the April 2008 nationwide elections and the next elections — rather than around an election. The next elections are due once the new constitution has been produced. This support should have a longer lasting impact than one-off support to elections.

Although the commission was widely praised for the way it ran the April 2008 constituent assembly elections, a review identified a number of ways in which the commission and the overall system for holding elections could be strengthened. The main need is for the commission to move from working in a reactive way around individual elections to more proactively addressing the challenges it faces over the medium term. Another need is for the Election Commission to develop an institutional memory based on its experiences of running previous elections — as experienced staff often move on to other government agencies.

The project will address both of these challenges towards the improved management of elections alongside initiatives to increase democratic awareness and voters' participation.

Project details

Nepali name: निर्वाचन आयोगको संस्थागत क्षमता अभिवृद्धि र व्यवसायिक विकास कार्यक्रम

Duration: August 2008 to July 2011

Budget: \$3.7 million

Funded budget: \$1.3 million pledged as of February 2009

Unfunded budget: \$2.4 million

Implemented: By UNDP in the Election Commission and its district offices

Main partner: The Election Commission

Implementing partners: International IDEA (IDEA) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

UNDP's role: Donor (\$1.3m) and overseeing agency



> Project objectives and activities

Institutional strengthening — Strengthening the capacity of the Election Commission to administer elections by supporting it to:

- produce a strategic plan for its development;
- modernise the voter registration system;
- produce a GIS-based mapping system for showing polling stations and other key locations to enable election logistics and planning;
- develop the system for dealing with election-related disputes; and
- learn from experiences in other countries with relevant electoral processes and systems.

Professional development — Build up the skills of Election Commission staff by running a BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy Governance and Elections) training programme and other professional development initiatives for them.

Democratic participation — Improve the understanding amongst the general public about the importance of participating in the democratic process — especially amongst women and marginalised groups — by supporting the commission to:

- run a continuous voter education and outreach programme; and
- set up an electoral education and information centre for the general public on the commission's premises.

An important early achievement has been training the facilitators to deliver the BRIDGE training courses to district level commission staff.

The project is being implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Election Commission. In some areas, project activities will be run in association with other international organisations including IIDEA and IFES for running the BRIDGE training programme.

> Funding gap

Substantially more funding is needed to fully implement this project as only \$1.3 million of the \$3.6 million needed had been committed as of January 2009.

Importance of this project towards achieving the MDGs and consolidating peace

Although Nepal has made good progress towards achieving most of the MDGs over the last decade, the progress would have been greater if there had been peace and a stable multiparty democracy. This project will make an important contribution towards enabling every citizen to take part in the democratic process of electing the next national and local governments. This is of crucial importance for consolidating the peace and accelerating progress towards achieving the MDGs.



A politician voting in the April 2008 elections



Project-supported training course for Election Commission staff

For more information:

☎ UNDP's governance unit (+977-1) 5523200 ext. 1005 and the project office in the Election Commission at (+977-1) 4223165

🌐 <http://www.undp.org.np/governance/index.php>

🌐 the Election Commission's website at <http://www.election.gov.np/EN/>

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