

UN Secretary-General, UNDEF Board, approve almost 50 new projects



Almost 50 two-year projects totalling almost ten million dollars have been approved for UNDEF's 13th Round of funding. In this Round, UNDEF received 2,307 project proposals from organizations in 141 countries, the vast majority local civil society organizations in Africa, Arab States, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, adding further to the considerable growth the Fund has experienced since its creation in 2005 and bring the total number of projects supported by the Fund to more than 800. These UNDEF-supported initiatives all reflect a focus on strengthening the voice of civil society and encouraging the participation of all groups in democratic processes - thus concentrating on the demand side of democracy, rather than the supply side.

Once the short list has been reviewed and recommended by the Board, UNDEF notifies the Permanent Missions of those countries where projects are envisaged, and gives them at least a month to respond with any comments, should they so wish. Following this stage, the short list is submitted to the Secretary-General for review and approval.

Following the Secretary General's approval, the proposals move into the final stage in the selection process: the negotiation of a project document, which is in effect the contract between UNDEF and the grantee. This requires the applicant to provide a more elaborated project design, and involves comprehensive guidance, input and review by UNDEF. Only upon successful conclusion of this process will the project formally be approved for funding. UNDEF is also required to notify the Government of each country where a project is recommended.

The short list is the product of a thorough and rigorous process.

A team of ten assessors from around the world-- combining more than 100 years of programme and project experience -- scored each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long list of some 300 project proposals. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators were invited to provide comments, quality vetting, and views on how proposed activities would fit in with existing work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments were sought from the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group, making use of the specific expertise of each of its entities: the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women. Based on this collective input, the UNDEF Secretariat produced the short list of 54 recommended project proposals.

Of the project proposals, 33 per cent are in the Arab States, 22 per cent in Africa, 19 per cent in Asia, 11 per cent in Europe, and 13 per cent in Latin America. Broken down by key activity, 23 per cent of project proposals are in rule of law and human rights; 22 per cent in gender equality; 18 per cent in youth engagement; 15 per cent in strengthening interaction with government; 9 per cent in electoral processes; 9 per cent in community activism; 3 per cent in media and 1 per cent in tools for knowledge. Governments on the Board comprise those countries who have made the largest cumulative financial contributions to the Fund over the past three years: Algeria, Canada, Germany, India, Poland, Republic of Korea, Sweden, and United States of America, and six countries reflecting geographical diversity: Botswana, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Mongolia and Tunisia.

What Is democracy? UNDEF hosts High-level Political Forum event with DSG, Naidoo, Carothers



UNDEF organized an unprecedented discussion at UN Headquarters on 15 July on what constitutes democracy, as well as on ways to energize the momentum around Sustainable Goal 16. A side event to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, it featured UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed as keynote speaker; remarks by Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; a panel discussion with leading experts and practitioners; and a substantive exchange with Governments, civil society and youth on the core elements of democracy as well as challenges on the road to 2030. The event was held in cooperation with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

The background to the event was the global democracy debate increasingly marked by distrust of democratic institutions, processes and elected representatives. Yet with the Sustainable Development Goals, a global effort is underway to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. This presented an opportunity to encourage a thematic, more constructive debate on democracy than merely reiterating the ways in which democracy is under strain; that while there is no one-size-fits-all model of democracy, and each country must find the model that works for its circumstances, there are fundamental characteristics these models need in common to qualify as democracies.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General said in her keynote [speech](#): “I thank the UN Democracy Fund for bringing us together. Since the signing of the UN Charter, democracy has been a core concern for the United Nations, for it is perhaps the most fundamental building block for advancing peace, human rights and development. But today democracy is being challenged worldwide. Human rights are being sidelined in favor of populism and intolerance. In many places the ability of private interests to influence elections is unfettered and the capture of the state by elites is warping the functions of state institutions.” She added: “We need to update our model of democracy through representation, to ensure more vibrant, dynamic

governance models that reflect the realities of the 21st century. We must find ways to facilitate and support civil society and an engaged global and local public.” The full speech can be read [here](#).

UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill [noted](#): “As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres puts it, democracy means an ongoing dialogue between political society and civil society. One where civil society has true voice and influence. That is what the UN Democracy Fund does.” She highlighted UNDEF’s role as the only UN entity with the word democracy in its name, and the only UN entity with the primary mandate to support democracy through civil society. “A unique model in the UN family, working to do transformative things with grants in relatively small amounts, using direct support to create enabling environments for civil society around the world. That goes for all that is crucial on our way to 2030. Youth, gender equality, rule of law, media freedom, electoral support”. Her full remarks can be read [here](#).



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Inter-Parliamentary Union Secretary-General Martin Chungong said that as “democracy optimist”, he saw the question as one not about the democratic concept of government, but rather about the institutions, the systems, and approaches that have been put in place to implement democracy. The public perception of parliaments was often negative, one of “self-serving individuals, corrupt, not working for the people, and most often throwing chairs at each other during parliamentary debates”. But there were incredible things being done by parliamentarians worldwide that needed to be built upon, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s role was developing and disseminating widely indicators of democratic health of parliaments.



The panel discussion brought together Jay Naidoo, veteran of the anti-apartheid movement, founding General Secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions and former member of Nelson Mandela’s first Cabinet; Jyotsna Mohan Singh, regional coordinator of the Asia Development Alliance; and Thomas Carothers, Senior Vice-President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and acclaimed democracy scholar. The discussion was moderated by Claudia Chwalisz, policy analyst at the OECD Open Government Unit and author of *The People’s Verdict* and *The Populist Signal*.



Jay Naidoo spoke of his experience on the front lines of South Africa’s struggle for democracy, and declining trust in democratic institutions, especially among young people. “These institutions are being undermined, the systems are being undermined, by money and those that carry vested interests.

I think that it’s taken away trust. Trust is for me indispensable in ensuring the legitimacy of the system. If people lose trust then what do they believe in? If I look at the issue of democracy it is about the legal obligation on governments to deliver on the political, social, and economic goals that our citizens have a right to expect.” What was needed was a renewal of the democratic model. While the basic values of “human rights, social justice, accountability...integrity, and honesty” remained key, there was a need for open discussion with the younger generation.

Jyotsna Mohan Singh spoke of the “need to protect civil society and expand civic spaces. Global trends show that this space is shrinking. Human rights and justice defenders are increasingly under attack, and last year was the most dangerous year on record... Civil society spaces must be expanded to create an enabling environ-

ment in which we can freely organize and express ourselves and safely operate, assemble, and ensure accountability.” Singh argued for an expansive role for civil society in SDG 16 implementation, calling upon civil society actors to take the lead in “official policymaking, planning, implementation, budgeting, and reporting processes across goals and sectors”.

Tom Carothers summed up three essential elements of democracy, “the right of citizens to choose their leaders, in processes that are genuine, fair, and open”, “a political life generally informed by freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of speech, and non-discrimination”, and “the importance of having leaders that

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are constrained by law and not law that is constrained by leaders". Carothers emphasized the need for a balance between openness and judiciousness in debates about democracy, distinguishing between issues raised that he sees as justified -- the impact of inequality on democracies, how new forms of democratic governance can coexist with traditional cultures); and issues he saw as problematic or even dangerous -- the presumed role of democracy in fomenting division, the possibility of 'the will of the people' overriding formal democratic rules and norms. Claudia Chwalisz said her work as an adviser to one of UNDEF's global projects, and as an OECD expert on innovative citizen

participation, focused on how public institutions can involve citizens more directly in decision-making. One example was the adaptation of old ideas like sortition, or random selection, to today's contexts in the form of citizens' assemblies and panels. These allowed time, space and resources for a diversity of people from all walks of life to provide public authorities with informed recommendations that are taken seriously, helping to overcome the dual challenges that democracies are facing of legitimacy and effectiveness. How to embed and institutionalize these new ways of making public decisions was a key question for the future of democracy.

Chatham House: UNDEF remembers Kofi Annan and democracy

UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill chaired a session of a Chatham House conference on Kofi Annan's legacy in June 2019, in which panellists included Raila Odinga, Kenya's former Prime Minister. Listening in the foreground of the top photo are Kofi Annan's widow, Nane Annan, and his two children, Kojo and Ama. Annika Savill recalled that Kofi Annan used to say "No one is born a good citizen, no country is born a democracy. Both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime." His approach for democracy too continued to evolve over his lifetime. Already in 1999, he issued a prescient warning. Unless the benefits of globalization were shared more fairly, all the "isms" of the 20th century would come parading back – the "isms" that exploit the insecurity and misery of people who feel victimized by the global market: protectionism; populism; authoritarianism; nationalism; ethnic chauvinism; fanaticism; and terrorism. The more there are wretched people, the more those "isms" would continue to gain ground. In 2000, he started sounding the alarm about what he called "fig-leaf democracy", where democratic rule is maintained in name only, while in reality authoritarian government has taken over. After completing his term, he developed a passion for electoral integrity again, not only in itself, but also as an entry point into good governance, national dialogue and peacebuilding, starting with his work on Kenya's post-election peace process and then founding two global commissions on electoral integrity. Throughout his leadership, Kofi Annan was committed to the rights of women and girls, and people living with HIV/AIDS.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

UNDEF sees results in Tunisia



UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill visited UNDEF projects in Tunisia in June 2019, at a critical time for the country's democratic transition and the role of civil society. She chaired a roundtable in Tunis together with the UN Resident Coordinator for UNDEF's ongoing civil society projects in Tunisia. These included 'Entrepreneurship for Participation and Inclusion of Vulnerable Youth in Tunisia', implemented by Tamkeen for Development; 'Kif-Kif, femmes et hommes', implemented by Free Sight Association; 'Observatoire pour la défense du droit à la différence en Tunisie', implemented by Association Tunisienne pour la Promotion du Droit à la différence; 'Feyza pour l'égalité des chances', implemented by the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability; and 'Femmes et hommes égaux dans les pouvoirs locaux en Tunisie', implemented by Association Lam Echaml.

Annika Savill also co-chaired a townhall discussion on empowering youth in Tunisia together with Zitouna Tamkeen CEO Nabil Ghaleb. Participants included young UNDEF project beneficiaries, project leaders, sponsors, and media. Progress reports and testimonies came from youth benefitting from an ongoing UNDEF-funded project to include and economically empower vulnerable youth in the northeastern governorates of Béja, Jendouba, Kef and Siliana. Implemented by local NGO Tamkeen For Development, the project links economic empowerment and political participation for youth at risk in poverty-prone areas of the country. The project aims to integrate youth in the country's social fabric and democratic transition by equipping them to participate in their regions' economic and political life, through raining in soft skills, project management, participative democracy, entrepreneurship. The project is co-managed through a youth-led steering committee, allowing them to exercise leadership and launch public initiatives where they can put into practice the foundations of democracy. As a result of project, almost 90 per cent of project beneficiaries voted for first time; two young women project beneficiaries ran for local Government office,



one of whom one was elected; several others became electoral observers; yet more formed and led Groupements de Développement Agricole – democratically mandated public utility organizations include owners and users, empowered by the state to manage natural resources. Thus through vocational and political participation training, the project already has achieved objectives of democratic engagement.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

UNDEF on the ground in Mali: Consolidating spaces for youth in Bamako

A project financed by UNDEF aims at empowering the young people of the capital of Bamako in the current decentralization process. The level of youth engagement remains low, even though young people under 18 make up nearly 54% of the country's total population. The main aim of the project is the establishment of youth engagement listening centers, consolidating spaces that work as interfaces between youth CSOs, local communities, government, and donors. These listening centers, institutionalized to ensure their sustainability, are run by young people for young people who develop social, economic and cultural development activities and initiatives. There, youth activists can share and debate ideas. Local authorities and governmental decentralized technological services facilitate implementation of the project and the products.

Implementation of the listening centers is proving highly successful. Youth are now able to contribute to the democratic life of their district through debates, workshops and lobbying activities. Additionally, small grants for the realization of development initiatives are released through the listening centers. Getting young people involved with microprojects related to their listening center has helped to promote the voice of the youth community. Another goal of the project is to improve users' access to public information about sectoral reforms and policies, debates, and spread the ideas of civil society on the public stage. The communication campaign has been a great success with more than twenty radio broadcasts, three TV shows and three public performances across District IV of Bamako.



Advancing defence sector transparency



Jaime Palacios, Programme Officer at UNDEF, visited the project in June 2019 to attend two workshops or 'Leadership Days' for senior Malian military officials. These workshops aim to increase the awareness of corruption risks, build a common understanding of reform priorities, and evaluate the challenges of tackling corruption from the perspective of the defence leadership. Defence reform is an area in which top-level buy-in is of particular im-

An UNDEF-funded project in Mali seeks to minimize the risk of corruption in the Malian defence sector. Implemented by Transparency International's Defence and Security programme, the project is helping to develop expertise on defence accountability within Malian civil society, initiate recommendations for defence sector reforms, and promote these reforms within state institutions. Opaque decision-making processes within the Malian defence sector have led to a lack of oversight by an otherwise vibrant civil society. Building Malian civil society's capacity for defence oversight will lead to a more accountable and transparent defence sector that can bring peace and security to the country.

portance for maximum project impact. Administrative staff and troops will only commit themselves to transparency and anti-corruption efforts when a high level of commitment has been shown by their superiors. These 'Leadership Days' create a safer environment for discussion of sensitive issues among military elites and help generate the political will for substantive defence reform.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Empowering women and girls with disabilities in Vietnam

UNDEF has been supporting the project Preventing Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Vietnam. This project, implemented in Hanoi and Danang by the local Action to the Community Development Center since April 2018, aims to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities and ultimately promote gender equality in Vietnam. The project takes a multi-faceted approach, promoting awareness of the rights of women and girls with disabilities and developing skills and knowledge to prevent violence against them, simultaneously building a mutual support system for those affected by gender-based violence, strengthening the legal framework for protection, and promoting policies aimed at preventing and providing support for the victims.

As an important milestone of the project, the grantee held the first policy dialogue on sexual violence against women and girls with disabilities on 20 June, in Hanoi. In partnership with Vietnam Women's Union, around 50 participants, women with disabilities, people with disabilities organizations, legal experts, police representatives who dealt with criminal cases of violence against women, discussed the complexity of problems of violence against women and girls, and possible solutions by multiple stakeholders.

The project will continue until March 2020 and is expected to continue enhancing the capacity of multi-stakeholders on the prevention of sexual violence, to strengthen support systems including legal assistance and to strengthen policy and legal framework related to the rights of victims of sexual violence in Vietnam.



Promoting access to justice for people with disabilities in China

East-Lake Institute for Social Advancement in Wu Han China has been implementing the UNDEF project Towards an Inclusive Justice System for Persons with Disabilities in China. The project targets three cities, Wuhan, Beijing, and Shenzhen, and is working on improving access to justice for people with disabilities in China by providing training for people with disabilities, their advocacy organizations, and legal aid providers. The project also aims to create a network among people with disabilities, public interests' lawyers, and local governments to provide necessary and effective assistance to those in need.

UNDEF Deputy Head, Mikiko Sawanishi visited Wuhan and met with the project team, people with disabilities and several lawyers who are participating in the project. She observed that the project empowers people with disabilities and participating lawyers, creates an equal partnership between lawyers and promotes long-lasting collaboration among stakeholders.

The project will continue until the end of February 2020.



NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Creating transparent cities in Ukraine

An UNDEF project in Ukraine is being implemented by the local branch of Transparency International and has now been working for two years towards encouraging the 100 largest cities of the country to become more transparent and accountable and to increase the involvement of their citizens in decision-making processes.

A vast array of actions have already been carried out, including the holding of training on anti-corruption best practices, the organization of workshops on community activism, and the development of a local government transparency ranking based on more than 90 transparency indicators. Through the dynamic interaction of these diverse and effective tools. The project is supporting Ukraine's democratic consolidation at the local level. More than 300 activists, officials and journalists from 90 different cities have already taken part in seminars helping to fight various forms of corruption. The ranking is now used by mayors and local authorities to build norms and regulations and boost their profile when applying for international funding. A growing number of cities are now applying to be assessed and join the ranking system. In addition, 12 communities have begun implementing anti-corruption initiatives designed by their respective communities. For instance, the city of Kyiv has asked for the assistance of Transparency International in implementing an initiative designed by grass-roots actors called "territorial community charter", which aims to increase the



participation of its population in local affairs.

In the future, the creation of the label "transparent city" should further encourage city officials to apply responsible norms and procedures. In the context of the upcoming end of the project, the NGO is working towards building a sustainable program capitalizing on this experience that focuses on four areas of work: transparency, accountability, investment and citizen engagement. Hence, not only are the project achievements considerable but its impact is also proving to be sustainable beyond the project timeline.

Women for fair access to water in Armenia

An UNDEF project implemented in Armenia is helping women devise sustainable strategies for the management of water in the Ararat Valley region.

The project, implemented by Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment involves a wide range of activities, from holding discussions on tariff compensation to trainings on project design for community representatives. It aims to enhance women's groups' knowledge and skills on water management and eventually support their capacity to implement an effective and equal repartition of the water resources in their communities. Two of the key activities are the launch of a regional awareness campaign on sanitation and the promotion of the slogan "Water is Life".

In the context of that campaign, staff members of the organization have been visiting schools in remote areas of the country. A 'WASH' training took place last May in the villages of Taperakan and Burustan. This activity was, in addition to the simple presentation of sanitation standards to children, a catalyst to reach out to parents and school employees and raise their awareness on adequate water management in everyday life. The Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Baseline Study conducted in April 2019



in the 10 most vulnerable communities has demonstrated the urgent need to inform the populations on issues related to water scarcity and hygiene, including the necessity to decrease water waste.

Part of the organization's work also consists of enhancing the cooperation between communities and local authorities and in this sense an impressive effort has been made to develop a large network that today includes officials, community groups and stakeholders. One of the upcoming challenges is now to engage water providers in improving the existing infrastructure in the region.