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EVALUATION REPORT



**UDF-AZE-07-173 Underpinning and developing the democratic electoral
processes in Azerbaijan**

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All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

Authors

This report was written by Landis MacKellar, Vusal Meryaze with the assistance of Bariz Mehdiyev, and Anar Mammadli.

Mr. Michel Leblanc, Transtec, provided editorial and methodological advice and quality assurance.

Ms. Aurélie Ferreira was Project Manager and Mr. Eric Tourrès Project Director at Transtec.

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I. Executive Summary

(i) The project

This report is the evaluation of the project “*Underpinning and developing the democratic electoral processes*,” which was implemented from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2010. The project had a total budget of US\$ 180,000 (total UNDEF grant \$200,000). The project was implemented by the Center Women and Modern World (CWMW) in partnership with Baku Volunteer Center (BVC), and New Shamakhi Foundation (NSHF). The project was directed to propagation of democratic values and mobilization of women for participation in elections. It focused on elections and women (with journalists and local NGO heads as secondary beneficiaries), and was carried out in 10 regions located close to Shamakhi (which is three hours’ drive outside Baku). The project’s main activities were:

- 10 civic voter education trainings for 250 women,
- 10 Training of Trainers (ToT) and capacity building on democracy and civil rights of women for 250 women; in the event, the same women,
- Production and dissemination of awareness raising materials, and
- Training for journalists and local NGO leader.

(ii) Assessment of the project

The project was **relevant** to country needs because (i) three elections were scheduled during the implementation period, (ii) voter participation has been low, particularly women’s participation, and (iii) especially in rural regions, women’s participation in social and political life is limited. Participants in trainings likely benefitted, but it was not entirely clear how participants were selected, nor does there appear to have been a large difference between the civic education trainings and the Training of Trainers training. The relevance of training local journalists is mixed, as mass media based in Baku dominates; however, local newspapers, despite their low circulation, can have some impact on local issues.

The decision to work in rural districts located reasonably close to Baku was a good one, as the needs for female empowerment outside the capital are greatest.

The major weakness of the project from a relevance point of view was that it bore no real relationship to needed governance reforms. The elections process in Azerbaijan, as we document in Annex 5, is flawed. While increasing women’s participation in a flawed process is a valid goal, the project would have added more value if it had addressed basic issues in governance.

The project was **effective** in producing planned outputs, and the quality of the trainings appears to have been good. However, the modest goals of the project, which was to implement only a limited number of trainings, must be recognized. The materials produced, in the form of brochures and posters, could have been more effective if their visual quality had been better.

The project doubtless had a beneficial **impact** on the direct beneficiaries of training, some of whom became election observers or municipal council candidates. In general, experts have noted slow but steady improvements in women’s empowerment, to which projects such as this have contributed. Over the project period, there was an increase in the number of female candidates presenting themselves, but this was mostly due to a change in policy of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), which decided to increase female representation. In the districts covered by the project, there appears to have been some increase in the number of self-presented (as opposed to party-selected) female candidates. The extent to which the project contributed to this is difficult to estimate. What is clear is that, while the project may have had

some impact on women's empowerment, it had none on democratization, as observers - both national and international - continued to be critical of the elections process in Azerbaijan throughout the project's implementation period. With the exception of the United Nations Human Rights Council, international observers have been broadly critical of the situation regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan.

In keeping with UNDEF guidelines, the evaluators did not subject the project to a close financial examination. However, when the number of persons trained is compared to the amount spent, even taking account of indirect and multiplier effects in trainees' home communities, the project was not very **efficient** given the relatively low level of planned outputs in comparison with the amount spent. In large part based on the quality of the project document and reporting, which was below international good standard, we have reached the conclusion that the implementing partner did not have sufficient capacity to implement the project.

In large part because of low capacity, it is unlikely that the **sustainability** of the project is ensured. Low sustainability is also related to weak partnerships (see below).

(iii) Conclusions

The conclusions presented here represent a synthesis of the answers to the Evaluation Questions.

- ***The NGO selected as implementing partner, CWMW, was specialized in increasing the social participation of women. In this area, it had expertise, credibility, wide respect, and a strong network. It did not have these assets in elections and democratization***

The NGO selected had a good history, going back to the regaining of independence, for encouraging and supporting the participation of women in social life. Its staffers clearly had greater expertise in women's and gender issues than they did in election issues. There was no evidence of a particularly critical attitude towards the governance and elections problems identified in Annex 5, save as they specifically affected women ("family voting" by male heads of household, for example). The fact that it was a local NGO outside Baku made this an innovative project, but also a risky one from the capacity point of view.

- ***Partnerships were not strategically designed***

The two partnerships formed by the principal implementing agency appear to have been largely partnerships of convenience, lacking strategic direction and substantive content. A strategy that might have added value could have been, for example, a partnership between CWMW as a regionally-based women's NGO and a (probably Baku-based, but perhaps with regional presence) elections' and democratization NGO.

- ***There was a mismatch between resources and goals***

A fair degree of inefficiency was to be expected in a project that only implemented standard training for 250 women and a small number of journalists / local NGO representatives. This project would have been better value for money if it had been a pilot project preparing a potentially larger project to be implemented later.

- ***There was a mismatch between resources, capacity, and monitoring***

The project document, mid-term report, and final narrative report were not up to the standard of professionalism that is expected in development cooperation today. While the decision to fund the project may have been a correct one, the weakness of the proposal and mid-term report should have sent a signal to UNDEF that close monitoring was needed. In fact, given UNDEF

staffing and time constraints, there was little contact between the responsible program officer and the implementing partner.

- ***Despite these weaknesses, the project appears to have had modest impacts in the area of women's empowerment. No impacts could be discerned in the area of democratization.***

This conclusion could be expressed in terms of the supply side of democracy (public institutions) and the demand side (civil society). In this case, demand for democracy was stimulated to some extent, but there was no impact expanding its supply.

- ***The poor articulation of project activities, outputs, outcomes, and objectives in the project document was a significant impediment to project relevance and impact.***

Logical frameworks are a double edged sword. A great deal of time and effort can be expended in designing detailed and fully articulated log frames which prove to be of limited utility in actual project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Even more can be expended making them visually attractive whatever their inherent strengths or weaknesses. The fact that UNDEF does not require a detailed log frame is, on balance, probably a positive point for the program. However, this project offers an unfortunate example of one in which the UNDEF log frame template, and the proposal review procedure, did not impose strategic discipline and consistency on the applicant.

(iv) Recommendations

- ***If CWMW wishes to continue to work in the area of political participation, it needs to work on the basis of a more focused partnership strategy***

Democratization, especially elections, is a well-populated field in Azerbaijan and one in which many NGOs have a high level of technical expertise, whether it is in the form of legal capacity, media expertise, or general political science. CWMW has a strong comparative advantage as a locally-based NGO outside Baku specialized in women's empowerment, but it needs to leverage that comparative advantage by forming partnerships with groups with greater capacity in democratization. CWMW is concerned about maintaining cordial relations with government but this need not be a fatal barrier to forming such partnerships.

- ***CWMW needs to address capacity issues***

If CWMW does not upgrade, for example, the quality of its proposal writing and reporting, it is likely to find itself left behind in the struggle for funding. CWMW is lucky to have several highly articulate, motivated young staffers with good potential as social entrepreneurs; these should be the focus of an effort to increase capacity in the organization, a strategy that would also allow the Director to concentrate on what she does best, which is cultivating and further developing her excellent network.

- ***CWMW should think more critically and strategically about training***

The trainings administered appear to have been of good quality, but were never tied together in a credible strategy. In developing future proposals, CWMW needs to be more careful to present a convincing strategy for the trainings, including an explicit link between the activities, outputs, and expected impact, including indicators.

- ***A high-risk project such as this requires increased monitoring on UNDEF's part***

This was a high risk project. One of the ways UNDEF leverages its resources is by keeping its staff very thin. Proposal ranking and monitoring are to a large extent outsourced. Yet, it was

clear on the face of the proposal and the mid-term report that the implementing NGO required support. If UNDEF wishes to continue financing high-risk projects, and it appears to be part of its strategy that it does, it needs to provide better support to them.

- ***UNDEF should review the extent to which the funding application requires applicants to identify other organizations and initiatives in the area and how the project will add value either by complementing them or leveraging its efforts.***

UNDEF's priority is always the demand side, and a small UNDEF project may not be able to have much impact on the supply side. However, partnerships formed with other NGOs dealing more on the supply side may, and in the case of this project would, have leveraged project results significantly. It is difficult to formulate a workable recommendation given the fact that project ranking is by committee and UNDEF's own resources for screening projects are very limited. Requiring applicants to identify other organizations and initiatives active in the area, and how, whether by complementarity or partnership, the project intended to add value would be one approach.

II. Introduction and development context

(i) Project and evaluation objective

This report is the evaluation of the project entitled “*Underpinning and developing the democratic electoral processes*,” implemented by the Center Women and Modern World in partnership with Baku Volunteer Center (BVC), and New Shamakhi Foundation (NSHF). The project focused on elections and women (with journalists and local NGO leaders as secondary beneficiaries), and was carried out in 10 regions located close to Shamakhi (which is three hours’ drive outside Baku). The project’s main activities were: 1) 10 civic voter education trainings for 250 women, 2) 10 Training of Trainers (ToT) and capacity building on democracy and civil rights of women for 250 women, 3) production and dissemination of awareness raising materials, and 4) a training for journalists. The project had a total budget of US\$180,000 (the total UNDEF grant \$200,000 minus UNDEF M&E costs \$20,000).

The project was directed to propagation of democratic values and mobilization of women for participation in elections. Details of recent electoral experience are given in Annex 5.

(ii) Evaluation methodology

An international expert was in charge to carry out the evaluation under a framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. The methodology of the evaluation is set out in the Operational Manual governing this framework agreement, with brief additions in the evaluation Launch Note. In accordance with the agreed process, a set of project documents was provided to the evaluators in February 2011 (see list of all documents consulted in Annex 2). On that basis, they prepared the Launch Note (*Launch note UDF-AZE-07-173*) setting out issues to be considered during the field visit, which took place from 29 March to 02 April 2011. Two national experts provided support and expertise to the valuation, one in Baku and one in the Smakhi region.

Based on document review, the evaluators identified, in the Launch Note, the following issues:

- What was the relationship between the project and broader governance reform initiatives underway?
- How were women and the trainers identified and precisely who were they?
- Who were the civil and public organizations, and local authorities the grantee worked together?
- What were the attitudes and roles of men in the project?
- Is there any concrete evidence of increased recourse to women and ToT who may have not participated in past elections? (related to Outcome 2)
- Is there concrete evidence in a change in attitudes towards future electoral behavior of the participants? (related to Outcome 2)
- Is there any evidence in a change of reduced media bias regarding election news coverage? (related to Outcome 4)
- What lessons have been learned for possible application elsewhere? What are the main constraints to building on project achievements, and how might these be addressed by future activities?

UNDEF specifically requested that the evaluation should look at:

- Whether women who participated became aware of election systems and increased their level of knowledge on electoral processes. Did the grantee make a survey/assessment on this issue prior and post training activities? (related to Outcome 4)
- Whether results achieved from the general civic voter education and the ToT were different. Were participants different? Did the ToT contribute to the sustainability of the

project? How many follow-up trainings were conducted by the women who participated in the ToT? (related to Outcomes 1 and 2)

- Whether awareness-raising material produced actually reached to the target audience. Was there any observable impact on women's understanding on the election systems and their rights? (related to Outcome 3)
- Whether journalists' training resulted in concrete results in the form of media coverage of the training itself, or improved coverage of women and election issues by the participants. Do the grantee and its partners still keeping in touch with participants and journalists to obtain their help in disseminating key messages? (related to Outcome 4)
- Whether women who participated in the training activities ran for the office in national or regional elections or they plan to do so. If so, how does the grantee assisting them? (related to Outcome 2)

The evaluators conducted interviews, and held one focus group discussion with a range of stakeholders (see list of people met in Annex 3).



(iii) Development context

▪ Economic and social development

Azerbaijan experienced impressive GDP growth in recent years coupled with very significant poverty reduction. The country has already met or is well on its way towards meeting many of the MDGs.. However, some indicators, for example on maternal health and child nutrition, though they have seen some improvements, still require continued attention to as they remain below the average for upper-middle-income countries.

The empowerment of women varies enormously between Baku and the regions. In the regions, women are active in the family sphere but, since the demise of the Soviet system, have regressed in the public sphere. According to national experts interviewed, girls' secondary school enrolment rates are declining, as is the mean age at marriage. Both these trends reflect reduced labor market opportunities and perhaps, to some extent, growing adherence to traditional social values. While only overall (male and female combined) voter turnout rates are available, it is not disputed that until quite recently, there was a decline in the proportion of women voting. In Annex 5, we note the relatively low number of female candidates in

parliamentary and municipal council elections, among the rank of Ministers, and female under-representation in local and the national election commissions. As we describe below, the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) has taken steps in recent years designed to increase female representation in governance structures. In Annex 6, we describe the unsatisfactory state of civil society and media freedom.

A problem specific to elections is the phenomenon of “family voting” in which the male head of household collects the identification documents of female household members and, at the polling place, casts ballots on their behalf. The problem, while still present, is slowly receding. In other areas as well, both national and international experts interviewed reported slow but steady progress in women’s rights and empowerment. Parliament passed a new law on the status of women in 2010, although the means of implementation remain unclear.

- **Good governance**

Azerbaijan is a Presidential Republic. The President is head of state and the executive branch of government. Elected by the people, the President appoints the Prime Minister and all cabinet-level government administrators. The National Assembly of Azerbaijan is the unicameral legislative branch of government which confirms the President's appointee for Prime Minister and has 125 seats. Of these, 72 are held by the YAP, 40 are held by what are referred to as “independent” parties but which are in fact controlled by Government, and 13 are from what is referred to as the “legal opposition.” Islamic fundamentalism, to the extent it exists, is not an organized political force. Azerbaijan does not rank well on a range of good governance indicators.¹ As documented in Annex 5, the electoral process in Azerbaijan is far from problem-free and strong efforts are needed to ensure equal and fair conditions for all candidates. While election legislation gives all parties equal rights, in fact, the YAP of President Aliyev dominates. In summary, Azerbaijan is a post-Soviet republic characterized by a highly centralized power structure of the sort sometimes referred to as “strongman politics.”

¹ The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), which ranks 125 countries on political and economic management against 17 criteria, shows for Azerbaijan a Status Index of 4.51 of a scale of 1-10, ranking 87th (Democracy index 3.80 - ranking 98th, market economy index 5.21 ranking 70th, and Management index 3.83 ranking 99th (<http://btindex.de/156.0.html?&type=98&L=1>). The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project reports aggregate and individual governance indicators for 213 economies over the period 1996–2009, for six dimensions of governance: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption. The six governance indicators are measured in units ranging from -2.5 to 2.5, with higher values corresponding to better governance outcomes. The values for Azerbaijan's Rule of Law, Control for Corruption, and Political Stability are -0.81, -1.1, and -0.39 respectively in 2009 (<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>).

III. Project strategy outcomes, strategy and implementation

(i) Objectives and strategy

The objectives of the project were described in the project document as:

- To actively draw women to participate in election processes;
- To increase their awareness of their election rights;
- To actively encourage female nominees;
- To create the necessary conditions for active participation of women in elections;
- To focus on rural parts of Azerbaijan;
- To contribute to carrying out fair and democratic elections in Azerbaijan.

The results framework (Annex II of the project document) described intended outcomes that would allow for progress in achieving these objectives as

- Enlightenment of women regarding election systems,
- Achievement of close integration of women to election processes,
- Dissemination of published materials and handouts, and
- Training of journalists regarding elections.

There is confusion however, when in the accompanying table in Annex II, these same “outcomes” are then described as “outputs,” each with an associated set of main activities that will produce the output. The accompanying table summarizes the information in Annex 6.

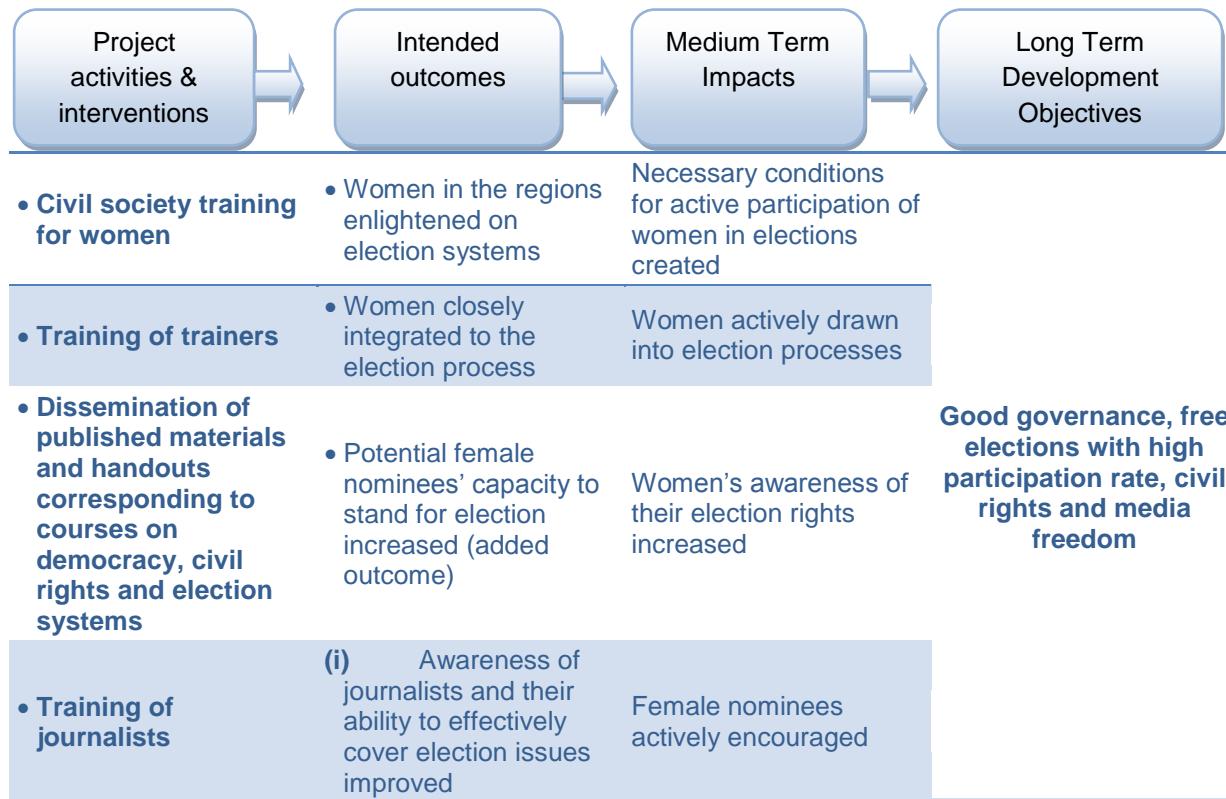
Output / Outcome	Main associated activity
1. Enlightenment of women in the regions on election systems.	10 civic voter educations implemented.
2. Achievement of close integration of women to election processes.	10 ToT and capacity building trainings implemented to educate women on democracy and civil rights.
3. Dissemination of published materials and handout materials corresponding to courses on democracy, civil rights and election systems.	Design, production and distribution of planned materials
4. Training of journalists.	Implementation of journalist trainings.

There are a number of basic issues. Disseminating materials (Outcome 3) and training journalists (Outcome 4) are clearly activities, not outcomes. “Focus on rural areas” is a strategic and tactical choice to achieve project objectives, not an objective in itself. “Creating necessary conditions for active participation of women in elections” and “increasing awareness of election rights” are objectives at a lower level than the other two objectives (increasing the number of female candidates and actively drawing women into elections).

The project is not entirely to blame for some these weaknesses, as the logical framework matrix provided in the application template did not provide a separate column for the outcomes which are linked with outputs (tangible, immediate results) and corresponding activities. This has permitted some rather loose reasoning. For example, according to CWMW, the trainings had two purposes: to promote voter participation and to encourage female candidatures, both by increasing women’s self-confidence and, in the words of CWMW “changing their entire view of the election process.” It may be argued that the link between trainings with these goals and the first four project objectives given above – drawing women into the election process, increasing awareness of election rights, encouraging female nominees and creating the necessary conditions for active participation of women – amount to common-sense and need not be made explicit. However, as we discuss further below, how the project would increase the number of

women nominees and, most strikingly, how it would encourage open, fair, and democratic elections, is not clear. In point of fact, the last objective was not explicitly served by any project activity; not a fatal weakness of the project, but one that needs to be confronted.

Editing liberally from the project document, an attempt to reconstruct project strategy in logical impact form is given in the accompanying diagram.



Even in this reconstruction of project logic, issues remain. The difference between the civic education training and the ToTs was never made clear in the project document. In practice, it appears that there was little difference between them apart from greater emphasis on group activities in the latter: they involved the same trainees and same trainers. Essential risks and assumptions – e.g. the assumption that women who are motivated by training workshops to run for office would be able to receive the needed legal advice in a complicated electoral system, fraught with risks for independent candidates – were never made explicit in the project document. No significant mention was at any point given to the democracy issues raised in Annex 5, save for a reference to the risk of government “interference.”

(ii) The implementing partner and its capacity

The weakness of the project document raises issues of the implementing partner’s capacity. CWMW was founded in 1998 and was registered with the Ministry of Justice in 1999. The founding, and current Director, had been a significant expert on women’s issues in the Soviet Republic. It is clear to the evaluators that, both before and after independence, she was and remains an active, well-connected, and trusted agent for women’s empowerment including participation in the democratic process.

According to CWMW, the UNDEF project was part of a long-term strategy. This was the third application made by CWMW; the NGO attributes its success to the fact that UNDEF simplified

procedures for the second funding round, in particular, dropping the requirement for recommendations by the UN agencies in the country. Also according to CWMW, the theme of the project was established by initial assessments in the districts, where women complained in particular about “family voting,” and was adopted in view of the fact that there were a number of upcoming elections.

In the evaluators’ opinion, the project proposal, the project mid-term report, and the project final narrative report were not up to international professional standards, as evidenced by vagueness, lack of logical consistency, poor English, and repetition of objectives in earlier documents as accomplishments in subsequent ones. The impression left is of an NGO with good standing, and large potential that needs to increase its capacity; a theme which figures in the recommendations below. The non-partisan attitude of CWMW, which might be cynically dismissed as accommodation with forces retarding democratic process, can equally be interpreted as an asset, an opportunity to be built upon. However, better capacity and better adaptation to the more competitive international cooperation environment is needed. The choice of a regional NGO (one of the few registered in Shirvan zone) was an innovation in project design, but one that raised risks in the form of insufficient capacity.

Civil society is generally under-developed in Azerbaijan (see Annex 6), and its space for maneuver has been diminishing. A question which arises is whether UNDEF should have more critically assessed the suitability of the partner. Our suggestion is that, given the situation as a whole, the choice of CWMW was an appropriate one, but pairing CWMW with a more adversarial and higher-capacity NGO would have greatly leveraged project accomplishments and contributed to sustainability by better building capacity at CWMW. A list of other NGOs active in democratization and elections is given in Annex 7.

(iii) Targeted Beneficiaries

The project targeted women aged over 18 with the right to vote in ten districts surrounding Shamakhi in the Shirvan zone. Geographical focus was a strong point of the project. Shamakhi is easily accessible from Baku, yet local NGOs (such as CWMW) outside the capital have little access to international funding. Shirvan was described by experts interviewed as an area with poor representation of NGOs, little newspaper presence, and nonetheless high female education – a good combination for a project with goals such as this one. National experts interviewed were all of the view that the geographical focus was a sound one. A number of Baku-based NGOs have local affiliates outside the capitol; in fact, very strong local presence; however, directly supporting a local NGO with no Baku base represented an innovative move. The combined beneficiary set – women, journalists, and local NGOs – was appropriate, the latter two especially for promoting sustainability. While it concentrated on training women, the project targeted journalists from district newspapers. Here, the strategic logic is questionable because the readership of such papers is low. The lack of focus on mass media in the true sense of the word is striking. Yet, the 2010 parliamentary elections were to a large extent concerned with local issues of corruption and unemployment. On such issues, local journalists can have some impact. However, Azerbaijan is a country in which the press and other media operate in an atmosphere of fear and oppression (see text box for an appraisal by various international organizations and NGOs).

IV. Evaluation Findings

The evaluation is based on a set of evaluation questions or EQs, designed to cover the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability; plus the issue of UNDEF value added. The Evaluation Questions and related sub-questions are presented in Annex 1.

(i) Relevance

The project's stated objectives were relevant to country needs. The need to improve the electoral process is clear from Annex 5 and there were three elections scheduled during the project period: 2008 Presidential Elections, 2009 Municipal elections, and 2010 Parliamentary elections. The project was highly relevant for increasing women's participation as voters and candidates. Yet, the relevance of the project for democratization was much lower since all of the planned outputs consisted of increasing the affiliation of women (and journalists) to the existing, flawed election system described in Annex 5. The only aspect of project strategy recognizing fundamental problems in the democratic process was the last objective, contributing to the carrying out of open, fair and democratic elections in Azerbaijan, a goal towards which no significant steps were either foreseen or taken.

There was only a weak relationship between the project, either in strategy or implementation, and broader needed governance reforms. As stated by one international expert interviewed, "Voter turnout is low because there is a lack of confidence in the electoral system; there is apathy in the form of no faith that democracy can lead to change, and a lack of meaningful dialogue between citizens and the state". The project addressed these issues only indirectly. The choice of partner, much stronger in the area of women's empowerment broadly speaking than in the technical area of elections, also confirms that, in implementation as well as in strategy, this project was much more relevant to gender needs than democratization needs. Increasing women's participation in the form of voter turnout was a laudable goal, but voter turnout overall, not just women's turnout, is low. To the extent that the project contributed to the emergence of women leaders, not just women voters, its contribution would be much more relevant to needs. There is some evidence, given below in discussing impact, that women benefiting from the project did, in fact, present themselves, which is a positive result.

Of interest from both the standpoint of relevance and efficiency, while it is likely that the trainings were suited to direct beneficiary needs, the method by which participants in the civic education trainings (the first round of trainings) were selected has not been made entirely clear by CWMW. According to CWMW, assessment visits were made to ascertain training needs. Application forms were distributed to women who participated in community meetings and training beneficiaries were selected on the basis of these applications. In order to promote discussion and exchange of views, a wide range of women; in particular, both educated and uneducated women, were selected.

Equally unclear, CWMW staff interviewed first stated that participants in the ToT trainings were selected out of the first pool of trainees based on their active participation and excellent communication skills; then later stated that all women who participated in the initial trainings also participated in the ToT training. The latter appears to be the case. The same two trainers implemented both trainings, so it appears that the ToTs were really more in the way of follow-up trainings. This, in implementation terms, suggests that the strategic distinction made in the

project document was not substantive. The choice to concentrate on a region outside Baku and choose an implementing partner not based in the capital was innovative and appropriate, a point supported by text above. The relevance of training journalists must be qualified by the view of international media experts interviewed that, while journalistic capacity is satisfactory, freedom of expression is limited (see Annex 6). The first observation, on capacity might, however, be fairly questioned outside Baku.

(ii) Effectiveness

Successful implementation of project components such as organization of various trainings, ToT trainings, and trainings for journalists and other local NGO representatives in 10 districts of Shirvan region, as well as development of different information materials related to elections implemented during the 2 year project period speak well for effectiveness. The trainers recruited were professionals with previous UNIFEM experience, and in at least one case, experience as an international election observer. The same two senior trainers conducted all training sessions, civic education, ToT, and journalists / NGO training. The latter training was not a strong point of the project, and a better project strategy would have contributed to a better articulation of the different purposes and intended results of the trainings.

The project's goals were modest: to provide training sessions for 250 women, ToT for 250 women, and trainings for 25 journalists / local NGO representatives. This amounts to only 25 women per district, a fraction of a percentage point of the population. 11 journalists and 10 representatives of local NGOs received training.

The evaluators examined the agenda for the trainings, which appear to have been of good quality. The "ToT" or follow-up training, building on the earlier civic education training, emphasized active participation. In both trainings, pre-training and post-training questionnaires were administered (the evaluators have not, however, seen any analysis or synthesis of results).

All training participants received brochures and posters to distribute in their communities. Four brochures were produced; three dealing with parliamentary, presidential, and municipal elections, and the fourth was a general elections questions and answers brochure. In the evaluators' view, while the information in the handouts may be useful and contribute to project goals, the level of visual presentation was low. The flagship project poster's only graphical content was a map of the region covered with rays extending from Samakhi to target districts. Brochure consisted entirely of text in numbered-paragraph form; no graphics, no photos, no use of text boxes telling the stories of individual women, etc.



(iii) Efficiency

In line with UNDEF guidelines, the evaluators have not looked at project accounts in detail. However, it is difficult, given the development context, to argue that a project which trained 250 women, 11 25 journalists, and 10 local NGO representatives at an expense of USD 180,000 was efficient. USD 180,000 granted to an NGO for a two-year democratization project in Azerbaijan

is a significant sum, and the two-year “run” of the grant is generous by national standards. For comparison, in the area of democratization, OSCE (according to Baku staff interviewed) spreads a total of about Euro 100,000 per year over 5-6 partner NGOs.

(iv) Impact

Evidence indicates that the project may have positively affected the level of participation of regional women in elections both as voters and candidates. Training recipients interviewed expressed the view that they became more aware of and interested in politics as a result of trainings, and CWMW reports that several training participants became candidates. One trainee interviewed was motivated to become a YAP election observer. In the region covered by the project, according to CWMW, in 2004 there were only 5 female municipal councilors, as opposed to 17 in 2009. 4 of the 17 self-identified, perhaps in some degree because of project impact; the other 13 were selected as candidates by Government. The YAP’s decision to increase female presence in itself is laudable, and may in part represent the accumulated impact of women’s empowerment projects such as this one.

According to CWMW, female voter turnout increased in the districts targeted and the number of women candidates increased. We have commented elsewhere on the difficulty of attributing increase in women candidatures to the project in the overall political context. The CWMW may certainly have contributed. As to increased female voter turnout, statistical data disaggregated by sex are not available in Azerbaijan. In Shamakhi district, in the 2009 municipal council elections, 112 candidates, 38% of the total, were female, of which 92 were elected.²

In addition to awareness raising among the 250 direct beneficiaries (and 11 journalists and 10 NGO representatives), there would have been some multiplier effects in their communities; CWMW estimates that for every woman who received training, five other women also benefited. A trainee interviewed stated that she had communicated information received to the Women’s Council, and had provided support to local women who wished to run for the Municipal Council.

The evaluators were not presented with comprehensive information on subsequent newspaper coverage by the 11 journalists who received training. Before training, each journalist promised to write at least one article about the elections process. The one journalist interviewed wrote three articles. The first reported on the training. The second was a piece describing the election process. The third, written after he decided himself to become a candidate, described his experiences in the registration and campaigning process. As stated above, the impact of provincial newspapers is very low, and the circulation figures cited by the journalist had no credibility compared to information gained from media experts at IREX in Baku. The circulation figures given for his Shirvan regional paper were an order of magnitude higher than the figure given by IREX for the circulation of all regional newspapers.

Since the project operated at the local level, it might be expected to have its greatest impact in the form of improved local newspaper coverage and in Municipal Council elections. We have not received concrete information on impact; however, the potential is there. The 2010 parliamentary elections were fought in large degree on local issues of corruption and unemployment, and in these areas, local journalists can have some impact.

² To put these figures in national context, in Annex 5, we report that, nationwide, there was a significant increase in the number of women candidates in the 2010 Parliamentary elections. There are now 20 women Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 125 total, up from 14 in the last Parliament. According to the OSCE, in 2009 26% of municipal councilors elected were women, as opposed to only 4% in 2004. However, most of this was the result of a YAP decision to field 30% female candidates, not a spontaneous groundswell of female participation in the democratic process.

Overall, international and national NGO experts report slow but steady gains in women's status and level of participation in public life. The incidence of "family voting," in which male household members produce female family members' passports at polling stations and cast votes on their behalf, is on the decline, but remains significant. To repeat language above, this trend may represent in some degree the accumulated impact of women's empowerment projects such as this one.

No information was given on the follow-up activities from the ToT. CWMW reports that several women who participated in the ToT events subsequently formed local NGOs. They also reported that some participants were able to combine their skills as schoolteachers with awareness and capacity gained during the trainings to have an impact on women in their communities. Some women who participated in trainings subsequently became candidates for office. In regions where the project was active, 2 women were elected to Parliament (these were not training participants) and 6 women were elected chair of the Municipal Council (it is not clear from information provided whether some of these had participated in training).

CWMW reports that a number of participants were elected to sit on Municipal Councils, but has not provided information on how many. It would appear CWMW offered some support to women who became candidates in the form of documents, planning advice, and media strategy. This was, however, limited by three factors: CWMW is not specialized in technical, legal, or managerial aspects of political campaigning; the women were located in districts outside Shamakhi, and a serious support effort would have required resources that were unavailable.

(v) Sustainability

Formation of partnerships is one indication of sustainability. Here, the project scores weak marks on two grounds:

- First, there is no evidence that contact was made with any of the major democratization and elections-oriented NGOs or international organizations active in the field. Except for one Government-organized NGO or GONGO (Parliamentary Coalition 2010 Election Monitoring), representatives of organizations interviewed knew nothing either of CWMW or the project, and CWMW staff professed ignorance of a number of well-known national NGOs who are major players in democratization.
- Second, the role of partnerships that were proposed in the project document appears to have been very limited in project implementation. New Shamakhi Foundation did not participate in any trainings; rather, it contributed to proposal preparation, training material preparation, and design of posters and brochures. Apart from sharing office space, with some confusion between staff interviewed over whose office space it was, there appears to have been no substantive collaborative activity between CWMW and the Baku Volunteer Centre, whose activities have mostly to do with youth, HIV/AIDS, and the environment. Baku Volunteer Center apparently provided volunteers for project activities. They also identified two alternative trainers, but these were never used. No Memoranda of Understanding setting forth expectations and responsibilities were ever signed between CWMW and either partner. The evaluators' opinion is that these partnerships appear to have been based more on acquaintanceships and familiarity rather than strategic considerations. CWMW and the New Shamakhi Foundation have collaborated in the past on community development; CWMW appears to play a mentoring role with regard to the Baku Volunteer Center. Neither partner organization had ever been involved in an elections project before.
- On a brighter note, CWMW has good relations with Local Executive Councils and District Election Committees. Some members of the both groups participated in trainings. The CWMW also has close relations with members of the Central Election Commission and

has advised it on increasing women's participation. It is also in close communication with local Women's Councils. The fact that CWMW identified itself as a strictly non-partisan organization, while it raises issues for some aspects of this evaluation, is not to be taken lightly. Advances towards UNDEF's goals that might have been impossible through cooperation with an NGO clearly identified with the hard opposition, might have been less than those achieved or sustainable via CWMW.

Like many NGOs, CWMW does not have a real long-term funding strategy and lives from grant to grant, going into hibernation when funds run out. No funding was in place when the evaluation mission occurred, however, a UN Women application was pending.

Experience suggests that the weak outlook for sustainability is not surprising. For example, the OSCE cooperated with the Office for Protection of Women's Rights, a larger and deeper organization than CWMW, in Shamakhi on women's democratic participation and concluded that results, based on trainings not much different than those organized by CWMW, were not sustainable. One problem was that, while trainings focused on general empowerment, they did not provide concrete information on practical aspects such as legal procedures, media strategy, etc.

(vi) *UNDEF value added*

This project provides an excellent opportunity to critically assess UNDEF's role in the democratization process in difficult contexts. A cynical answer might be that, through this project, UNDEF merely made a marginal contribution to improving women's participation in an essentially undemocratic process. Better, one might argue, to support more adversarial, watchdog-type activities. Yet, one might also argue, increasing women's participation in the political process in a country such as Azerbaijan, where many women, especially in the regions outside Baku, are disempowered by social mores is a valid goal. As a UN organization, UNDEF may be better equipped to work with groups that engage with government, not those who confront it. The Realpolitik of the situation is that UNDEF works in difficult environments, and this in itself adds value. However, the "UN brand" can be a double-edged sword. Focus group participants from national elections monitoring NGOs in Baku strongly held the view that the UN prefers to work with pro-ruling party organizations in Azerbaijan. As we point out elsewhere, the best solution may have been for CWMW to partner with a stronger organization, more accustomed to electoral reform and more willing to confront public authorities.

V. Conclusions

The conclusions presented here represent a synthesis of the answers to the Evaluation Questions presented in the previous section.

(i) The NGO selected as implementing partner, CWMW, was specialized in increasing the social participation of women. In this area, it had expertise, credibility, wide respect, and a strong network. It did not have these assets in elections and democratization

The NGO selected had a good history, going back to the regaining of independence, for encouraging and supporting the participation of women in social life. Its staffers clearly had greater expertise in women's and gender issues than they did in election issues. There was no evidence of a particularly critical attitude towards the problems identified in Annex 5 save as they specifically affected women ("family voting," for example). It would have not been difficult for CWMW to have received technical assistance and capacity building from, e.g., IREX, NDI, or other international agencies specialized in aspects of democratization. Better outreach to organizations with technical expertise might have improved the project.

(ii) Partnerships were not strategically designed

The two partnerships formed by the principal implementing agency appear to have been largely partnerships of convenience formed with acquaintances rather than partnerships with strategic direction and substantive content. A strategy that might have added value could have been, for example, forming a partnership between CWMW as a locally-based women's NGO outside Baku and an elections and democratization NGO, probably Baku-based but perhaps with local presence.

(iii) There was a mismatch between resources and goals

A fair degree of inefficiency was to be expected in a project that only implemented standard training for 250 women and a small number of journalists / local NGO representatives. This project would have been better value for money if it had been a pilot project preparing a potentially larger project to be implemented later.

(iv) There was a mismatch between resources, capacity, and monitoring

The project document, mid-term report, and final narrative report were not up to the professional standard that is expected in development cooperation today. While the decision to fund the project may have been a correct one, the weakness of the proposal should have sent a signal to UNDEF that close monitoring was needed. In fact, given staffing and time constraints at UNDEF, there was little contact between the responsible program officer and the implementing partner.

(v) Despite these weaknesses, the project appears to have had modest impacts in the area of women's empowerment. No impacts could be discerned in the area of democratization.

This conclusion follows directly from the discussion above and does not require elaboration. It could be expressed in terms of the supply side of democracy (public institutions) and the demand side (civil society). In this case, demand for democracy was stimulated to some extent, but there was no impact expanding its supply.

(vi) The poor articulation of project activities, outputs, outcomes, and objectives in the project document was a significant impediment to project relevance and impact.

Logical frameworks are a double edged sword. A great deal of time and effort can be expended in designing detailed and fully articulated log frames which prove to be of limited utility in actual project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Even more can be expended making them visually attractive whatever their inherent strengths or weaknesses. The fact that UNDEF does not require a detailed logframe is, on balance, probably a positive point for the program. However, this project offers an unfortunate example of one in which the UNDEF logframe template, and the proposal review procedure, did not impose strategic discipline and consistency on the applicant.

VI. Recommendations

According to CWMW,

In the future, this project can be realized in other regions of Azerbaijan and create a feminine leadership "Network" in which the activity can be integrated into government activities in this area. Based on the Network, in the future it is planned to establish a monitoring program and compilation of national reports on the situation with the elections and other related topics. We believe that this project is thematically and financially sustainable. In addition, the project will be included in the system of long-term planning of our organization, that the future can be predicted on the basis of current trends.

What recommendations, following from the conclusions above, can help CWMW pursue this goal?

(i) If CWMW wishes to continue to work in the area of political participation, it needs a more focused partnership strategy

Democratization, especially elections, is a well-populated field in Azerbaijan and one in which many NGOs have a high level of technical expertise, whether it is in the form of legal capacity, media expertise, or general political science. CWMW has a strong comparative advantage as a locally-based NGO outside Baku specialized in women's empowerment, but it needs to leverage that comparative advantage by forming partnerships with groups with greater capacity in democratization. CWMW is concerned about maintaining cordial relations with government but this need not be a fatal barrier to forming such partnerships.

(ii) CWMW needs to address capacity issues

The world of development cooperation and the NGO world are becoming increasingly competitive. If CWMW does not upgrade, for example, the quality of its proposal writing and reporting, it is likely to find itself left behind in the struggle for funding. CWMW is lucky to have several highly articulate, motivated young staffers with good potential as social entrepreneurs; these should be the focus of an effort to increase capacity in the organization, a strategy that would also allow the Director to concentrate on what she does best, which is cultivating and further developing her excellent network.

(iii) CWMW should think more critically and strategically about training

The trainings administered appear to have been of good quality, but were never tied together in a credible strategy. This was particularly evident in the fact that there was no real difference between the civic education and training of trainers events, nor does there appear to have been any consistent effort to monitor or follow-up either the ToT or the training of local journalists. In developing future proposals, CWMW needs to be more careful to present a more convincing strategy for the trainings, including an explicit link between activities, outputs, and expected impact, including indicators.

(iv) A high-risk project such as this requires increased scrutiny and monitoring on UNDEF's part

UNDEF finances projects implemented in difficult environments, increasingly by partners that are finding their legs in a competitive environment. Nothing in this evaluation suggests that UNDEF

should adopt a more conservative tack or reduce its willingness to finance high-risk projects. One of the ways UNDEF leverages its resources is by keeping its staff thin. Proposal ranking and monitoring are to a large extent outsourced. Yet, it was clear on the face of the proposal and the mid-term report that the implementing NGO required support. The milestone verification report examined by the evaluators essentially re-stated information that had been communicated by CWMW, and contact between the program officer and CWMW was minimal. There was also staff turnover in New York. If UNDEF wishes to continue financing high-risk projects, and it appears to be part of its strategy that it does, it needs to provide better support to them.

(v) UNDEF should review the extent to which the funding application requires applicants to identify other organizations and initiatives in the area and how the project will add value either by complementing them or leveraging its efforts.

UNDEF's priority is always the demand side, and a small UNDEF project may not be able to have much impact on the supply side. However, partnerships formed with other NGOs dealing more on the supply side may, and in the case of this project would, have leveraged project results significantly. It is difficult to formulate a workable recommendation given the fact that project ranking is by committee and UNDEF's own resources for screening projects are very limited. Requiring applicants to identify other organizations and initiatives active in the area, and how, whether by complementarity or partnership, the project intended to add value would be one approach.

VII. Overall assessment

This project involved a well-thought of but technically weak women's empowerment NGO in the field of democratization in which it had little capacity, without a very convincing partnership strategy and a weak logical framework. As such, it was a high-risk project. The project appears to have had some impact in the area of women's participation in the democratic process, but it has done little to address flaws in that democratic process. That is not, in itself a fatal weakness, although some democratization results would certainly have strengthened the project. As the OSCE / ODIHR report referred to in Annex 5 reminds us, the project, and UNDEF, work in a difficult environment in Azerbaijan. However, while the project was a worthwhile investment, the return on it was rather limited.

VIII. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation questions

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value added	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Project-related documents

- Project document
- Mid-term/Annual Progress report
- Milestone verification report
- Project final narrative report

Other documents

- Amnesty International report 2010 Azerbaijan.
- Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, Final Report, The results of monitoring of the referendum on amendments to the Constitution of Azerbaijan held on March 18, 2009.
- Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, Final Report, The results of monitoring of the municipal elections held in the Republic of Azerbaijan on December 23, 2009.
- European Commission Progress Report on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (SEC(2010) 519; Brussels, 12/05/2010)
- Human Rights Watch 2010, *Beaten, Blacklisted, and Behind Bars: The Vanishing Space for Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan.*
- Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2010.
- Law and Development Public Association, Final report on election complaints to commissions and courts summary.
- Law and Development Public Association, Report on monitoring of investigation of the election complaints in 23 December 2009 municipal elections.
- OSCE/ODIHR Elections Observation Mission Final Report, Parliamentary elections 7 November, 2009.
- Ombudsperson for Human Rights Annual Report 2010.
- Parliament 2010 Coalition for Election Monitoring, Preliminary post-election report on parliamentary elections 2010.
- Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Thomas Hammerberg on his visit to Azerbaijan (3-7 September 2007), CommDH(2008)2, paragraphs 69 to 73)

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

28 March 2011	
Arrival, international consultant	
Coordination meeting, Mr. Landis MacKellar and Anar Mammadii	
29 March 2011	
Coordination meeting, Mr. Landis MacKellar, Mr. Vusal Mirzayev, and Mr. Bariz Mehdiyev	
Mr Elgun Taghiyev	Senior Programme Assistant / Democratization
Mr Alex Grogorievs	Country Director, National Democratic Institute
30 March 2011	
Travel to Shamakhi	
Ms. Sudaba Shiralayeva	Director, Centre Women and Modern World
Mr.Ramin Mammadov	Manager, New Shamakhi Foundation
Mrs. Sevda Mammadova	Trainer
2 training participants	
31 March 2011	
Ms.Tamam Jafarova	Member, Central Election Commission
Mr.Vahid Khanaliyeva	Director, District Election Commission
Ms. Gular Fataliyeva	Director, Baku Volunteer Center
Mr.Mejid Mejidov	Journalist, local newspaper "Ayalat," Green Party candidate, 2010 Parliamentary election
Travel to Baku	
1 April 2011	
Mr Rasim Sarfili, Ms. Nigaiz Atebeyli	Parliament 2010 Election Monitoring
Mr. Alasgar Mammaldi	Lawyer, Azerbaijan New Media Project, IREX
Ms. Oksana Zarukaeva	Project Director, Azerbaijan New Media Project
Mr. Bashir Sulezmani	Executive Director, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
Mr. Hafiz Hasanov	Chairman, Law and Development Association
Ms. Dilara Irfan Efendiyeva	Association for Protection of Women's Rights in Azerbaijan; Chair, Women: Peace and Security Center, State University, Baku.

Annex 4: Acronyms

ACSDA	Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
BVC	Baku Volunteer Center
CoE	Council of Europe
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ENEMO	European Network of Election Monitoring Organization
EOM	Election Observation Mission
GMF	German Marshall Fund
GONGOs	Government-organized NGOs
HDI	Human Development Index
IFRS	Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
IRFS	Institute of Reporters for Safety and Freedoms
IRI	US International Republican Institute
MPs	Members of Parliament
NDI	US National Democratic Institute
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NSHF	New Shamakhi Foundation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OPWR	Organization for Protection of Women Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE PA	OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
OSECE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
ToT	Training of trainers
YAP	New Azerbaijan Party

Annex 5: Elections and Political Freedom in Azerbaijan

Since regaining its independence in 1991, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been developing a democratic society based on such fundamental principles as the respect for political and civil rights and liberties; the protection of interest of every citizen irrespective of her/his ethnic, religious or any other affiliation; the division of power; and the rule of law. Achievements in the field of democratic state-building include political pluralism, more than 800 functioning mass media outlets, abolition of censorship in 1993, development of civil society with approximately 1,400 non-governmental organizations, and the establishment of a modern judiciary system.

Three Parliamentary and two Presidential elections were held in the country after the adoption of Azerbaijan's Constitution in 1995.

However, a range of deep concerns has been raised.

Elections

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission (EOM) preliminary report on the 2010 Parliamentary elections concluded (p.1)

while] the 7 November parliamentary elections ... were characterized by a peaceful atmosphere and all opposition parties participated in the political process, the conduct of these elections overall was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the development of the country."

This conclusion was joined in by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament, who had participated in the EOM. The OSCE/ODIHR Final Report included over 20 concrete recommendations on how to lift the restrictions that still characterize Azerbaijan's electoral environment.³ These include ensuring an inclusive candidate registration process, building an election administration that enjoys public confidence, and allowing for a campaign period where the fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression are respected. It also recommends stepping up efforts to ensure the freedom and independence of the media; improve the conduct of the voting, counting and tabulation process; and develop transparent and effective election dispute resolution mechanisms.

Representatives of Baku-based national NGOs active in election monitoring expressed the view that the OSCE underestimated the extent of election violations. They characterized the OSCE/ODIHR report as highly accurate concerning the run-up to the election, but overly positive regarding the events of 7 November itself.

Opposition candidates face problems of registration. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, district Election Commissions disallowed many signatures required for registration. Permission to hold meetings and events is often denied, and the degree of access of candidates to the all-important national television medium is strictly restricted. As election day draws near, pressure and intimidation against opposition candidates are not unknown, ranging from a summons to appear at the police station to threats of physical violence. On election day 7 November 2010, opposition candidates were on the ballot in only 37 districts, and in 27 districts there was no opposition candidate.

The Parliamentary Coalition 2010 Election Monitoring, a pro-Government NGO, identified some problems in the 2010 parliamentary elections, especially official pressure, not only on opposition candidates, but on Election Committees trying to carry out their official duties. However, they are

³ See: OSCE/ODIHR reports - <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan>, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe's reports - http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/ATListingThesaurus_E.asp?DescID=5454.

of the view that there are no problems with registration, especially as compared to the 2005 elections. The Coalition agrees that there is not enough access to media for candidates and that, here as well, official interference is a problem. IREX, a USAID-supported organization specialized in media, expressed a stronger view, namely that Government, through its six TV and 4 radio station essentially controls access to mass media.

The political impacts of the unsatisfactory election system since the 2003 Presidential elections could be summarized as follows:

- International observers were highly critical of the campaign which they said had been marred by voter intimidation, violence and media bias of Ilham Aliyev at the 2003 presidential elections. Since then, according to reports of domestic and international observation missions, elections have failed to meet international standards.
- Mr. Aliyev won a second term of office in 2008, scoring an overwhelming victory in an election that was boycotted by the main opposition parties. International observers said that, despite being an improvement on previous votes, it fell short of fully democratic standards.
- Mr. Aliyev looked set to cement his grip on power even further when a move to lift the two-term limit on the president was approved in a referendum in March 2009, paving the way for a possible third term.
- In November 2010, the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) further increased its already healthy majority in parliamentary elections, with the main opposition party failing to win a single seat due to the first-past-the-post system. International observers again criticized the vote in terms of: restrictions of fundamental freedoms, media bias, the dominance of public life by one party, and serious violations on election day.

Recent Trends in Voter Turnout and Participation, especially of women

- **15 October 2003 Presidential elections.** The voter participation rates (proportion of eligible voters who cast ballots) was 71.2%. Out of 2, 421,061 valid votes, 1, 860, 346 (76.84%) were cast for Ilham Aliyev. One female candidate, Lala Shovket, participated in the election as a candidate.
- **6 November 2005 Parliamentary Elections.** The total number of candidates was 2063, of which 151 were women. 14 of these were elected to Parliament. The voter participation rate was 42.2%.
- **15 October 2008 Presidential Elections.** The voter participation rates turnout was 75.1%. Out of 3,642,874 valid votes, Ilham Aliyev received 3,232,259 (88.7%).
- **18 March 2009 Constitutional Referendum.** The voter participation rate was 70.83 %
- **23 December 2009 Municipal Elections.** Out of 31,000 registered candidates, 6,108 were women. The voter participation rate was 32.0%.
- **7 November 2010 Parliamentary Elections.** Out of 1114 nominated citizens, only 690 succeeded in registering, evidence of the difficulties experienced by candidates in the registration process. 93 of these registered candidates were women, of whom 20 were elected to Parliament. The voter participation rate was 49.5%

Not much can be gleaned from these data because voter participation data are not disaggregated by sex. However, comparing the 2005 and 2010 Parliamentary elections,

- There was a slight increase in overall participation, from 42 to 49 percent.
- In 2005, about 7.5% of registered candidates were women, a figure which increased to about 14% in the 2010 Parliamentary elections.
- In 2005, slightly less than 10% of female candidates were elected to Parliament; in 2010 this proportion over twice as high, at over 20%. The NAP decided to increase the proportion of selected candidates who were women.

- Voter participation in municipal elections is particularly low. The high level of apathy reflects the fact that Municipal Councils have very little power.

In the absence of hard data, interviews on voter participation of women differed radically. The OSCE expert on democratization and elections in Baku reported that women's participation has been declining; representatives of 2010 Parliament Coalition Election Monitoring, a GONGO, reported that it has been increasing over the last ten years.

Shamakhi district

The District Election Commissioner reported that, during the 2010 parliamentary elections, there were 32 international observers in the district and that the head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Grossman, reported that elections in Shamakhi were up to international standards.

Annex 6: Civil Society and media Freedom Freedom in Azerbaijan

Civil Society

In the last five years, restrictions to freedom of assembly and the activities of political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have persisted.

NGOs can apply for the registration only to Baku Office of the Ministry of Justice. The law on the state registration of legal entities states that that registration shall be carried out by the relevant executive power. As a procedure, presidential decree determines which ministry is authorized to carry out the registration. The relevant presidential decree empowered the Ministry of Justice to register commercial legal entities and NGOs. The Ministry of Justice has 10 regional offices which are eligible to carry out registration. Therewith, according to the internal decree of the Ministry, registration of the NGOs shall be carried out in Baku Office of the Ministry of Justice. The requirement to enter into registration in the Head Office of the Ministry of Justice in Baku increases expenses of the NGOs situated in the regions.

While there are serious problems in registration of independent NGOs, in 2009, as it was in previous years, the process of establishing multiple GONGOs (Government Organized NGOs) with active participation and support of state bodies, state officials. These GONGOs do not face any difficulty. One of main aims in establishing GONGOs as alternative to independent organizations working in the field of election, human rights, law, education and other is to possess both state allocation for support of grant projects and allocation from outside.

When NGOs attempt to implement election-related activities, prior to elections, it is common for regional executive authorities create obstacles to the events held by the NGOs. The social – political departments of local executive authorities demand that NGOs receive the Presidential Administration's permission to hold election-related events. When these demands are not met, local NGO representatives may be pressured or summoned to appear at police stations.

The 2010 European Commission Progress Report on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (SEC(2010) 519;, Brussels, 12/05/2010) referred to recent developments regarding civil society as "uneven." More money is available in the form of grants from the State Committee on NGOs. Moreover, in her annual report for 2010, the Ombudsperson for Human Rights reported good cooperation with civil society leaders and an extensive awareness-raising campaign carried out at local level to urge local government to collaborate more closely with civil society. However, recent changes in the law on association have had negative impact. Although the most egregious proposals, such as that NGOs receiving more than half of their finance from international sources not be permitted to operate, were dropped, a number of restrictive measures were introduced by presidential decree in 2009. Among these was a provision that foreign NGOs would be permitted to operate only under a formal international agreement and an unduly strict requirement that all foreign funding received must be reported to the Ministry of Justice. Amnesty International, as well, in its *International Report 2010* on Azerbaijan, was critical of recent changes in the rules and regulations governing NGOs. Freedom House's Magdalena Frichova Grono, in *Nations in Transit 2010*, wrote "The space for civil society has continued to shrink in Azerbaijan. The authorities do not countenance dissenting voices and have sought to silence critics with both financial incentives and intimidation ranging from tax inspections to jail terms." The Freedom House index for civil society has continuously declined since 2008.

Even prior to the new restrictions, NGO's room for maneuver had been constrained by the difficulties experienced by NGOs wishing to officially register in order to obtain legal status. The European Court of Human Rights has on several occasions ruled that impediments and delays instigated by the Ministry of Justice have been in violation of Article 11 European Charter on Human Rights (Ramazanova and others v. Azerbaijan, Appl. No. 44363/02, judgment of 01/02/2007; Nasibova v. Azerbaijan, Appl. No. 4307/04, judgment of 18/10/2007; Aliyev and others v. Azerbaijan, Appl. No. 28736/05, judgment of 18/12/2008; Ismayilov v. Azerbaijan, Appl. No. 4439/04, judgment of 17/01/2008.).

Media Freedom

Azerbaijan's state-run and public media compete with private and opposition publications and broadcasters. TV is the most-popular medium. A public broadcaster, set up in 2005, is intended to be free from government control. Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution, but in 2010 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said journalists and bloggers "work in a climate of endemic impunity and under persistent pressure from the authorities". State influence over broadcast media "stifles diversity", it added. State television does not air alternative voices. The government has refused to free Eynulla Fatullayev, the editor-in-chief of Gundalik Azerbaijan (Daily Azerbaijan) despite evidence that the case is politically motivated⁴. Local relays of the BBC and US international radios were closed in late 2008 by the broadcasting regulator. Violence against journalists is not uncommon.

More details about repression of media freedom is given in the text box above. The recent trend is summarized in the title of the 2010 Human Rights Watch report *Beaten, Blacklisted, and Behind Bars: The Vanishing Space for Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan*. A similarly negative view was given by Amnesty International in its *International Report 2010* on Azerbaijan. Freedom House, in its *Nations in Transit 2010* report cited "authorities' continued crack down on all forms of independent reporting and harsh treatment of critical media professionals."

"Defamation," a charge often brought against journalists writing in opposition to the government, is widely used as an instrument to suppress freedom of expression. As early as 2007, the Commissioner for Human Rights drew attention to the fact that defamation was being used as a weapon against journalists and urged legislation reform, which has not taken place. According to the Media Rights Institute, a national NGO, the number of prosecutions for defamation doubled between 2005 and 2009. Other elements of the criminal code employed include hooliganism, tax evasion, incitement to racial or religious hatred, and the like. In a judgment of 22 April, 2010, the European Court of Human Rights called upon the Azerbaijani authorities to secure immediate release of Mr Eynulla Fatullayev's, originally sentenced for defamation and then to additional prison terms for offences regarded by the OSCE (http://www.osce.org/fom/item_1_42272.html) and the Commissioner for Human Rights as "highly improbable," including drug smuggling. The Commissioner noted that in the 18 March 2009, constitutional reform referendum, changes to Article 32 (right to personal immunity) Section III (protection of a person's private life) were amended. Despite concerns of the Venice Commission, a number of changes instituted by Presidential decree under the amended Article 32(III) have subjected, e.g., journalists who photograph or video-record persons to criminal penalties, even if in the context of public events.

⁴ See: Article 19 media campaign - <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/azerbaijan-forgotten-human-rights-crisis-unfolds-at-council-of-europe-s-door.pdf>

However, it is to be noted that the criticisms expressed by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and others do not resonate with the positive report on freedom expression given by the United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC/WG.6/4/AZE/1, 4 November 2008, paras. 107-13)). Moreover, in its *Annual Report 2010*, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Human Rights drew attention to the positive aspects of recent developments in freedom of expression, as well as to the release of a number of journalists, the position that it had advanced in favour of non-detention penalties for journalism-related violations of the law, and improved cooperation with mass media..

This is an evaluation of the UNDEF-financed project, not of the Government of Azerbaijan. However, the preponderance of evidence is that whatever improvements in media freedom have occurred have been overshadowed by setbacks. Under these circumstances, the training of local journalists was certainly a relevant project component, but impact could only be expected to be modest.

Annex 7: Other NGOs Active in Elections and Political Freedom in Azerbaijan

Election related NGOs

Elections Monitoring and Democratic Studies Centre (EMDS) has worked towards improved election legislation, increased voter activities, and provided voter education and election monitoring since 2001. It has been cooperating with the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) since 2001, implementing domestic programs as the NDI local partner. EMDS conducted monitoring of 2005 Parliamentary, 2008 Presidential, 2009 Municipal and Referendum, and 2010 Parliamentary elections. It is a member of European Network of Election Monitoring Organization (ENEMO) and cooperates with USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and German Marshall Fund (GMF), Embassies of US, UK and Canada and the OSCE Baku office.

The Organization for Protection of Women Rights (OPWR) has worked in the election field since 2000. The main activities of the organization, which receives funds from Embassy of the UK, the OSCE Baku office and State Council for Assistance of NGOs, are voter education and increasing women's participation in the political process. It has 1,000 active members; runs information centers in the regions, trains about 150 per year in leadership skills, and since 2005 has helped to prepare female candidates.

The Law and Development Public Association was founded in 2005 and works towards improvement of election legislation, protection of election rights, investigation of election complaints and defense of election rights in the Courts. The organization cooperates with NED, GMF, Embassy of the UK, the OSCE Baku office and European Union.

The Legal Education Society was founded in 1999 and deals with raising awareness of election processes, investigation of election violations and defense of election complaints at Courts. The organization receives funds from NED, GMF, the Soros Foundation, Embassies of the US and the UK, and the OSCE Baku office.

The Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACSDA) and Parliament 2010 Coalition deal with election monitoring and voter education. Both are identified by international election experts as government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), and do not reveal funding sources. Both participated in monitoring of the 2010 parliamentary election.

The Democratic Election Center was founded in 1998 prior to the Presidential Elections. The organization, which is generally identified as pro-government, conducts activities on improvement of election legislation and voter education.

The strongest women's association is the Office for Protection of Women's Rights. The State Commission on Women also conducted trainings aiming to increase women's participation in the democratic process.

International organizations active in the elections field

The OSCE Office in Baku has conducted programs on improvement of election legislation and electoral system, election monitoring, voter education and assistance to increase voter turnout. It cooperates with EMDS, Law and Development, Democracy Learning Public Union, OPWR, Legal Education Society organizations.

The Council of Europe (CoE) office in Baku works on improvement of election legislation and electoral system and media coverage in elections. The CoE Baku office cooperates with Media Rights Institute and Institute of Reporters for Safety and Freedoms (IRFS).

US NDI works towards improvement of electoral system, enhancing capacities of election subjects and election monitoring. The organization has a close cooperation with EMDS on elections. NDI recently was ejected from its office after it was accused of irregularities in its registration.

The Norwegian Human Rights House was closed by government order.

The Open Society Institute supports activities on voter education and increasing voter participation.

The European Union has funded projects on improvement of the electoral system, election legislation, and voter education. The EU collaborates with For the Sake of Civil Society, Legal Education Society, Law and Development Center and Democracy Learning Union.

GMF funds programs on election monitoring, voter education, increasing voter participation, awareness raising election rights, and investigating election complaints and violations. GMF cooperates with EMDS, Law and Development, FSCS and Democracy Learning Union.

NED supports activities on voter education, increasing voter participation, women and youth participation in election process, and media monitoring during elections. The organization cooperates with EMDS, Law and Development, Democracy Learning Union, Legal Education Society and other NGOs.

The Embassies of the UK and USA have funded projects on strengthening electoral processes, improving the credibility of elections and compliance with international standards, where possible, in line with key recommendations from international Election Observation Missions.

Two major international players in the election field -- the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and US International Republican Institute (IRI) ceased their operations in the country in 2008.

Media

Major NGOs active in supporting media freedom and building capacity are Media Rights, a national NGO, and on the international side, IREX and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IFRS). See the text box above for a description of the difficult atmosphere for the media in Azerbaijan.