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Round 12: UNDEF Board green-lights more than 50 projects

UNDEF's Advisory Board met on 2 May 2018 and endorsed a short list of 51 two-year projects for its 12th Round of funding, totalling almost 10 million dollars. This will bring to over 750 the number of projects funded and supported by UNDEF since its inception 12 years ago. In this Round UNDEF received 2,429 project proposals from organizations in 139 countries, the vast majority local NGOs. This Round comes amid continuing challenges worldwide, including increasing social polarization, the ongoing refugee crisis, and growing restrictions against civil society in an alarming number of countries. For Round 12, UNDEF's Advisory Board agreed to give priority to proposals under the four themes of women's empowerment; rule of law and human rights; medium and freedom of expression and electoral processes.

Once the short list is approved by the UN Secretary General, 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. For this Round 12 of Funding, The short list is the product of a thorough and rigorous process. A team of eight 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 expertise of each of its entities: the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Peacebuilding Support Office, 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 51 recommended project proposals.

Of the project proposals: - 16 per cent are in Africa, 22 per cent in Asia, - 17 per cent in the Arab States, - 15 per cent in Europe, - 16 per cent in Latin America. Broken down by main project focus, 23 per cent of the project proposals are in women's empowerment; 15 per cent in strengthening interaction with government; 18 per cent in rule of law and human rights; 9 per cent of project proposals are in youth engagement – including working with young people against extremism; 10 per cent are in media and freedom of expression; 6 per cent in community activism; and 15 per cent in electoral processes. Governments on the Board comprise the seven largest



contributors to UNDEF during 2013-2015: United States of America, Sweden, Germany, India, Poland, Republic of Korea and Algeria, and six countries reflecting geographical diversity: Botswana, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Mongolia and Tunisia.





Round 1 : YOUTH: Democracy-building and Reconciliation via young people in Nepal



One of UNDEF's very first projects focused on giving a voice to rural youth in post-conflict Nepal. **Equal Access** used an innovative combination of radio programming, leadership training and direct youth-led democracy-building activities. The radio series "New Nepal" dramatized the stories of international and local peace and democracy advocates highlighting practical reconciliation solutions and peace-building success stories. Inspired by the characters in the serial drama, youth were able to gain knowledge of human rights as well as of local and national governance. Over 1000 young people were trained on peace-building and reconciliation theories and techniques and encouraged to engage in discussions on the radio series. The project had a sustainable impact since the trainees then went on to organise multiple public events to stimulate awareness on peace-

building and build a sense of community from creating a peace park, to street drama and peace journalism training.

As one listener put it "The programme has enabled marginalized groups of people to speak out. It has also helped establish different clubs, run various activities related to public awareness, sustainable development and overall development of the nation. We learnt a lot from the programmes – the situation in the dramas are parallel to our life patterns and are based on true life-like events. This has been of great help to our community. We learn and make other people learn about the issues raised on the radio. We have run community cleanliness activities, helped mediate disputes and learnt about the voting process and the importance of selecting the right candidate"



Round 2 : GENDER and MEDIA: Building a women democracy radio in Liberia

Given the high levels of discrimination and violence suffered by women in Liberia during the civil crises, coupled with a high rate of illiteracy and lack of access to information, the NGO **Liberia Women Media Action Committee** used an UNDEF grant to establish the Liberia Women Democracy Radio. The station served as a medium through which the voices of women in the country could be heard. One of the weekly shows entitled "Young Women Talk" advocated women's involvement in politics. A group of young girls were trained to develop the shows which sensitized young women about the political developments in the country and the importance of participating in decision-making. In addition to producing radio shows, the project provided training for female reporters to boost women's numbers in newsrooms, reaching out to 13 female university students.

Following the success of this first UNDEF project, the NGO was awarded a second grant which focused on empowering women based in mountainous and forested rural areas by providing information and networking opportunities via radio and mobile technology. The project set up a radio-to-mobile service making broadcasts of Liberia Women Democracy Radio available via mobile phone and online. Following the outbreak of the Ebola crisis in the country, the project also made use of these mediums to provide informative audio messages to a wider audience. The Liberia Media Action Committee learned a lot from its first UNDEF grant and has gone from strength to strength and is now implementing projects funded by a diverse range of donors including the Carter Center and the National Endowment for Democracy.





Round 3: COMMUNITY ACTIVISM: Giving slum-dwellers a voice in Latin America

Round 3 saw the launch of a regional project aimed at empowering and organizing slum dwellers in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. Implemented by **TECHO** and its network of youth volunteers, the project initiated community organizing meetings and community centres providing a dialogue space for slum dwellers to gather and discuss their needs. A core team of representatives from each community was trained in leadership skills and given the opportunity to compete for small grant funding to carry out community projects to improve their living conditions. One of the key successes of the work was the first ever community leader summit in Latin America, which brought together more than 100 leaders from across the region to discuss pressing needs and share lessons learned. The outcome document stressed “Here we are. We want to live in a dignified manner

and we want to be part of the solution.” Each representative devised a workplan based on the final document to implement in their respective community.

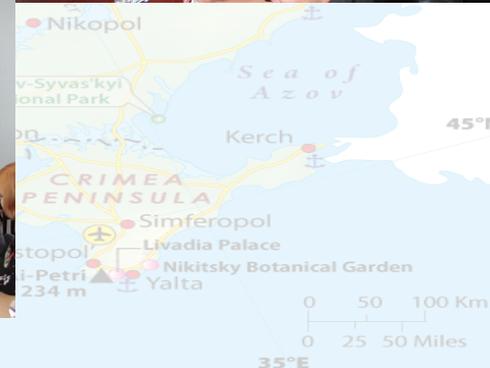
Speaking at a side event organised by UNDEF in March 2018 at the Commission on the Status of Women, Luisa Córdoba, Director of International Cooperation at TECHO underscored that “UNDEF’s support has allowed us to test ourselves. Thanks to UNDEF’s support, the Governments in our project countries saw our organization move from mere outputs to a transformative large-scale intervention” The side event brought together four former grantees to discuss Empowerment Through Democracy, Civil Society and Innovation.



Round 4: ELECTORAL PROCESSES : Your Local Representative – Building citizen participation in local governance in Ukraine

Under a Round 4 UNDEF grant, the **East Europe Foundation** worked in eight oblasts across the Ukraine building skills among local NGOs and citizens to help them engage in political processes and hold their local government officials accountable. The project aimed to strengthen connections between representatives and voters, instilling confidence in both to work together for a better democracy. The Foundation trained over 100 local NGOs in how to engage citizens in public

life via various advocacy techniques. Your Local Representative websites were set up in each region providing a portal for citizens to access information on their local councils and communicate directly with elected officials on issues affecting the community. In one oblast, this resulted in pedestrian crossings and road signage being placed near schools to enhance safety; in another illegal construction was contravened thanks to the civic protests made via the regional portal.





Round 5: STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY INTERACTION WITH GOVERNMENT: Promoting a national legal framework on the right to information in Cambodia

Through a multi-pronged strategy, UNDEF's Round 5 project in Cambodia aimed at improving citizen's access to public information thereby enhancing social accountability and transparency. The initiative implemented by the NGO **Advocacy and Policy Institute** provided training and capacity building for local councils on access to information, awareness raising activities through public community fora, citizen feedback mechanisms, media campaigns and advocacy for a national legal framework on access to information. The project culminated with a national conference with participation of government, human rights experts, legal practitioners and civil society leaders to discuss the key issues.

The project recorded a number of success stories, with all six target communes having strengthened their administrative procedures with regards to information management. The initiation of community focus group discussions improved local authorities' responses, resolving cases on access to health services, illegal logging and fishing and air pollution. Community residents gained the confidence to request for interventions and provide feedback to local authority and commune councillors, dispelling previous fears "we as ordinary

citizens never gave feedback and asked for any support from them [local officials], we only know how to do our daily jobs and have our family lives and we do not know the local authority jobs and the local authority never take care about our community issues like unemployment, concern local economics and livelihood in our villagers. We have never provided feedback, advice, criticize and requests to the local authorities".

The core of NGOs actively advocated for a robust legal framework on access to information through a series of legal reviews and recommendations submitted to the Parliament and relevant ministries.

Building on this 2011 project, the Advocacy and Policy Institute was given a new grant under Round 11 and is now using this to use similar techniques to focus on strengthening local governance and accountability in an additional four target communes. Scorecard surveys have been used to assess citizens' needs and awareness levels before initiating targeted training on building their awareness of local government roles and their capacity to monitor the latter.



Round 6: YOUTH : Engaging young people in democracy debate in Morocco

Le Médiateur pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme was selected as a recipient of a Round 6 grant to increase young people's involvement in political debate. With over 30% of the population represented by youth and limited opportunities for them to be heard, the project set up a youth parliament providing them with an exchange platform to debate and express their opinions. Over 150 young people were trained on democracy, good governance and public policy analysis. 50 of these were then divided into thematic working groups to work on specific policy issues and to come forward with recommendations for policy proposals. The sessions culminated in a simulated parliamentary session for the young people held in the national parliament building where they debated and presented their findings in front of government officials and members of parliament.

A second round of funding was awarded in Round 9 to help sustain the momentum. The new project Youth Web TV aimed at greater democratization of public media by opening up access to young people. The project trained over 100 youth in the design, development and implementation of television programmes addressing various topics related to current political, economic, social and cultural issues. A web TV platform,

providing an alternative to traditional media, was established to broadcast the young people's podcasts and publicity advocacy spots.

Twenty-eight year-old Hayat Mechnan explains how the project helped her "Participating in the project increased my passion to work in the field of health. During the parliamentary session we held, I was in charge of questions dealing with health policy. The experience and skills I gained helped me to become more actively involved in politics. I took the lead in coordinating a lobby group of nurses and technicians in the sector to advocate for a new national health policy. The recommendations also aimed at giving nurses the right to sign up to higher education. I was also able to contribute to episodes on health issues that were developed for the Youth WebTV."

Hafsa Afailal, coordinator of the project was invited to the 2014 International Day of Democracy event organised by UNDEF and its partners in the United Nations Working Group on Democracy to speak on the theme of democratic engagement of young people.





Round 7: GENDER: Empowering women refugees in Arab States



A regional project led by the NGO **Mandat International** paved the way for a series of UNDEF-funded refugee empowerment projects in the region. The pilot project which started in 2014 worked with over 100 Syrian women refugees in Reyhanli, near the Turkey-Syria border, training them in international law, including human rights, women's rights, children's rights and humanitarian law; democratic mechanisms, project conceptualization and design; and communication techniques. The women formed teams to propose, design, run and staff their own sub-projects, that would support post-conflict reconstruction and serve as a source of inspiration to other Syrian women. To keep the momentum going, UNDEF supported the second phase of the project to ensure the sustainability of these sub-projects. Housed within one centre where they could share resources and learn from each other, the women undertook initiatives including a Syrian Women's Committee that offers advice and support to women on managing their legal, financial and other affairs in the host country and a training centre for young women and girls that provides information on key human rights issues such as early marriage and healthcare.

The two projects provided an important model for similar work in Lebanon. Mandat International launched its third UNDEF-supported initiative in 2017. The two-year project is currently working to empower Syrian women who are refugees in Lebanon to develop their own projects that will allow them to more fully participate in democratic and economic processes.

UNDEF is also supporting a Round 11 project implemented by the Women's Learning Partnership working to empower individual Syrian refugee women in Lebanon and Jordan to create positive change for their communities. The project is conducting culturally adapted training programmes for Syrian refugee women on leadership, human rights, and community organization, so they can help organize other refugee women to understand their rights and collectively participate in decision making and community building. The project is also working with locally registered aid organizations to promote a new understanding of Syrian refugee women as agents of change.



Round 8: MEDIA: Using media tools to increase rural communities access to information in Kyrgyzstan

The **Kloop Media Public Foundation** used an UNDEF grant in Round 8 to boost community reporting thereby increasing the rural population's access to information and their representation in local media. Without key information, 60% of the Kyrgyz population have limited means of monitoring the responsibilities of local authorities and holding them to account. The project worked with young volunteers teaching them journalism skills and enabling them to establish a network of community media centres. The trainees used a variety of communication techniques to transmit their stories and educational messages in order to reach the widest number of people - from text messages to social media accounts to leaflets.

As part of the course, volunteers collected questions via text messaging from local people on issues affecting their communities. A series of interviews were then conducted with local authorities on these issues, providing the basis for news stories. In response to these stories, in one

village which lacked access to clean water, the local administration installed a pipeline. In another, a local kindergarten was renovated following complaints that it could only be used during the warmer months due to lack of insulation. In one area, villagers had limited access to electricity – following publication of the article, the local energy authority and villagers collected money to install a transformer. As one volunteer put it “we became a bridge between the local population and the administration. We started spreading news, so the local residents started coming to us and telling their stories and issues. When our stories started helping the people, we were so happy.”





Round 9: GENDER: Raising awareness of gender equality and women's rights in Puntland, Somalia

An UNDEF funded project with the NGO **Radio Daljir** in Somalia had the goal of giving voices to the "Voiceless Women and Girls of Somalia." In view of the low literacy rate, radio was utilised as one of the most effective and widely available mediums to educate and raise awareness. Young women were selected to be trained in radio programming enabling them to contribute to over 80 programmes covering topics ranging from opportunities for women in education, employment, and political participation to prevention of abuse and violence against women and girls. This project also used radio advocacy and direct lobbying to push for a national quota for women representatives in both chambers of parliament. This helped to ensure that the regions of Puntland and Galmudug had 30 per cent of seats allocated to women in the Upper House Chambers of the Federal Parliament. One UNDEF trainee also won a parliamentary seat in the region of Mudug.



Round 10: YOUTH: Empowering youth through dialogue in Jamaica

All around the world, young people are disproportionately affected by social issues such as unemployment, yet they often have the least access to, representation in, and impact on governance. **Talk Up Youth** is using the Round 10 grant to change that culture, one empowered young person at a time. Through innovative use of social media, inclusion and consultation of young people at every stage, and a focus on capacity-building and guidance, the project has made unprecedented progress in constructively galvanizing the energy, talents and insight of the youth. #YouthfChat has established a framework for consistent interaction between the government and business leaders of Jamaica and the young people who are impacted by their policies. Young people across the island are being engaged in their own communities, trained in advocacy so they can mobilize their peers in identifying priority areas that would benefit from representation, and educated about their constitutional rights so they can effectively engage with their elected officials. They are then given opportunities to have direct dialogue with these elected officials and make their voices heard. This is a completely novel approach to solving the problem of young people withdrawing from civic life in Jamaica, and it has since been replicated by other civil society bodies in the country, out of recognition of the successes of this project. In addition to the impact on the ground, it has also had sustainable impact in the virtual



domain. By maintaining the connection with the youth through their preferred medium of digital communication – WhatsApp, the project now has a functional youth network. This community includes young people engaged through the project, paired with mentors from the Talk Up Youth team and leaders of Youth Information Centres from each parish.

In these WhatsApp groups young people collaborate across parish borders to develop projects, share job opportunities and support each other's endeavours. This community keeps the engagement alive and leads to truly amazing stories like that of 17 year old Dominique Stone. Dominique was so moved when she connected with other young people interested in developing her parish St. James, that she founded the "Youth Empowerment Action" – an organization which she has used to further engage with her Member of Parliament.



Round 11 : RULE OF LAW : Mobilizing local communities in Benin against trafficking of young girls.

One of UNDEF's brand new projects under Round 11 has just launched focused on two municipalities in Benin. Because of poverty, many families struggle to provide for their children. This has contributed to a rise in internal and cross-border human trafficking. The majority of the victims of the internal trafficking are girls who are exploited. The UNDEF project - implemented by the **Ligue des Femmes en Lutte contre la Déperdition Scolaire Féminine, la Pauvreté et la Dégradation de l'Environnement** – using the Fon language, will work to prevent such exploitation including by engaging the local media to raise awareness on the provisions of the laws relating to the trafficking of children; creating a citizen's watch committee; and helping 30 girl victims of trafficking reintegrate into their communities by becoming economically and socially independent. Those girls will in turn become advocate in their community against human trafficking.

