

UNDEF partners again with The New York Times in sixth annual Athens Democracy Forum

The annual Athens Democracy Forum was held on 14-19 September 2018, organized for the sixth time by *The New York Times* in cooperation with the UN Democracy Fund and Athens City Hall. As in previous years, the Forum coincides with the International Day of Democracy.

This year's programme centred around the theme *Democracy in Danger: Solutions for a Changing World*, featuring discussions such as *The Allure of the Illiberal: Are there flaws in the classic models of democracy?*; *When Technology Collides with Citizenship: How are rapid technological advances changing the nature of politics?*; *Identity, Diversity and Inclusion: How can democracies preserve human rights amidst pervasive populist backlashes?*; and *The Business of Business: Do companies today have a greater responsibility to society, and when is engagement good for business?* Venues included the Zappeion in the National Gardens of Athens; the Stoa of Attalos in the Ancient Agora of Athens – the very birthplace of democracy; the Acropolis Museum; and Costa Navarino, a sustainable destination in Messinia, southwest Peloponnese.

The Mayor of Athens also presented the annual City of Athens Democracy Award to Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique, who transformed the conflict-ridden nation into one of Africa's most successful democracies.

Speakers at the Forum included writer and academic Yascha Mounk; Mayor of Athens Georgios Kaminis; *New York Times* President and CEO Mark Thompson; *New York Times* writers Roger Cohen and Steven Erlanger; Diplomat and academic Kishore Mahbubani; Chinese contemporary artist Ai Wei Wei; Italian philosopher-designer Brunello Cucinelli; Tunisian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Ouided Bouchamaoui; and UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, whose remarks at the Stoa of Attalos can be read [here](#).

An UNDEF-convened panel focused on economic empowerment of Arab youth to strengthen threatened democracies and prevent extremism, sponsored by Silatech, a social development organization based in Qatar. The remarks of UNDEF Executive Head, Annika Savill can be read [here](#). An annual exhibition on children and democracy at the Hellenic Children's Museum was closed by the Mayor of Athens and UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, whose remarks can be read [here](#). UN Secretary-General António Guterres sent a message of support to the Forum, which can be read [here](#).



Women for climate resilience in Cambodia



Climate resilience is essential to building sustainable communities. Women play a key role in local adaptation and mitigation efforts with regard to climate change, but in Cambodia they have limited access to decision-making processes. The **Cambodian Development Resource Institute** under its UNDEF grant is empowering women and women's groups to promote and advocate for climate change adaptation initiatives. The project started in 2017 and focuses on four provinces in the country aiming to train local women, and form climate change groups to analyze the climate change risks to their communities and to propose ways to enhance resilience against negative effects of natural disasters such as landslides, floods, and droughts. Women groups are encouraged to submit specific proposals to commune councils and are also implementing independent small-scale initiatives that are funded through small grants. Mikiko Sawanishi, UNDEF Deputy Head, visited Rong Domrey and Rakchey communes, Prey Veng Province, and met with women's climate change leadership groups identifying challenges and possible actions to adapt to the effects of climate change in their communes.

Fostering democracy without violence in Indonesia

In the shadow of a series of violent conflicts, particularly among youth, an UNDEF project is trying to cultivate a concept of conflict monitoring, prevention and resolution among youth in Jakarta, Makassar, and Papua. The project led by the **Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information**, has already developed an online platform for conflict monitoring and reporting, and trained youth on how to use it. The project is also providing courses to youth groups to help them develop skills to mitigate and resolve conflicts. Mikiko Sawanishi, Deputy Executive Head of UNDEF visited the grantee's office and discussed the project progress and visited Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam— a Muslim student association - and met with students who also participated in the project.



Empowering indigenous Malaysian youth in Sabah

An UNDEF project in Sabah is helping give indigenous youth a voice in decision-making processes. These youth often suffer from a lack of identity - caused by the loss of their ancestral lands to extractive industries and the settlement of plantation migrants in indigenous territories, resulting in forced displacements and migration. Furthermore, there is limited public awareness about indigenous people's customs, rights, system of governance and other issues. The project implemented by **PACOS Trust** recognises that empowering ethnic youth and enabling their participation in decision-making is key to a sustainable future, enabling them to recognize their cultural heritage, exercise their rights, and maximize their potential for the betterment of their communities. Under the project, PACOS mobilized a group of youth to register and cast their votes during the elections in May 2018. It is carrying out a series of activities to empower youth through awareness-raising sessions and project management skills training to help the youth implement community development initiatives independently and thereby give them a sense of importance and responsibility in the community.



Strengthening parliamentary oversight in Montenegro

An UNDEF project in Montenegro is working towards increasing parliament's responsiveness and openness to citizens by monitoring and analyzing the work of parliament and its working bodies and sharing the findings with the public. The first semi-annual report was published and launched at a press conference by grantee **Network for Affirmation of NGO Sector** in July.

The project will work with the parliament's secretariat to help draft procedures for review of citizens initiatives. This will enable the public to address the Parliament and its committees, submit initiatives, point out concrete problems, initiate debates and use control mechanisms to change laws, policies and practices of all branches of power. MANS intends to provide citizens with free legal aid to address the committees and submit initiatives once these procedures are in place. In addition, to establish direct and effective communication between citizens and MPs, the project aims to develop a mobile application which would allow citizens to send messages with information on problems in a free and open format to MPs and interact with them on different issues, while at the same time enabling MPs to provide responses using the same application and/or via different methods if requested by citizens (e.g. e-mail, post, etc.), thereby holding MPs more accountable.



Youth parliament for local government action in Northern Albania

Youth organisations and representatives of local authorities recently organised the twelfth civil forum in Shkoder, Northern Albania. The fora, organized in each of the administrative units of the municipality bring together a mixed group of leaders of youth organisations, members of the Youth parliament formed under the project, youth workers from marginalized groups and representatives from local authorities to discuss four key themes: Education; Environment; Social Services and Unemployment. The fora are designed to create a culture of open dialogue and debate. Each group is given a specific theme to discuss and background information on each of the topics, including relevant legislation, contact points of those responsible in local government and suggested areas for debate. Groups are given 20 minutes to discuss the topic in relation to the Shkoder central area, with subject expert moderators taking note of the issues raised and possible solutions. The groups then rotate to the next table to discuss the next topic. Each moderator presents the overall findings per thematic area – these include identified problems and possible solutions, e.g. under education, problems such as limited public transport for disabled people; lack of sports grounds, corruption were identified. The issues and recommendations that come out of all fora are being fed into a Local Youth Plan of Action spearheaded by the members of the Youth Parliament established under the project. It will form an important strategic document used to lobby Local Government on pressing issues of concern.

The driving force behind the project implemented by **Intelektualet e rinj, Shprese** has been the creation of a Youth Parliament for the Shkoder area. Youngsters from across all administrative units were selected from secondary schools and trained in leadership, communication and teamwork skills. They now meet every Friday

during school term time to discuss ongoing issues and devise action plans. The team has managed to make significant inroads into helping resolve some of the community problems. As the elected President, Ms Samanta Zadrima, explains “in one school the students had not been given their scholarship money from the local administration; they complained to us and we raised this with the relevant authorities. This got solved rapidly. We have also created blogs, videos and press statements to raise the awareness of authorities on issues that need addressing in our communities.”

Another Youth Parliament member, Mr Bekim Toskaj, notes “this has helped me to develop new skills in communication and video production. We have learnt to work as a team with a common purpose to solve the problems that young people face in our community”



Changing gender perceptions in Kosovo

'Am I Equal in Kosovo society?' an UNDEF project worked to reduce discrimination against women - one of the many challenges that post-conflict Kosovo faces. Working through a variety of media outlets, the project activities aimed to enhance the role of women as an equal part of Kosovo society organising debate and discussions on three key topics: violence against women, discrimination in employment, and sexual harassment. The project was implemented by the **Independent News Centre Media Network**, in partnership with the Kosovar Gender Studies Centre and the Center for Legal Aid and Regional Development. Journalists and women's NGOs were also trained on gender issues and communication skills in order to develop media products about gender discrimination and the advancement of women's rights.

The individual impact from the project was noteworthy: Tringa Prekorogja, who was given a media internship at the Implementing agency as part of the project says, "Working with the Network greatly improved my knowledge. The media productions under the project positively affected the public's knowledge and perceptions about key gender issues."

Shemsije Seferi, Director of the NGO ALMA, who attended the training and workshop programmes under the project went on to encourage victims to participate in the radio dramas and spoke about women's issues on local radio stations. She also set about securing income-generating opportunities for single mothers with safety concerns. Based on her experience during the project, she also proposed to the



municipality and the Ministry of Innovation and Entrepreneurship to create a restaurant run by women who had been subject to abuse, serving traditional food in a tourist location in order to generate employment and also support local women farmers.

Working for participation of hearing-impaired youth in the Russian Federation



In July, UNDEF launched a new project in the Russian Federation working with young hearing-impaired people across the country. Through the project, the Implementing agency **Organization of the Deaf Youth Success** will build their skills and demonstrate these to the public, thereby increasing their employability in the job market and acceptance in society. The official launch took place at the UN Information Centre headquarters in Moscow on 10th July. The grantee's President, Lydia Frolova, stressed that "creating conditions for continuous inclusive secondary and higher education will allow young hearing-impaired people to show their talents and achieve maximum self-realization in society."

The project will train educational experts and teaching staff, develop training programmes for vocational education adapted for hearing impaired people, and carry out advocacy work with the media. It will also run a Deaflympics – a series of competitions to test the professional skills of young hearing-impaired people in different vocational areas, such as hairdressing and carpentry. The Deaflympics will be attended by businesses and the public in order to raise awareness and assist young hearing-impaired people to obtain the best vocational education and the most suitable employment.

Strengthening the voice of African writers in civil society

An UNDEF regional project has just completed a series of activities aimed at contributing to efforts to repeal criminal defamation laws and other restrictions to freedom of expression - barriers to strong and stable democracies. Project grantee **PEN International** in collaboration with its centres in Africa, in particular Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia, the project provided capacity building for writers in 10 African countries to enable them to initiate strong advocacy campaigns and become experts in the issue of defamation at the national level. Training was followed up by national level research in the four focus countries to examine the policy and legal frameworks and provide case study examples as a basis for the development of advocacy strategies and coalition building in the country.

Partnerships were also strengthened through the project with regional bodies, such as the Pan-African Parliament, which has laid the groundwork for greater engagement with parliamentarians across Africa.



UNDEF launches Namibia project for gender equality in politics

Gender equality in political participation is a fundamental aspect of modern democratic governance. The participation of women in political party leadership and decision-making positions plays an influential role in advancing an inclusive democracy. In terms of the Namibian legal framework, both men and women enjoy equal rights and opportunities to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes. However, in practice, it is often more challenging for women to access and exercise these rights.

Women's Action for Development a civil society organization in Namibia, aims to achieve 50-50 gender equality in the political representation at national and regional levels. While Namibia is already advanced in terms of gender equality in parliament, it is significantly important to achieve 50-50 in both houses, particularly the National Council as a leading success case in Africa and the world. The project began in June 2018 with the grantee visiting all political parties to brief the project and to conduct a baseline survey, and to convince them to participate in the project actively to promote women as their main candidates for the upcoming parliamentary election in 2019 and regional council election in 2020. Subsequently the grantee organized



a media briefing in July with high profile speakers, including the Deputy Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and the Speaker of National Assembly. The grantee will implement awareness campaigns, workshops and training women candidates for the upcoming elections. It also aims to establish regional '50-50 gender inclusive support clubs' comprising citizens to support women candidates and elected candidates.

Developing the voice of vulnerable youth in Côte d'Ivoire

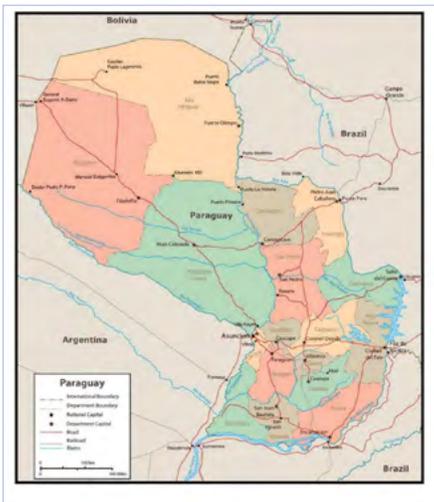
An UNDEF project in Abidjan has been working to help include vulnerable young people in democratic processes, integrate them into decision-making and thereby increase their access to health services, education, and employment.

The project led by **Dignité et Droits pour les Enfants en Côte d'Ivoire** created public fora for vulnerable children and youth to meet and exchange ideas, with trainers conducting courses for over 1,700 vulnerable youth on their rights as citizens and democratic principles. Specialized training on project management and leadership skills was also given to over 500 young people and the best 50 proposals for micro-projects were selected for funding. One of the projects led by 5 young people helped to solve the critical shortage of water at the community health centre in the vulnerable area of Abobo. Despite previous attempts by the health centre staff to remedy the situation, the water outlets had remained defunct for a year. Through the perseverance of the young people lobbying local authorities, this was solved.



Better access to public information in Paraguay

A project in Paraguay is working towards improving access to public information in the country. Legislation establishing citizens' access to public information was enacted in 2014, however implementation has so far been weak and largely limited to a few high-profile corruption cases. Knowledge about the law is also largely limited to the capital. The project grantee **Instituto de Derecho y Economía Ambiental** is, therefore aiming under the project to strengthen the effectiveness of implementation and increase public awareness of the access to information law across the country, particularly among journalists and judges. It will advocate for and encourage an increase in the use of the law by journalists based in Paraguay's interior cities and towns, in news articles, and in investigations related to the misuse of public funds and by engaging judges to enhance the judicial system's compliance with the law.



The project's first milestone event was successfully held on 14th July in Villarica completing the second of a series of ten workshops training journalists based outside the capital. The workshops covered a number of topics such as relevant legal frameworks on access to information, human rights legislation, the methodology of how to submit a request, follow-up and react when faced with a refusal by authorities to

furnish information, as well as techniques on how to effectively use public information in investigative journalism. After each workshop, the journalists are expected to come up with a story and join a virtual community of practice administered by the grantee. This virtual group will help the trained journalists to use the law, answer legal questions, learn from each other, and to share their work using the access to information law. Participants felt that the activity had been highly useful in raising their awareness of the importance of using investigative journalism in the local and national media about topics of citizen interest based on public information. Furthermore, officials from the Ministry of Justice attended the sessions to explain their role in the area of access to public information.

Secretary-General approves almost 50 new UNDEF project proposals

The UN Secretary-General has approved a short list of 49 project proposals for UNDEF's 12th Round of Funding, following recommendations by the United Nations Democracy Fund Advisory Board. UNDEF has contacted those short-listed. UNDEF's Twelfth annual call for project proposals was open from 20 November 2017 to 20 December 2017. The call particularly welcomed projects in the areas of women's empowerment, rule of law, media and electoral processes focusing on elections scheduled for 2020 at the earliest, in addition to the other established main areas for UNDEF projects -- community activism; youth engagement; and strengthening civil society capacity for interaction with government. UNDEF received 2,429 project proposals for this 12th Round, reflecting



continuing high demand. The proposals originated from organizations in 139 countries, the vast majority local civil society organizations in Africa, Arab States, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. Proposals are expected to open in mid-November 2018.

Shortlisted applicants are now required to complete the final stage of the selection process -- negotiating a Project Document with UNDEF, which is in effect a contract between the grantor and the grantee. Only on the satisfactory conclusion of a project document, and its approval by the United Nations Controller, will the proposed project be formally approved for funds disbursement. The next window for project proposals is expected to open in mid-November 2018.