Over 2300 organizations apply for UNDEF support

UNDEF held its thirteenth call for proposals in December 2018-January 2019 and received 2307 project proposals.

The proposals originated from organizations in 141 countries, the vast majority local NGOs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The share of proposals per region is illustrated in the chart below.

This response to the call for proposals will add to the considerable growth the Fund has experienced since its creation in 2005, and bring the total number of projects supported by the Fund to over 830 most of them two years long. These UNDEF-supported initiatives all reflect a focus on strengthening the voice of civil society and encouraging the participation of all groups in democratic processes -- thus concentrating on the demand side of democracy, rather than the supply side.

Now follows a thorough and rigorous process of assessment, quality vetting, due diligence and lessons learned from previous rounds. A team of ten international assessors, combining more than 100 years of programme and project experience, score each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long-short-list of some 300 project proposals. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators and Experts of the UNDEF Advisory Board are invited to provide comments, quality vetting, and views on how proposed activities would fit in the overall context of existing UN work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments are sought from the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group, making use of the specific 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.

Once the short list is approved by the Secretary-General, the proposal moves into the final stage in the selection process: the invitation to short-listed applicants to submit a project document, which is in effect a contract to be negotiated between UNDEF and the grantee. This negotiation requires the applicant to provide a more elaborated project design, and involves detailed input from both UNDEF and the applicant, as well as scrutiny and due diligence enquiries by UNDEF. Only upon successful conclusion of the project document will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement.

Because of the large volume of proposals, UNDEF is able to contact only those applicants who advance to the short list. This is expected to be in August 2019.
‘Our partnership with UNDEF enables us to empower and accelerate women’s leadership’: UNDEF brings together activists during UN Commission on Status of Women

An UNDEF-hosted side event during the March 2019 session of the UN Commission on Status of Women showcased UNDEF projects on the theme of Empowerment, Engagement and Leadership Through Civil Society. UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill, remarks here, was joined by Ambassador K. Nagaraj Naidu, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the UN; Courtney Nemroff, Acting U.S. Representative for Economic and Social Affairs to the UN; and Dr. Wairimu Njoya, UNDEF Advisory Board member and Assistant Professor of Political Science, Williams College.

A panel discussion featured UNDEF project implementers Ghida Anani of the Abaad Resource Centre for Gender Equality in Lebanon, who spoke about strengthening fair legislation for women affected by sexual violence and exploitation; Alejandro Bonil of Corporación Opción Legal in Colombia, who described efforts to empower women survivors of armed conflict; Hala Al-Karib of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, who explained the work to engage marginalized women in elections in Sudan; and Rehmah Kasule of the Century Entrepreneurship Development Agency, who addressed her mission in Uganda to strengthen young women’s civic participation and leadership.

The project implementers also explained how UNDEF’s support specifically strengthened their mission and work overall.

In Lebanon, “UNDEF was one of the very few organization that believed and accepted to invest in an advocacy legal reform campaign to abolish one of the most shameful legislations against women and girls, which was the ‘marry-your-rapist’ law,” said Ghida Anani. “This kind of support, which contributed to the success of this campaign, paved the way for Lebanon to start the journey of reforming all sexual violence related legislations! The appreciation from UNDEF was tremendously encouraging and motivating, allowing us to continue our journey and daily fight. The real sense of partnership with UNDEF reinforces our sense of responsibility to grow even more and continue to tackle such challenging issues in Lebanon and the MENA region.”

In Colombia, UNDEF support had enabled “empowering women survivors of the armed conflict” and “continuous growth and strengthening, very much needed in the new post conflict Colombian humanitarian environment”. Read Alejandro Bonil’s full remarks here.

In Sudan, UNDEF’s support had helped empower women human rights defenders with both visibility and understanding of protection against risk. “In the Horn of Africa, where I am working, women human rights defenders are mostly invisible, they struggle with lack of recognition,” Ms. Al-Karib stressed: “They struggle with lack of protection mechanisms available for their work and the violations committed against them. They have limited knowledge of to connect to avenues of support and solidarity.” Read Hala Al-Karib’s Naidu’s full remarks here.

In Uganda, “our partnership with UNDEF enabled us to empower and accelerate young women’s leadership by engaging them to actively take charge of their lives and lead change in their communities,” Ms. Kasule said. We multiplied faces and amplified voices of young women in civic, electoral and democratic processes in Uganda. Strengthening young women’s leadership and civic participation project in Uganda directly worked with 1,500 young university women and mentored 50 women members of Parliament.”. Read Rehmah Kasule’s full remarks here.

Ambassador Naidu stressed that India had “closely followed the work of UNDEF in supporting projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promoting human rights and encouraging participation of all groups in democratic processes”. He highlighted how “UNDEF has funded an award-winning rural weekly newspaper published in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in local languages and run by a collective of 40 rural women journalists. The newspaper is a shining example that a functioning democracy is dependent on access to information for all people.” Read Ambassador Naidu’s full remarks here.

Representative Nemroff of the United States emphasized: “As we all know, a vibrant civil society is a key element in democracies that thrive. For this reason, UNDEF is of immeasurable importance. Recognizing this, the United States is proud to be UNDEF’s top donor, having contributed three million dollars in 2018 and over $66 million since its founding.” Read Representative Nemroff’s full remarks here.

Dr. Njoya underlined the “continuing importance of multi-level and multi-sector approaches to women’s empowerment. This is the approach that UNDEF grantees have consistently taken.” She added that “the struggle to have their voices heard at home, to defend their market spaces from encroachment by others in contested urban spaces, and to shape how things are done in their own neighborhoods gives women a launching pad from which to engage more actively in formal electoral processes and political deliberation. This is a principle that is consistently imbued in UNDEF’s work for women’s empowerment.” Read Dr. Njoya’s full remarks here.
NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Observatory for minority rights in Tunisia

An UNDEF project in Tunisia is working towards the improvement of minorities’ rights by creating channels of communication between discriminated populations, public actors and members of civil society to work together to put forward structural reforms.

In Tunisia, minorities suffer from discrimination and even persecution for various reasons among which religion, ethnicity or gender. The project grantee Association pour la promotion du Droit à la différence has so far not only trained 39 Tunisian civil society organizations on programme management in the field of human rights, but has also contributed to the debunking of the myths underlying social exclusion. In this context, a roundtable study group was organized gathering 70 public figures from different backgrounds to discuss the cultural forces that fuel existing patterns of exclusion. Various conclusions were drawn, and all pointed to the need to take common action to protect minorities by strengthening tolerance, open-mindedness and democracy. As of today, 24 newspaper and 3 television programs have already spread the word about the NGO’s work and their lobbying has paid off as last October, a law tackling all forms of discriminations was finally passed in the Tunisian assembly.

Strengthening fair legislation for women affected by sexual violence and exploitation in Lebanon

To contribute to eliminate the influence of patriarchy on legal structures, correct gender injustices and end all forms of gender-based violence in Lebanon, UNDEF is supporting various interconnected initiatives that target both the political legislative sector and civil society.

The Implementing Agency, ABAAD, is providing focused capacity building and support to Internal Security Forces (ISF) to develop the knowledge and skills of officers who work directly or indirectly with gender related issues, such as GBV and rape survivors. In early 2019, four training sessions were given to around 200 ISF officers. At the community level, four workshops were conducted with survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), covering key GBV and sexual violence topics and trends. The observations, findings and key learnings from the workshops resulted in the creation of a relevant and culturally sensitive tool that actively engages women survivors of SGBV in raising awareness, preventing and protecting from sexual abuse against women in Lebanon.

To address the issue of rape, the project also supported a nation-wide campaign titled “Shame on Who”, calling for the prosecution of all rapists and promoting a public opinion that supports the victim instead of judging her. The launch of the campaign included a video of a social experiment to showcase the negative perception and attitudes of the society towards rape victims. The campaign had a broad reach, spanning across media with 3.7 million impressions. As of this day, the campaign has accomplished one of its main objectives of encouraging women and girls' survivors of rape and sexual assault to come forward, disclose their cases and seek support. The #ShameOnWho campaign received national and international exposure and media coverage. Among others, CNN aired a video report covering the shocking social experiment video with which the campaign was launched.
‘We partnered with UNDEF in Tunisia to empower youth in the democratic process’

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar highlighted UNDEF’s initiative to empower young people in Tunisia while presenting the work of Silatech, the organization founded by Sheikha Moza to connecting young people with opportunities to take control of their future and influence their communities positively.

“We strongly believe in the importance of youth civic participation and social empowerment as a driving force for community and national development,” Sheikha Moza told at an event in Geneva in March 2019 to mark Silatech’s 10th anniversary, attended by UNDEF Executive Head Annika Savill. “In Tunisia, for example, we partnered with the UN Democracy Fund, Tamkeen For Development and Zitouna Tamkeen, to empower youth to build confidence and commitment to participate in the democratic process.” Other speakers included Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

UNDEF’s Tunisia project with Tamkeen for Development works to empower vulnerable youth in the northeastern governorates of Beja, Jendouba, Kef and Siliana, linking economic empowerment and political participation for youth at risk in poverty-prone areas of the country. It aims to integrate youth in the country’s social fabric and democratic transition by equipping them to participate in their regions’ economic and political life. Young men and women participate in an economic inclusion scheme, on the underlying principle that once youth are given the opportunity to become economically independent, they will gradually gain the confidence to proactively engage in civic and political life.

Silatech has programmes in 17 countries with a network of more than 300 partners. It has connected more than one million young people with job and vocational opportunities.

Read Sheikha Moza’s full speech [here].
UNDEF expands its frontiers into youth and women participation in community policing in Kenya in its eleventh round

An UNDEF project in Kenya is working to mobilize women and youth to participate in community security initiatives. The Kenyan constitution, which provides for two levels of government, recognizes the fact that security is a shared function and espouses the importance of involvement and collaboration of local communities in addressing security challenges.

The project is therefore building the capacity of women, youth and local communities to participate in community-policing structures, enhancing coordination and accountability within security agencies at the national and county level and advocating for the respect of human rights and gender principles by security agencies, for greater safety and security for all communities.

The project started in early 2018 and the project grantee The Institute for Social Accountability has successfully implemented their first milestone activity of providing training for 45 Kenyan Police officers on human rights policing and crime prevention in Nairobi, Baringo and Isiolo counties.

Reversing youth exclusion in Mozambique

UNDEF embarked its journey in Mozambique by funding a project aimed at reducing the social, cultural, economic and political exclusion of young people in the city of Chimoio. The project that began early 2018 is working towards an increased level of youth engagement in social and political processes; greater understanding of and responsiveness to the needs of young people and the issues of their exclusion. These outcomes are being pursued via facilitated soft-skills training, a small grants program, and youth-led campaigns and actions across the city.

Led by the MICAIA Foundation, the project successfully completed its first milestone activity – the 20th and final workshop in 5 thematic areas including active citizenship, identity, culture and globalization, dialogue and me, you and the community with 45 young participants. The workshop took place over 5 days in Chimoio with two reflection reports as outcome documents. There has been a good response and turnout for this workshop and thereby laying out the possible themes for the upcoming campaigns in addressing the challenges that the youth face in Mozambique.
Creating space for women’s participation in civic life in Somalia

An UNDEF project works for women’s leadership and political participation in the Somalia regions of Galmudug and Puntland by building awareness, advocacy, and capacity at the grassroots level. Implemented by the Somali Birth Attendants Cooperative Organization, the initiative engages and trains youth, elders, influential women and girls, civil society organizations, media, and local councillors to foster behavioural change, improve access to information, and build knowledge on human rights and women’s rights. The project is establishing a permanent forum in the two target regions to create space for women’s participation in civic life. An advocacy validation workshop was held in November 2018 in North Galkayo, where participants discussed and adopted a strategy for a series of activities using different media.

Promotion of women’s political participation in Central African Republic

An UNDEF-project in the Central African Republic held its final event in the Ombella Mpoko prefecture. By deepening the knowledge of the women and girls of the region on their rights and on the country’s political system, the project sought to bridge the gender gap in the political arena and fight the overall growing inequalities in the region. Project grantee World Vision, in collaboration with the Women Jurists Association of the Central African Republic, led capacity and knowledge building trainings aiming at empowering the women and girls of the region to develop their leadership skills and engage in the decision-making process of their country.

From the initial 250 beneficiaries, the 2-year project actually reached more than 1,500 women, 90% of whom now claim to have increased their political literacy. Moreover, 77 girls and women received capacity-building training in civil rights and political systems and are now considered able to lead women empowerment and gender equality events. Finally, a large number of men are now taking part in the weekly meetings where women and girls have been sharing their experiences and discussing the issues of gender inequalities in the public sphere.
NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Increasing involvement of Philippines communities in the extractive industry

A UNDEF project in the Philippines is working towards making extractive industries transparent and accountable to local communities. Local communities often have a limited role or lack the capacity to adequately represent their views on social and environmental issues surrounding extractive industries, including mining. Kita, Inc., a local Philippine NGO, commenced implementation of the project in April 2018 which aims to increase the capacity of local civil society and indigenous people groups to establish and participate in multi-stakeholder discussion groups on these topics in three regions. Nine training sessions were held in November 2018 to help build the capacities of marginalized sector representatives, with the objective that they then participate in the discussion groups.

Enabling national initiatives to take democracy beyond elections

UNDEF is funding a global project designed to help politicians and parliaments do democracy better. It will deliver a practical Handbook and three demonstration projects with governments who ask to participate. It is designed to bring together insights from operators of not simply the largest participation projects run by governments - but those which were so substantive that they empowered politicians to act on the result due to the growth in trust in the community. It will give a clear guide to good approaches and lessons learned.

The Handbook drafting is underway, and a review group drawn from projects around the world will be finalising this in late April. As the Handbook is distributed, the grantee newDemocracy will be inviting more people to submit ideas for projects they can host. Already a dozen governments have been in touch with projects from the local to the national, and the first demonstration project will be announced soon.

To express interest in running a pilot project please email UNproject@newdemocracy.com.au.

Read an interview here about the project with newDemocracy’s Executive Director Iain Walker.