



## THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

To celebrate the season, UNDEF is happy to announce that its current window for project proposals will remain open until the first Monday of the New Year. For specifics, see the article below. In the subsequent pages of the newsletter, we present a selection of

our current projects, all of them implemented by local civil society organizations against the odds in challenging environments. With this issue, the UNDEF teams sends warm wishes for a happy new year to all our courageous civil society partners around the world.

### UNDEF Extends Project Proposal Window Until 6 January

UNDEF's current annual call for project proposals will remain open until 6 January 2020, using the on-line system and guidelines at [www.un.org/democracyfund](http://www.un.org/democracyfund).

This is the Fourteenth Round to be launched by UNDEF, which typically provides grants of up to US\$250,000 per two-year project. In the past 13 years, UNDEF has supported over 800 projects in over 120 countries at a total amount of almost US\$190 million. UNDEF invites project proposals covering one or more of eight main areas:

Media and freedom of information; gender equality; community activism; rule of law and human rights; youth engagement; strengthening civil society interaction with Government; tools for knowledge; and support for electoral processes.

While UNDEF always welcomes projects in all the above areas, UNDEF particularly encourages projects on media and freedom of information in this Round -- including citizen journalism and training journalists in legal know-how as well as personal safety and security, both physical and online; building peer support networks for freelance journalists; developing investigative journalism skills; understanding and advancing legislation for access to information; combating hate speech; developing public media literacy, with a focus on learning to digest material

critically and to evaluate sources -- both online and in other media.

Project proposals are subject to a highly rigorous and competitive selection process, quality vetting, due diligence and lessons learned from previous rounds. A team of international experts score each proposal against 10 set criteria and produce a long list. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams 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 invited from relevant UN entities at UN Headquarters.

Based on this collective input, the UNDEF Secretariat produces a first short-list, expected to be confirmed mid-2020, after which the process moves into the next stage. Each short-listed applicant will be contacted with a request for a draft project document, which is in effect the contract between UNDEF and the grantee. The project document 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 negotiation will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement -- usually after September every year.



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Boosting Participatory Budgeting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

[Caritas Development Bukavu](#) received a grant as part of UNDEF's Twelfth Round of funding to support civil society organizations promoting participatory governance and the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The project is implemented in two decentralized territories of the province of South Kivu in the east of the country: Kabare and Nindja. Its objective is to boost citizen participation in local governance by strengthening the capacities of civil society members and local authorities. The project focuses on organizing forums for participatory identification of investments in priority projects to be implemented by local authorities in close collaboration with civil society.

In parallel, the civil society organizations supported under this project are actively participating in the construction of a peaceful society and promotion of human rights through various social cohesion activities that they are carrying out in their communities. These activities include mediation in civil and community conflicts, as well as advocacy and awareness raising interventions around human rights, and social cohesion.



Finally, the project has set up a coordination framework so that stakeholders involved in participatory governance and participatory budgeting at the local level and local and regional authorities can ensure that the needs of local members of the community are reflected in budgets.



### Promoting Inclusive Democracy and Disability Rights in Afghanistan



The UNDEF-funded project Promoting Inclusive Democracy and Disability Rights in Afghanistan implemented by [Community Center for Disabled](#), aims to improve the participation of persons with disabilities in democratic processes. The project is successfully rolling out awareness campaigns and capacity building activities of civil society groups, media, organizations, and communities across six provinces in Afghanistan. The project coordinated efforts to increase access to voting for persons with disabilities and promoted inclusive democracy by removing physical barriers, such as inaccessibility to polling stations and inability to secure a national ID and/or voting cards, but also by removing social and cultural barriers to their participation in elections at a local level. The lack of civic education, for example results in a lack of awareness among citizens about the rights of persons with disabilities and can cause a lack of sensitivity to their needs during the voting process. Moreover, the exclusion of persons with disability within society can lead to lack of education and fear of social stigma.

Based on a two-day monitoring of elections to assess the accessibility of polling sites for persons with disabilities, and support from the election staff and security personnel by using questionnaires, Community Center for Disabled drew a pertinent conclusion: compared to the elections in 2018, the elections in the target areas were more inclusive towards people with disabilities, this thanks to effective advocacy and project activities being focused on persons with disabilities. In fact, not only were the latter more confident to be participating in elections and conscious that participating in elections is a citizen's duty, but the election sites themselves were more accessible. Increased awareness and sensitization also resulted in security and election staff personnel paying more attention to the disabled voters and their needs.

## A Strategy for an Informed Society in Colombia



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

## Building Transparent Cities in Ukraine



In Ukraine, UNDEF partner [Transparency International Ukraine](#) has taken big steps to motivate its 100 largest cities to become more transparent and participatory in an effort to fight local level corruption that has slowed development.

The project, Building Transparent Cities in Ukraine worked on three levels to increase information and build incentive, create awareness, and produce additional programming to combat corruption. Building on the experiences of Transparency International in Slovakia, a local government transparency ranking was created so that the transparency of the largest cities could be established, and local municipalities could access information regarding their capacity to effectively combat corruption and identify areas for improvement. This information was widely publicized and created incentive for poorly ranked municipalities to

improve. In parallel, the project worked to train activists, municipality officials and journalists on best practice in local government transparency to increase their ability to identify corruption at the local level effectively. Finally, civic organizations were engaged in trainings and supported to create and implement local initiatives aimed at decreasing corruption.

The project has proved to be quite a success. More than 300 activists, officials and journalists from 90 different cities have participated in seminars and trainings to fight various forms of corruption. The transparency ranking has created incentive for municipalities to improve their scores in order to improve their images and access international funding. Mayors and local authorities are using the ranking in the drafting of regulations. Twelve communities have begun implementing anti-corruption initiatives designed by their respective communities. Transparency International has seen a growing number of cities applying to be assessed to join the ranking.

The city Mariupol, located in Eastern Ukraine near the war zone, is an excellent example of the project's success. Over a course of two years, the city was able to increase its transparency score and ranking from 28.1 points and 57th place in 2017, to 76.4 and 2nd place in 2018.

In the future, the label "transparent city" should further encourage city officials to apply responsible norms and procedures in an effort to fight corruption.



## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Empowering Rural Communities in Bhutan through Mass Media



Access to information is a key ingredient for democracy. In Bhutan, where most media outlets and journalists are centered in the capital Thimphu, UNDEF partner [Journalist Association of Bhutan](#) is working to bring media coverage and social media awareness to the remotest areas of the country. The project works to enable two-way communications between journalists and rural community members and to increase coverage of rural news. Journalists are trained to find and cover interesting stories in rural communities, and rural community members are trained on social media and journalism skills.

The project implemented community media training from August to October 2019 in villages and districts across the country, reaching a total of 233 participants. Community members learned about various types of media, its role and importance, the government's social media policy, how to engage with media, and how to identify fake news. Based on the training, rural communities established four Community Media Forums with the aim to share rural news among their communities and with journalists using social media.

Journalists were engaged to produce rural news which resulted in 15 stories covering rural community issues.

Following these stories, in May 2019 the Minister of Information and Communications launched the third edition of the *Bhutan Press Mirror*, a Journalists Association of Bhutan occasional journal showcasing five published rural stories. Moving forward, the project is continuing its efforts to increase rural news by enhancing partnerships between journalists and rural community members and enhancing their skills as professional and civic journalists.



### Protecting Indigenous Land in Malaysia

In the Malaysian Peninsula the organization [Malaysian Care](#) is working to strengthen indigenous communities to protect their native land rights. With UNDEF support, the project is building indigenous organizations and networks and training them to advocate for their rights with State institutions.

Following a baseline survey of 21 villages in December 2018, community groups were mobilized to form a land protection local action network with support of implementing partner Koperasi Sengoi Pribumi Perak. Group members participated in workshops covering writing for advocacy, paralegal training, and the mapping software Geographic Information System. Using this training, villages have produced boundary maps

showing their land's original size and collecting documentation of their family so that they can bring their cases for mediation and future legal actions.

The project is building youth advocates such as Ms. Wah Adja, a 20-year old student from Kg Ulu Geruntum village. Prior to the training Adja knew little about land protection and how community members could advocate for themselves and protect against seizure of their land. Supported by the training, she has since helped her community to map out their customary land boundaries to use as evidence in court against the state government. During her term breaks she participated in indigenous rights events and has since joined the project team of organizers. She has conducted two land awareness sessions in the villages, shared her knowledge with 190 people at a conference on land protection strategies, and represented her community at a youth-at-risk consultation with the aspiration to educate other indigenous communities on their land rights.

The project will continue until November 2020 working to involve more young people like Adja to empower and support local community members of indigenous grassroots organizations to advocate for their land rights.

