

## UNDEF Board approves almost 40 new project proposals, all relevant to pandemic and civic space



UNDEF’s Advisory Board met virtually on 1 April 2021 and endorsed a short-list of 38 projects for its 15th Round of funding totaling almost \$10 million dollars, all with direct relevance to addressing the challenges to civic space and democracy as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

In this Round, UNDEF received 1,622 project proposals from organizations in 110 countries, the vast majority local NGOs, despite the implementation constraints posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Proposals originated from Africa, Arab States, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, adding further to the growth the Fund has experienced since its creation in 2005 and bringing the total number of projects supported by the Fund to more than 840. 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.

The Round comes as the Covid-19 crisis brings further challenges to civic space, making UNDEF support more important than ever – from developing media literacy and digital safety as democratic participation is forced online; fighting misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, which have mushroomed in the crisis; training journalists remotely to report on the impact of the crisis with in-depth, fact-checked coverage, while staying safe on the front lines; empowering women against gender-based violence, which has surged amid lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures; addressing the challenges of inequality and weak service delivery made worse by the crisis, with specific focus on the needs and rights of women, youth, minorities and other marginalized populations, so as to help hold governments to account. Where appropriate, to enhance sustained impact, projects will dovetail with and build upon ongoing transformational processes at the national level.

The short list is the product of a thorough and rigorous process. A team of 14 international experts -- combining extensive programme and project experience -- assessed each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long list of 192 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 with existing work in the countries and fields proposed. Based on this collective input, the short list was produced.

Of the project proposals: 31 per cent are in the Arab world; 24 per cent in Africa; 21 per cent in Asia; 13 per cent in Latin America; and 11 per cent in Europe. Broken down by key activity, 21 per cent of project proposals are in strengthening interaction with government; 21 per cent in youth engagement; 19 per cent in women’s empowerment; 17 per cent in rule of law and human rights; 10 per cent in media and freedom of information; 8 per cent in electoral processes; 2 per cent in tools for knowledge and 2 per cent in community activism.

Once no-objection has been sought from Governments of countries where projects are envisaged, the list goes to the Secretary-General for review and approval. 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.

Governments on the 2020-2021 Advisory Board comprise the seven largest cumulative contributors to UNDEF of the past three years: United States of America, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Poland, India and Republic of Korea, and six countries reflecting geographical diversity: Chile, Greece, Maldives, Morocco, Nepal, and Senegal.

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

## Combating violence against women in the home and public arena



UNDEF convened a webinar panel on the sidelines of the March 2021 session of the Commission on the Status of Women, bringing together women leaders from UNDEF grantee organizations on the topic of violence against women both in the home and public arena. Co-hosted and moderated by former UNDEF grantee [Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género](#) the event featured introductory remarks by UNDEF Executive Head Ms. Annika Savill and Deputy United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, Ms. Courtney R. Nemroff. This was the first meeting of what will become a network of UNDEF women civil society leaders for the exchange of lessons learned and taking best practices forward.

The panel discussion showcased the work of some of UNDEF's most courageous and creative women and their projects in combatting violence against women broadly – not just domestic gender-based violence. The discussion brought into focus the importance of addressing this crisis which has surged amid the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, quarantines, and social and economic pressures.



Panelists shared experiences on a range of interventions including: shifting harmful social norms around violence against women in Lebanon; promoting gender-sensitive journalism in Azerbaijan; legal and psychological counseling to victims of gender based violence in Guatemala; community engagement to increase school safety for girls in Nigeria; awareness campaigns for women with disabilities at risk of domestic violence in Afghanistan; using media to mobilize civil society to protect vulnerable women in Egypt; and groundbreaking research on violence against women political leaders through social media.

All panelists expressed that UNDEF support, far beyond financial, had helped them to be taken more seriously by Governments and other actors, helped them manage projects better, and aided them to lead truly transformational efforts. Discussions allowed panelists to engage directly with Ms. Savill and Ms. Nemroff around how the UN and Member States can open space to bring more prominently the voices of civil society to UN Headquarters and country-offices.

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

## Engaging civil society on Agenda 2030 in the Arab region



On 25-26 March 2021, UNDEF grantee, the [Arab NGO Network for Development](#) together with the regional networks of the Civil Society Platform on Sustainable Development organized a two-day virtual event to engage civil society in policy dialogue on Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The event is part of a wider effort to plug gaps in knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 and enable civil society to participate fully in sustainable development policymaking and programme delivery.

Discussions centered around the five main themes of the Agenda 2030: people, prosperity, partnership, planet and peace, and additional challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Over one hundred civil

society participants from the region actively participated in the event, elaborating key challenges that they faced in achieving sustainable development and sharing their respective country contexts. Participants developed a set of recommendations to be presented at the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, the primary regional mechanism to review implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities operating in Arab countries.

## Creating civic space for youth in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, an UNDEF-supported project is empowering youth to increase their civic engagement in electoral processes and monitor public policies ahead of the upcoming elections scheduled for May 2021. The project, implemented by [Bilal Citoyen](#), is working to establish seven local networks dedicated to raising awareness and promoting citizen participation of youth, who make up half of the electoral population, in decision-making bodies and connecting them to public authorities to hold them to account. Youth participation is all the more important amidst the Covid-19 pandemic where it is more crucial than ever to ensure that responses to the crisis uphold their rights and are inclusive of their needs.



In February, the project held a conference for young leaders of seven municipalities on the management of public goods to provide space for them to learn to tailor their arguments, empower their communities and to create space for civic engagement and collaboration between young citizens and experts. Participants engaged in discussions around how to express the political and civic ambitions of youth in concrete ways, and how to increase youth voter turnout in the next elections.

## NEWS FROM THE FIELD

### Engaging marginalized women in elections in Sudan



An UNDEF project in Sudan is supporting grassroots urban women living in poverty to formulate their own political agendas and increase their participation in local government. [The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network](#) has been working since 2019 to help marginalized women elevate their voices in politics as both candidates and educated voters through training, community outreach and civic engagement. Project participants have collaboratively produced a Woman's Manifesto -- a document that presents a list of issues and rights of marginalized women, and recommendations for further action to be used in to engage with politicians and other stakeholders.

In February, the organization brought together grassroots women, political parties, civil society organizations and media outlets both in person and on Zoom to present the Woman's Manifesto agenda as well as screen a documentary film created by the project that showcased the project and highlighted the experiences and aspirations of Sudanese women for equal and meaningful participation in decision-making. The documentary was publicized on social media and online channels, and future screenings are scheduled to continue to raise awareness and advocate for the inclusion of marginalized women in political spaces.

### Dialogue for sustainable forest development in Viet Nam

In Viet Nam, an UNDEF project is working to improve dialogue and interaction between government officials and ethnic minority communities to protect and regenerate local forests and the communities they sustain. UNDEF grantee, [Centre for Sustainable Rural Development](#), in collaboration with Quang Tri Forest Protection Department and Quang Tri Union of Science and Technology Association for Forest and Biodiversity Protection is implementing the project in three communities in the Dakrong district to increase transparency and accountability in Viet Nam's forest sector.

Through training and awareness-raising sessions, adapted to Covid-19 safety protocols, the project is empowering community members and organizations with the technical knowledge of forestry issues and advocacy skills needed to engage officials with confidence. Trainees are working toward piloting a citizen-based independent monitoring model to monitor and prevent forest losses with a view to adapting and applying it across the country in support of sustained dialogue and documented progress against deforestation.

