



★ THE ★ NEW YEAR ISSUE



For UNDEF's project organizations, the past year has again been profoundly challenging. They have continued to show exceptional creativity and courage in pivoting their projects to adapt to the impact of the pandemic, despite the slow roll-out of vaccines in most countries, and the devastating economic and social damage wrought by the prolonged

crisis. This New Year Issue is an opportunity to pay tribute to the resilience of our civil society grantees around the world. As UNDEF project officers were able to resume mission in late 2021, we look at a range of UNDEF projects in Africa, Latin America, and the Arab States. We enter 2022 with new determination and hope.



Colombia projects strengthen post-conflict justice, rural media, women's rights

An UNDEF project in Colombia empowers communities impacted by armed conflict to access justice, by documenting serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; presenting the findings to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission; and providing legal assistance to restore the rights of victims of forced displacement and dispossession. Implemented by **Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro**, the project has led to seven judicial sentences recognizing the fundamental right to land restitution, seven land restitution rulings in individual cases, three protection actions favorable to the victims, and a range of protection

measures for women victims in Magdalena and Cundinamarca.

UNDEF Project Officer Jaime Palacios visited the project in November 2021, as well as two other UNDEF projects in Colombia:

One works to strengthen local news in rural areas while encouraging civic participation and debate. It builds on an earlier UNDEF Colombia project that established journalism labs in Cesar and Tolima, which are now being expanded to the regions of Cauca, Chocó, Magdalena, and Valle del Cauca, bringing media and digital literacy training programmes to community leaders and groups, women



and young people. Through support for local content production and communication, the project ensures at least one monthly product on local issues. An experimental media and digital literacy programme for local schools has been established to embed trainings in the educational system. The initiative is implemented by **Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, FLIP**.

Another project, currently under development, will work for the rights of women affected

by violence and the Covid-19 pandemic -- strengthening the capacity of women's organizations and their ability to press for better policies and services through negotiations with local authorities and political candidates. Implemented by **Corporación Casa de La Mujer**, the project will build employers' and authorities' awareness of and compliance with Article 23 of Law 1257/2008, which works through business tax exemptions to facilitate access to employment for women survivors of political and domestic violence.

Mexico projects defend domestic workers, disappeared, women with disabilities



An UNDEF project in Mexico works to ensure access to social security for 2.2 million domestic workers who have previously been denied labour rights. It builds on Mexico's current legal reforms following the Government's pilot programme in 2019 to register domestic workers in the country's mandatory social security system, giving them access to social security and healthcare benefits. The project works through training, collective organization, campaigning, and building a network of alliances with strategic actors in 25 municipalities, to ensure domestic workers are enrolled. Implemented by **Nosotrxs**, the project also offers guidance on the rights of domestic workers who face insecure employment

during the pandemic, or need better information on coronavirus precautions. A video one domestic worker's experience with the project is available [here](#).

UNDEF Project Officer Jaime Palacios visited the project in November 2021 to meet with stakeholders and beneficiaries, as well as two other UNDEF Mexico projects, including an initiative working for prevention and response mechanisms against gender-based enforced disappearances. Implemented by the **Centro de Investigaciones para la Equidad, Política Pública y Desarrollo**, the project is establishing a system to document and monitor cases; advocate for mechanisms to prevent disappearances; support

The project works through training, and building a network of alliances with strategic actors in 25 municipalities

families in the search for victims; and work for laws that clearly define and criminalize gender-based enforced disappearance in Mexican states lacking such legislation.

Another project, currently under development, will work to strengthen the political participation and leadership of women with disabilities in developing a national disability strategy for Mexico. Implemented by **Documenta**, the project plans to build the capacity of women with disabilities to advocate and dialogue with public institutions, and to help design and implement regulatory frameworks and public policies ensuring the rights of women and girls to a life free of discrimination and violence.



Sierra Leone projects fight for women's participation against the barriers of patriarchy

An UNDEF project in Sierra Leone works to strengthen women's participation in areas where cultural patriarchal barriers have previously limited their involvement. The project engages women in decision-making and access to services in the two newly created rural districts of Falaba and Karene, two former rural chiefdoms that recently attained full district status. The project works through training and facilitation, raising the profile of women's rights, amplifying women's voices, and working with local government stakeholders to create entry points for women to become an integral part of the governance process.

UNDEF Project Officer Katie Travers visited the project in November 2021, travelling to Karene to meet with implementing partner **Action Plus**, project beneficiaries, and local government stakeholders. She participated in a capacity-building session for local women's groups on governance, rights-related advocacy, and community support mechanisms for women.

Katie Travers also met with two other UNDEF projects in Sierra

Leone. One was an initiative to enhance women's role in local governance through monitoring service delivery and holding local government to account. Implemented by **The Campaign for Good Governance**, the project trains women from target communities on local government policy and low-tech data collection; empowers women to monitor progress in the delivery of community electricity, water and health services; and creates platforms for constructive dialogue between women's groups, traditional leaders and local representatives to present monitoring results, community needs and urge duty bearers to uphold their commitments to improve service provision.

The other is a project under development to increase the capacity of community-based organizations and women's rights groups to advocate for gender parity, building on a national policy for 30 per cent's women's representation at all levels of governance. The project is to be implemented by **Muloma Women's Development Association** in the run-up to the general elections scheduled for 2023.

Gambia projects open access to information and dialogue with government

An UNDEF project in the Gambia has not only paved the way for the historic passage of the Access to Information Bill in August 2021; it has also created unprecedented cooperation and collaboration between civil society and government. This marks the first time that a civil society-led process has resulted in formal legislation in the country. Under the project, the **Gambia Press Union** formed a civil society coalition to draft legislation and built platforms for dialogue with the Ministries of Justice and Information to refine and build consensus around the bill. These activities were complemented by training for journalists on the topic and advocacy among the general public to build wide support for access to information as a tool to enhance accountability and good governance.

UNDEF funding provided a critical boost to civil society's efforts, providing the sustainability and predictability to strategically plan and sustain activities that ensured a coordinated effort to obtain government buy-in and support for the legislation.

Government counterparts were involved from the beginning of the project and invited to collaborate in the drafting of the legislation. The Ministry of Justice provided lawyers to work almost full-time on the bill in collaboration with civil society counterparts -- supporting them to advocate internally with members of Parliament to ensure the bill's passage.

UNDEF Project Officer Katie Travers visited the project in November 2021 to meet with journalists and other project beneficiaries, as well as and government stakeholders. She also met with an UNDEF project working to strengthen the advocacy capacity of civil society and the public to effectively participate in public policy processes. Implemented by **The Association of NGOs in The Gambia** -- an umbrella body of civil society organizations in the country -- the project builds the knowledge and skills of civil society organizations on human rights and policy analysis to enhance popular participation, combat corruption, and ensure efficient delivery of public services, including around access to information.



Projects in Central Asia work for women's green leadership, improved criminal justice system

An UNDEF project in Uzbekistan supports women's leadership in green entrepreneurship amid severe impacts of climate change, and thereby their participation in the local economy. Based in Karakalpakstan, an autonomous republic surrounded by the dried-up Aral Sea and the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts, the project works to build a start-up ecosystem for clean tech led by women. Implemented by Tech4Impact, the activities also include capacity-building, developing knowledge online knowledge materials and web resources, and conducting awareness raising campaigns. UNDEF Senior Project Officer Christian Lamarre visited the project in October 2021, participating in a project workshop in the republic's capital of Nukus on ways to accelerate start-up launches in climate-change impacted spaces. Start-up proposals ranged from green guesthouse to hydroponic agriculture; it is expected that up to eight start-ups in this acceleration cycle will reach the final stage.

In Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, an UNDEF project works for to builds better conditions in a prison and criminal justice system suffering from overcrowding, poor management, lack of transparency and accountability, and punitive practices. Implemented by **Penal Reform International Central Asia**, the project also works to develop probation services as a key tool to increase resilience and stability in communities, taking into account the problems of women and children in conflict with the law. So far, the project has visited more than 300 facilities for monitoring and formulated recommendations for improvement; and held a series of training-of-trainers sessions for prison staff, probation officers, national experts and monitoring bodies, including on ways to integrate international standards for the treatment of prisoners.



Jordan projects work for rights of detainees, stronger independent investigative reporting

An UNDEF project in Jordan works to improve effective representation for detainees so as to ensure their human rights are respected. Implemented by **Justice Center for Legal Aid**, the project seeks to bring holistic change on all levels of engagement through capacity enhancement, awareness-raising and provision of legal services. UNDEF Senior project Officer Christian Lamarre visited the project in October 2021, participating in a project workshop on best practices in pre-trial rights - focusing on inspection and investigation procedures, arrest and search guidelines, gender-sensitive approaches, interview skills with more vulnerable groups, and overall, the complementarity

of duty lawyers' and police officers' work.

Christian Lamarre also met with an UNDEF Jordan project to strengthen independent media and expand the ecosystem of investigative reporting, thus building good governance and accountability. Implemented by **Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism**, the project works to equip aspiring journalists from governorates across Jordan with skills to report on accountability and governance on the ground. It develops policy papers on governance and accountability, which, along with the journalists' reports, are discussed in local debates to raise media and public awareness, ultimately encouraging change.

Iraq projects empower youth to rebuild after IS; strengthen media freedom

An UNDEF project in Iraq works to strengthen youth participation in democratic processes, building a network of young activists to develop skills in leadership, negotiation and communication. Youth use media tools to communicate their stories and experiences, and engage with local authorities and other civil society actors to advance democracy and human rights. Implemented by **Al-Tadhamun Iraqi League for Youth**, the project focuses on 16 targeted districts in three governorates – Al Anbar, Ninawa, and Saladin – struggling to rebuild following a period of IS occupation.

The three governorates suffered economic collapse following the conflict with IS, including a disastrous unemployment rate, a severe lack of services, and an increase in the proportion of widows. The regions are also highly diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity and political affiliation.

The funding from UNDEF marked a turning point for Al-Tadhamun, providing visibility and opportunities for new partnerships networks, enabling them to launch a range of further initiatives, including supporting safe space for local identity groups, and creating a women's advisory board in Al Anbar governorate.



As a result of the project, Al-Tadhamun became a hub for youth and civil society; youth leaders designed their own peacebuilding initiatives in two adjacent governorates – Ninawa and Saladin – based on learning from the project; and young team leaders volunteered for election monitoring in their area, as well as training more local young people to do the same in Al Anbar.

UNDEF Senior Project Officer Christian Lamarre visited the project in October 2021. He

Youth use media tools to communicate their stories and experiences

also met with an UNDEF project to strengthen journalism and media freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan. Implemented by the **Kurdistan Human Rights Watch Organization**, the project works to strengthen media professionalism, security, awareness of rights, advocacy for safer reporting conditions, as well as more accurate reporting and analysis as a component of democracy. Project activities also incorporate a response to the Covid-19 crisis for media on the frontline, and for the fight against

Lebanon projects work for women's civil status, refugees; journalism, SDG activism

An UNDEF project in Lebanon works to strengthen the autonomy of Syrian women refugees so as to increase their opportunity to fully participate in the democratic, economic and reconstruction processes -- whether they return to Syria or stay in the host country. The project has adapted to both the global pandemic and the multiple crises impacting Lebanon, including the devastating explosion in Beirut in August 2020. The women's sub-projects, which include Syrian cuisine for charity and crafts such as face masks, allows them to demonstrate their skills as entrepreneurs and organizers for the benefit of local needs.

The Dar Zeytouna project, implemented by **Mandat International**, builds on a series of previous pioneering UNDEF pilot projects with Syrian women refugees in Turkey and Lebanon. It works to establish and maintain a centre for Syrian refugees to meet and support a variety of enterprises projects, while encouraging collaboration between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities. The project operates a centre as a meeting place and shared resource to enable Syrian women refugees, and some Lebanese women from the host community, to implement projects they conceptualized and developed. Through the project, the group has learned small business management, online advertising, basic accounting, and a trade.

UNDEF Senior Project Officer Christian Lamarre visited the project in October 2021, participating in a workshop which illustrated how the project created economic opportunities for women, but also empowered them socially. They have more authority at home, respect in the community, and self-esteem generally. The project has also encouraged them to learn a trade to one another, and has inspired other Syrian women to start similar initiatives. Men are also now contacting the project to ask to participate in the project.

The above project was one of eight UNDEF Lebanon projects visited by Christian Lamarre in October. These included:

- An initiative to address differential treatment, especially by gender, under Lebanon's personal status laws. Lebanon lacks a civil code regulating personal status matters such as marriage, inheritance, child custody, and so relies on 15 separate personal religious-based status laws and courts for the 18 recognized categories. As a direct result, individuals are treated differently because of their religion and gender. Implemented by **Kafa**, a local civil society organization, the project seeks to raise awareness of the discriminatory impact of religion-based status laws, equip civil society and media to advocate changes to personal status laws, and advocate for Lebanese legislators to support a unified, gender-sensitive personal status law. Watch the project's awareness-raising video here: <https://youtu.be/70TdjYtVBnc>
- A project to influence decision-makers for an adequate response to crimes of gender-based violence and shift social norms and attitudes towards zero tolerance. Implemented by **Abaad**, it is a sequel to a



successful UNDEF-Abaad project campaigning to abolish Lebanon's 'marry your rapist' law, which was finally revoked in 2017. For women and adolescent girls in Lebanon, the main protection concerns remain rape, marriage as a result of rape, forced and early marriage, domestic violence, and sexual harassment and exploitation. Unaccompanied girls, single female heads of households, child mothers or spouses and women and girls living with disabilities are particularly vulnerable given lack of legal protection, lack of economic resources, social norms and attitudes. The new project thus aims to address the structural issues in the Lebanese Penal Code, specifically in Articles 503-521, that do not adequately protect survivors of gender-based violence. The project hopes to achieve this by engaging survivors in campaigns for legal reform and cooperating with religious leaders, government officials and civil society partners to change norms.

- An initiative to work through journalism to foster greater accountability and governance. Implemented by **Journalists for Human Rights**, the project works to advance media freedom and access to data and information; enhance the capacity for journalists to cover sensitive human rights related issues; engage underrepresented groups and ethnic minorities; provide journalists with resources to improve their legal knowledge through strong working relationships with civic actors. The project focuses on underrepresentation of marginalized communities in politics and media, and the mismanagement of national resources leading to an increased socio-economic divide, all of which threaten future democratic reforms.
- A project to strengthen civil society capacity for policy dialogue on sustainable development and Agenda 2030. Implemented by the **Arab NGO Network for Development**, it works to develop and implement a training curriculum that embraces an integrated perspective on human rights and sustainable development. It will hold national and regional training for over 100 Arab civil society leaders from across the region, to be disseminated to Arab States through e-newsletters, pamphlets and infographics.