



THE VALENTINE ISSUE

To celebrate the approach of Valentine's Day, the UNDEF team introduces a selection of our newest partners, all of whom launched two-year projects with us in the past few months. Some of the initiatives are the first of their kind endeavoured in the countries concerned; all of them are innovative, implemented by civil society organizations, and work against the odds in challenging environments. We also feature an

in-depth look at the accomplishments of one of our most imaginative partners in India, whose project with us is now nearing its completion; and an overview of the almost 2400 project proposals submitted by potential new partners in our Round Nine window, which closed on New Year's Eve. With this Valentine's issue, we at UNDEF send a warm embrace to all our courageous civil society partners around the world.

A first for Libya: Building safe and independent journalism

Amid the considerable security challenges in Libya, UNDEF funds the first project to focus fully on strengthening independent journalism, so that local citizens have better access to information about the country's democratic process. Implemented by the [Rory Peck Trust](#) together with local partners, the project will train a core group of freelance journalists in freelance tradecraft and safety skills. This is being developed into an online resource, providing all freelance journalists in Libya with access to information that can assist them in producing more professional and ethical content, safely and securely.

The murders of freelance journalists in the Arab region, the deteriorating security situation in Libya and the growing restrictions on media in a range of countries, make even more relevant and important the work and safety of independent journalists.

Despite the challenges on the ground in Libya, the initiative has been able to make an effective start since the project signing in October 2014. The project team has successfully completed a baseline survey to build a more detailed understanding of current levels of knowledge on professional development and safety amongst Libyan freelancers; finalized a workshop curriculum and recruited trainers; publicized workshops and started processing high levels of demand from local freelancers; met in Tunis with other media development organizations conducting projects in Libya, so as to build strong collaboration among NGOs working there and ensure each project has a larger impact.



Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates: Empowering young emerging leaders



Young people have played a key role in the Arab movements since 2011 -- and yet four years later, they still find themselves disempowered and unable to take control of their future. For this reason, UNDEF funds a project to empower young leaders in five countries to play a bigger role in civic and democratic life. Implemented by the [World Youth Alliance Middle East](#), the project will develop young opinion-shapers and offer them resources to connect with youth leaders in other countries. Through volunteer work and community awareness activities, the emerging leaders can start constructively working together to make their communities a better place while positively influencing the perceptions that societies in the region have towards youth in democracy. Over the span of two years, the project will train 600 youth leaders through 40 national workshops and contribute to 12,000 hours of volunteering. All lessons learned will be compiled into a guide that will support this new network of Emerging Leaders of the Arab Region.

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A first for Bolivia: Legal identity papers for democratic participation of indigenous and peasant communities

The Bolivian Constitution recognizes the rights of indigenous, native and peasant nations and peoples. Yet, many communities do not benefit from these rights as their members lack identity papers and their organizations are not registered. Leaders also tend to lack the knowledge and skills needed for democratic participation. This is why a new UNDEF-funded project works in the La Paz and Oruro Departments to legally empower people traditionally excluded to participate in democratic processes and exercise their civil and indigenous rights. Implemented by [Microjusticia Bolivia](#), the project will provide basic legal documentation of identity and legal personality; build capacity of local target groups, at least half of whom are women; and provide evidence-based input to advocate for reform of public institutions. The project focuses on the municipalities of Achacahi, Ancoraimes, Viacha, Pucarani, Batallas, Sica Sica, Patacamaya, Caracollo and Choro, with a population of some 225.000 people, 90 percent of them Aymara natives.



A first for Colombia: A journalists' agenda for peace and freedom of expression

Colombia's peace dialogue process has reached agreement that the role of media will be key in reaching a stable and durable peace. But there is a lack of information and debate about the peace challenges for the media. UNDEF funds a project that proposes an agenda of freedom of expression for peacetime, taking into account the media issues posed in the peace dialogues by the Government and the guerrillas, the demands of journalists working in conflict areas, the compatibility of the Colombian legal framework and experience in other countries.

Implemented by [Foundation for Press Freedom](#), the project seeks to strengthen media networks, promote open and plural debates through forums, roundtables and think tanks. The agenda for freedom of expression will be submitted to the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace Havana. The project will also produce a documentary that aims to educate and advocate challenges faced by Colombia's existing media networks to a wider audience who traditionally lacks access to this information.



Cameroon: Decentralizing power, helping grassroots participate

Cameroon suffers from lack of communication and accountability between local elected leaders and their electorates in planning and implementation. This is why UNDEF funds a project to build participatory governance and include local communities in local decision making processes. Implemented by [Interfaith Vision Foundation Cameroon](#), it focuses on grassroots advocacy, training and sensitizing local leaders and councillors in community mobilization so as to hold elected leaders accountable and responsive; hold local quarterly meetings regularly in the targeted council municipalities. At the end of the trainings, participants are expected to develop an action plan to impart knowledge gained to their respective institutions.



Malawi: Engaging young people in local governance

Young people make up over 65 per cent of Malawi's population, but their participation in democratic processes at the grassroots level is declining and they remain marginalized in the social, political and economic arena. UNDEF funds a project to empower youth organizations to participate effectively in local governance in the regional districts of Mzuzu, Blantyre and Lilongwe, through specialised training courses for senior management

of youth organisations and the creation of platforms for dialogue. Public and local government awareness of the role of youth in local governance is built via talk shows and issue-based sensitisation campaigns. Implemented by the [Malawi Human Rights Youth Network](#), the project brings together 40 youth affiliate NGOs in 17 districts countrywide.



India: Mobile phones give voice to rural citizen journalists and activists

Indigenous communities in rural India are often neglected by mainstream media. An UNDEF-funded project gives voice to these communities through [CGNet Swara](#), a mobile phone movement enabling people in remote areas to place an ordinary phone call to the CGNet Swara server and record a message in their local language. Messages are reviewed by a team of moderators to ensure accuracy and relevance to the community. After being approved, messages are released with a textual summary on a [website](#). They are also made available for others to hear over the phone. Because the reports are publicly available on a website and distributed over social media, they have greater leverage to spur action than traditional mechanisms, such as helplines and complaint forms

Though initially launched as a news channel, CGNet Swara has evolved into a powerful mechanism for resolving grievances that otherwise go unnoticed in rural communities. For example, large numbers of laborers have used CGNet Swara to receive overdue payment of wages from the government. Broken hand pumps in rural areas have been fixed promptly after reports on CGNet Swara. Health emergencies such as cholera and malaria have been swiftly addressed, even when government officials were previously unresponsive.

Over the past five years, CGNet Swara has grown to encompass 46700 callers who have recorded over 6000 stories and have called over 430000 times to listen. In the last few years, CGNet Swara has resolved about 250 grievances from rural communities. The key mechanism behind this success is a follow-up team who monitors reports on CGNet Swara and brings them to the attention of government officials, resulting in concrete changes in rural communities. Intensive training workshops and a traveling theatre and puppetry troupe, are used to spread awareness about the CGNet Swara.

Voice remains the primary interface for mobile subscribers in India, due in large part to the language constraint. India has 22 official languages and 1635 recognized mother tongues. One third of Indian adults are not literate and several millions speak languages that do not even have a script. The state of Chhattisgarh is home to some



of India's most disadvantaged populations and is a center of political unrest due to a strong anti-government Maoist movement. The three main languages of the region have no print or audiovisual media. Hence, Interactive Voice Response systems are a huge industry, though the current focus is on content consumption. Enabling a production experience on voice, similar to the internet, could create sustained communities of involved users -- an ecosystem where it's easy for anyone, even from a rural area, to participate in a knowledge-sharing society using a basic cellphone and voice as the medium.

The platform has been credited with far-reaching impact where users have recorded stories narrating problems that were solved as a result of using CGNet Swara:

- In the Sitapur Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh, about 25 villagers were working in a government agriculture farm on a daily wage basis and they were not paid their wages for a full year. Complaints through official channels yielded no response. After a message was recorded on CGNet Swara, the full amount was paid to all the workers within a week. More details can be found [here](#).

- In Gadhvayi village, Madhya Pradesh, there was an outbreak of cholera in July 2014. When reported to the local health officials, some of them fled the scene instead of delivering help. CGNet Swara was used to raise the issue to the chief medical officer of the district, who responded swiftly with a medical team. People from the village called CGNet Swara to express thanks for "saving our lives".

- In the Kabirdham district of Chhattisgarh, a Forest Ranger took a payment of Rs. 99,000 (USD 1600) from a set of 33 families, promising the land titles under the Forest Rights Act. But after two months, nothing had happened. The village used CGNet Swara to report the case. Soon the official not only returned the payment, but called and recorded a message to apologize. This is also featured in this article in [The Hindu](#).

Information gathered through CGNet Swara has also helped advance more responsible reporting of malaria deaths by the Chhattisgarh government.





Ban Ki-moon highlights India's support for UNDEF

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited the world's largest democracy in January 2015. In meetings with President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he expressed appreciation for India's contributions to peacekeeping and the promotion of global democracy. He pointed out that India was the second largest donor to the UN Democracy Fund, next only to the United States. His words were covered in [The Hindu](#), [The Shillong Times](#), and [NDTV](#).

Burning issues for women in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia

An UNDEF-funded project held a closing session on under-age maids of Tunisia, marriage law reform in Egypt, gender-based violence and women's right to inheritance in Jordan. It was covered in [As Sawsana](#). The project aimed to increase the capacity of and establish networks among civil society to enforce equal participation of women.



A voice in Malaysia for participatory local democracy

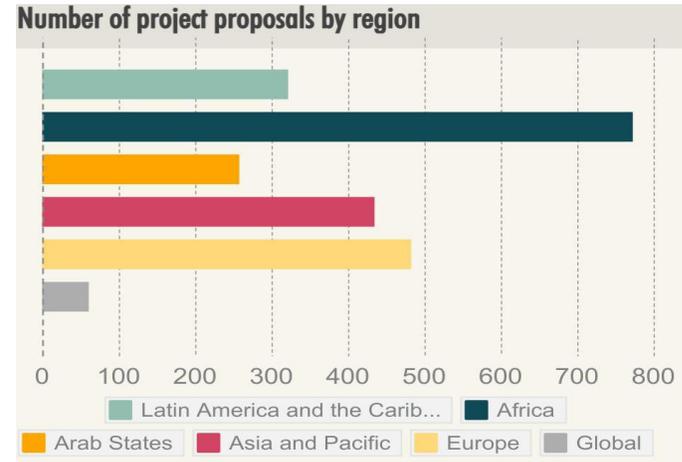
Malaysia's [Aliran](#) highlighted UNDEF-funded [Participatory Local Democracy Index](#) as a tool to compare and measure the extent to which each country has promoted decentralisation of power, revenue and functions; the scope of popular participation in local governance; and accountability and transparency of local governments.



APPLICANTS FROM 143 COUNTRIES vie for UNDEF grants IN NEW FUNDING ROUND

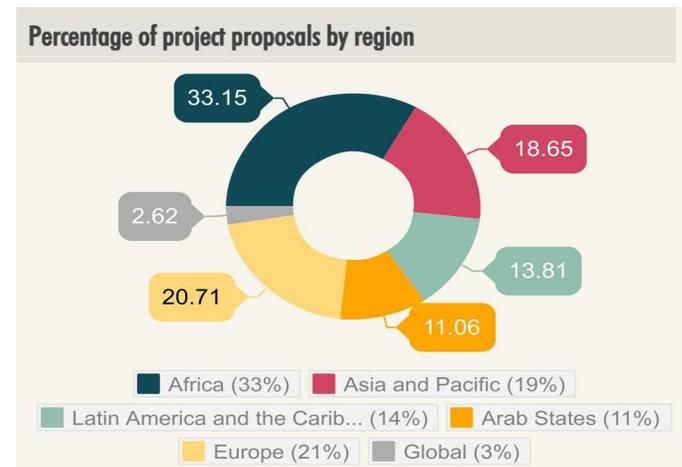
NINTH ROUND OF FUNDING

UNDEF'S annual project proposal window closed on New Year's Eve 2014 yielding almost 2400 proposals



The project proposals originated from applicants in 143 countries, the vast majority local civil society organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In the first phase of the selection process, the proposals are assessed by independent consultants, who judge each proposal on its inherent quality and scores it against 10 set criteria:

- Does the proposed project advance the objectives of UNDEF?
- Does the applicant organization have a strong track record?
- Is the proposal technically sound in conception and presentation?
- Does the proposal make use of the UN's and UNDEF's comparative advantage?
- Would the proposed project have significant impact?
- Would the proposed project represent good value for money?
- Does the proposed project have strong prospects for successful implementation?
- Does the proposed project have strong prospects of sustainability beyond the project duration?
- Does the proposed project encourage inclusiveness?
- Would the proposed project enhance gender equality?



This assessment yields a long list which is in turn reviewed by UN Resident Coordinators in the field and by the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group -- comprising the UN Department of Political Affairs, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, the UN Rule of Law Unit, the UN Development Programme, UN Women, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. This review process narrows down the list further, resulting in a short list of some 50 proposals to be discussed and endorsed by the UNDEF Advisory Board and ultimately submitted to the Secretary-General for approval.

Given the large volume of proposals, only applicants who advance to the short list will be contacted by UNDEF. This is expected to be in mid-2015, when short-listed applicants will be asked to compose a draft project document to be negotiated with UNDEF -- the final stage of the selection process. In its first eight Rounds of Funding, UNDEF has supported more than 550 projects in over 150 countries. They all reflect a focus on strengthening the voice of civil society, ranging from access to justice to empowering indigenous communities, from developing constitutional watchdogs to strengthening the rights of migrants.

