As UNDEF enters its Seventh Round of Funding, momentous efforts for democratization coincide with troubling developments in some parts of the world. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has noted, there have been alarming threats to hard-won gains in democratic governance in several countries. Civil society groups face growing pressures and restrictions. Legislation has been introduced specifically targeting civil society organizations and making it almost impossible for them to operate. Champions of democracy have encountered new confrontational measures.

At the same time, the rule of law has become more clearly articulated as a priority of the UN system. The Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels held in September 2012 reaffirmed that “human rights, the rule of law and democracy are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and that they belong to the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations” and invited “donors, intergovernmental organizations and relevant civil society actors to provide technical assistance and capacity-building, including education and training on rule of law-related issues, as well as to share practices and lessons learned on the rule of law”.

UNDEF has always had projects in the field of rule of law and human rights. In this Seventh Round of Funding, project proposals in this category make up some half of the total number, reflecting the UN family’s wish to give life to the September Declaration – including support for civil society efforts in this area.

UNDEF received 3,013 project proposals for its Sixth Round, the second highest number so far, reflecting continued high demand for support from the Fund. The proposals originated from organizations in 133 countries, the vast majority local NGOs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The short list approved by the UNDEF Board in March 2013 is the product of a thorough process of assessment. A team of five international assessors combining more than 60 years of programme and project experience scored each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long-short-list of 250 project proposals. UN Resident Coordinators and Experts of the UNDEF Advisory Board reviewed these, commenting on how proposed activities would fit in with existing UN work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments were 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.

Based on this collective input, the UNDEF Secretariat produced a short list of 50 project proposals. 32 per cent are in Africa, followed by 24 per cent in Asia, 14 per cent in the Arab world, 12 per cent in Europe and 12 per cent in Latin America.

Once the short list is approved by the Secretary-General, the proposal moves into the final stage in the selection process: the negotiation of a more detailed project document, in effect the contract between UNDEF and the grantee. Only upon successful conclusion of the project document, and its approval by the UN Controller, will the project proposal formally be approved for funds disbursement.

India’s Ambassador to the UN, Manjeev Singh Puri, kicked off UNDEF’s Board meeting by handing over a cheque for 1.85 million dollars from the world’s largest democracy. This brings to over 31 million dollars India’s total contribution since the Fund was established in 2005. As an original co-founder of UNDEF, with the United States, India thus remains UNDEF’s second largest donor. The cheque was handed to Michael Doyle, Chair of UNDEF’s Advisory Board.
Citizen journalists and young leaders in Georgia

UNDEF Deputy Head Annika Savill visited a number of UNDEF projects in Georgia in April 2013, including an initiative that used citizen journalism to promote free and fair elections in the polls of October 2012. The project spread the tool of civic journalism to over 10 cities, providing information to voters, training in the use of IT and social media, newspaper, film and website coverage, fact-checking by trained journalists, as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis of the received information. Recommendations on how to prevent violations were elaborated and presented to decision-makers.

A more recently launched Georgia project focuses on equipping young members of political parties and civil society organizations with skills and knowledge to enhance their role in effective public policy. This includes trainings in leadership and policy-making, and workshops to create roadmaps for public policy-making. Empowerment through education will foster a sense of ownership among participants in promoting democratic values.
UNDEF Update – June 2013

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

YOUNG LEADERS TAKE THE HELM IN COMMUNITIES OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia-Herzegovina is still a post-war country in transition, divided along ethnic lines. Because the engagement and civic responsibility of young people is crucial, an UNDEF-funded project works to equip young people with leadership skills to take an active part in decision-making processes in their communities. As part of the training, the students established action plans for their communities, with very diverse objectives. They successfully lobbied for a full-time youth representative to be appointed in the municipality – a new position which will serve as a mechanism to integrate youth perspective in the local government. The project is implemented by Education Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Education: Civitas Bosnia and Herzegovina.

STRENGTHENING YOUNG PEOPLE’S POLITICAL SKILLS IN TAJIKISTAN

With more than 60 per cent of the population aged under 30, Tajikistan is one of the world’s youngest countries. Yet youth participation, both political and social, is low and young people’s opinion undervalued. This is why UNDEF funds a project in Tajikistan to encourage young people to participate in political debates on youth policy issues. The initiative works to strengthen the youth sections of all eight registered national political parties, increase young people’s understanding of democratic values and principles as a fundamental basis for participating in the next national elections, and develop comprehensive strategies and approaches towards youth policy. A key mechanism is the creation of a Youth Debate Centre, as well as a monitoring body to evaluate the effectiveness and application of youth policy recommendations.

This is the second youth project funded by UNDEF in Tajikistan. Implemented by the Youth of the 21st Century, a local NGO, the project recently held a training course on democratic debating skills for young people in Dushanbe.

HOLDING GOVERNORATE COUNCILS ACCOUNTABLE IN IRAQ

An UNDEF-funded project in Iraq has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with six Governorate Councils as part of an effort to strengthen civil society participation in democratic processes and advance accountability in Government institutions.

The project, active in the Governorates of Baghdad, Babil, Karkuk, Najaf, Basrah and Karbala, works to make communities more aware of their rights to participation and basic services, as well as evaluate the performance of Governorate Councils to address citizens’ needs.

Implemented by the Um-Alyateem Foundation, the project will train Governorate Councils in good governance and transparency, public policy and communication. A network of more than 20 civil society organizations will attend Governorate Council sessions regularly to monitor their performance. The results will be disseminated through a website and public reports.
Amplifying the voice of women in politics and decision-making in Zimbabwe

An UNDEF-funded project in Zimbabwe works to empower women and increase their participation in politics and the decision-making process. The project, implemented by the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust, trains women in the Binga District to be popular opinion leaders, who will in turn train other women and men and spread the acquired knowledge across their communities.

The project recently carried out a workshop to build knowledge on national and international legal instruments and policy on women’s political participation. It will hold regular follow-up meetings and parliamentary study tours, and disseminate information regarding women’s participation in political processes through newspaper articles, radio programmes and television talk shows.

Breakthroughs for UNDEF-funded rights litigation in Southern Africa

An UNDEF-funded project for using public interest litigation to strengthen human rights and the rule of law in Southern Africa has yielded some significant developments in just one year. The initiative’s implementers, the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, recently litigated a case in Botswana on behalf of four elderly sisters challenging a discriminatory customary law practice prohibiting women from inheriting a family home. A landmark ruling from the Botswana High Court held that the customary law rule infringed the right to equality under the Botswana Constitution, thus allowing the sisters to continue living in their home and avoid eviction by male family members.

In Lesotho, the Centre is awaiting a ruling from the Constitutional Court after challenging customary law practice prohibiting women from inheriting to chieftainship. The Centre argued on behalf of the plaintiff that denying chieftainship on the grounds of gender alone violates constitutional rights to equality and freedom from discrimination.

The Centre aims to promote and advance human rights and the rule of law in southern Africa, primarily through strategic litigation support and capacity building. It provides support to local and regional lawyers and organizations in litigating human rights and rule of law cases in Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
Two projects for young people in Pakistan

An UNDEF-funded project has held a series of district democracy forums to strengthen youth organizations for democracy, focusing on young people in the Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The initiative, implemented by the Chanan Development Association, works to create dialogue between young people and political candidates. It was covered prominently in The Express Tribune.

Doors open to women’s centre in Libya

An UNDEF-funded centre for Libyan women has opened in Tripoli’s Ben Ashur district, with the aim of training them to participate actively in the democratic processes of the new Libya. The Libya Herald reported on the opening. The project is implemented by Libyan Woman Centre.

An UNDEF-funded project held a workshop and exhibition in Karachi as part of Draw Me Democracy, a global initiative to engage young artists, designers and communication professionals to take active role in democratic and human rights processes. The project, implemented by Posters for Tomorrow, was also featured in The Express Tribune and in Dawn.

VOTE
62 million Pakistanis live below poverty line

When half of Pakistan doesn’t vote, the other half doesn’t eat.

VOTE!
FOR JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT IN SIERRA LEONE

A new project works to create social movements so as to build more effective and proactive civil society that is capable of achieving social change. The initiative was covered extensively in Awoko.

DEFENDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN COLOMBIA

Following attacks and threats against journalists in several parts of the country, an UNDEF-funded project presented the results of a national survey on freedom of expression and access to public information. The study, part of a project implemented by Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, collected the perceptions of more than 700 journalists and editors. It was featured in the blog Libreta de Apuntes.

MINISTERS OF COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES HIGHLIGHT UNDEF ROLE

At the Seventh Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies, held in Ulaanbaatar in April 2013, ministers pledged to support the strengthened role of the Community of Democracies at the United Nations by developing closer cooperation with the United Nations Democracy Fund.