UNDEF’s Fifth Round of Funding comes at a historic time for democratization efforts worldwide, with momentous events in the Arab world and elsewhere. The UNDEF Advisory Board met on 31 March and endorsed a short-list list of 65 projects in Africa, the Arab world, Asia, the Americas and Europe, estimated at a total of approximately 14 million dollars. The list, which includes 10 projects in the Arab world, is now subject to approval by the Secretary-General, and to the successful negotiation of project document between UNDEF and each short-listed applicant.

This response will add further to the considerable growth the Fund has experienced since its creation in 2005. Once approved, the addition of the new projects would bring the total number of UNDEF-funded projects to more than 400 in almost 150 countries.

UNDEF received a record 3,754 project proposals for its Fifth Round -- almost twice as many as the average in previous years -- reflecting unprecedented demand for support from the Fund. The proposals originated from organizations in 149 countries, the vast majority local NGOs in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 230 proposals originated from the Arab region.

The short list is the product of a thorough process of assessment, quality vetting, due diligence and lessons learned from previous Rounds. As fewer than two per cent of the total incoming proposals could be included in the short list, the process was even more rigorous and competitive than in previous years. The proposals were first vetted by a team of six independent international assessors, combining some 60 years of programme and project experience. Each proposal was judged on its inherent quality and scored against 10 set criteria:

- Promotes the objectives of UNDEF
- Draws on the United Nations comparative advantage
- Will have a significant impact
- Will encourage inclusiveness
- Will enhance gender equality
- Has strong prospects for successful implementation
- Has a strong track record
- Is technically sound in conception and presentation
- Represents good value for money
- Has strong prospects of sustainability beyond the project duration.

This assessment narrowed down the list to about 270 proposals, which were in turn reviewed by the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group -- comprising the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women -- as well as the UNDEF Advisory Board. Based on this collective input, the UNDEF Secretariat produced a selection of 65 project proposals. 34 per cent are in Africa, followed by 23 per cent in Asia. The Arab world has an unprecedented 15 per cent. Of the total number of proposals, 32 per cent are in the area of community development, followed by 26 per cent in women’s empowerment; 15 per cent in youth; 9 per cent in media; 8 in strengthening instrumentalities of Government; 6 per cent in rule of law and human rights; and 3 per cent in tools. Overall, 20 per cent specifically address the needs of marginalized communities.

The UNDEF Board for 2010-2011 brings together UNDEF’s seven biggest donors -- the United States, India, Japan, Qatar, Australia, Germany and Spain -- and six countries reflecting geographical diversity and a commitment to democratic principles -- Costa Rica, Ghana, Iraq, Mauritius, Poland and the Republic of Korea as well as two civil society organizations and four individuals.
NEWS FROM THE FIELD

New project
In Algeria -- as in Tunisia and Egypt -- greater participation by women is crucial to building better governance and genuine democracy. A new UNDEF initiative works to strengthen the leadership of Algerian women in political parties, trade unions and professional associations. In this way, the project addresses the legacy of both Algeria’s traditional male domination, and the years of armed conflict during the 1990s which further inhibited women’s political participation. Implemented by Association Culturelle Amusnaw, the initiative consists of training, seminars and thematic sessions, as well as a survey of existing women’s leadership in their communities. It aims to raise awareness of legal and constitutional tools that guarantee women’s equal rights, and draw on examples of women who have overcome obstacles to assume leadership roles.

New project
At a critical juncture for Egypt’s democratic development, a new UNDEF-funded project has just begun its work to empower Egyptian youth and strengthen their involvement in political discourse and processes in the upcoming election period. The initiative, titled “Enlarging the Social Base for Democracy and Rule of Law in Egypt”, will use an integrated education programme to train young people in human rights strategy, networking and social media. The overall goal is to instil a passion for human rights and democratic participation, expose youth to different political, cultural, social, and religious perspectives, and foster tolerance, pluralism and peaceful dialogue.

NEW PROJECT WORKS TO ENGAGE YOUNG EGYPtIANS IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS

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NEW PROJECT TACKLES ALGERIA’S DIFFICULT TWIN LEGACIES
Empowering village women in People’s Republic of China

An UNDEF-funded project works to empower women in Dongzhu village, Heilongjiang province, northeast China, where patriarchal values still dominate village governance. The initiative engages marginalized rural women in village-level governance, and helps raise their awareness of democratic participation; seeks to mobilize them to participate in village elections; strengthens their decision-making skills; and trains them to monitor public affairs at the village level. The project is implemented by Women’s Watch China, a local NGO. It is one of three projects funded by UNDEF in China.

The vast majority of Indonesians living in extractive areas are both poor and powerless. Previous attempts at collaboration between local government, corporations and NGOs have failed over issues of mistrust and lack of capacity. An UNDEF-funded project works to enhance trust and cooperation between government, local government, NGOs and corporations. It aims to improve the capacity and credibility of local NGOs as partners of corporate social responsibility programmes, develop communities in favour of increasing public welfare, and establish better regulations at national and local level. The project is implemented by the Institute for Research and Empowerment, based in Yogyakarta.
WOMEN VENDORS AND HERDERS EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS IN SOMALILAND

Somalia is one of the world’s most challenging environments for NGOs. A new project funded by UNDEF in Somaliland works to raise women’s awareness of their rights and how to exercise them. Implemented by the local Women’s Integrated Network, the initiative develops the capacity of a core group of young professional women to train, support and assist women working in markets and shepherding. It works through consultation sessions such as this one at Hargeisa market.

WOMEN USE RADIO to build better governance in Burundi

After 12 years of civil war, Burundi’s challenge is to keep addressing the divisive factors that drove the country’s brutal armed conflict, while finding ways to nurture the country’s fragile democracy. An UNDEF funded initiative trains women to take up leadership positions, and thus improve governance in the country as a whole. The project, implemented by Search for Common Ground, just launched a new radio series specifically for and about women leaders in the public and private sector. The first programme in the series, entitled ‘Umwanya Ni Rwawe,’ or ‘It’s Your Time, It’s Your Opportunity,’ polled listeners on their views of women’s representation in different institutions. Those interviewed noted a positive trend for elected posts such as parliamentarians, but less so for senior appointed officials and executives. The overall project works to give newly elected and appointed leaders the tools to play a genuine and active role in governance and positive social change.
UNDEF’s work in Arab world held up as model in testimony to U.S. Congress

A new interactive website was just launched by an UNDEF-funded project in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to strengthen women’s participation in politics and decision-making. The initiative is implemented by the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research.

Cyber attacks by the state, politically-motivated censorship and government control over internet infrastructure have emerged as especially prominent threats to freedom in the internet, according to an UNDEF-funded report compiled by Freedom House. To illuminate the emerging threats to internet freedom and identify areas of opportunity, Freedom House created a unique methodology to assess the full range of elements that comprise digital media freedom. The report examines internet freedom in 37 countries, and concludes that the threats to internet freedom are growing and have become more diverse.

Online tool for women in politics in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia

In testimony before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Brookings Deputy Director Ted Piccone discussed how constructive US engagement at the UN serves US interests in international peace, security and democracy. Citing UNDEF’s work in the Arab region, he said “This is precisely the kind of value added the UN can provide that serves our interests in fostering credible democratic transitions in that part of the world.”
WORTH READING

Top 10 from UNDEF’s First Round

A compendium of ten exemplary UNDEF-funded projects was compiled by Dr. Lincoln Mitchell of Columbia University. It draws on his meta-evaluation of UNDEF’s First Round of Funding, and comprises projects in Guatemala, Mongolia, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Thailand, as well as two global projects.

As rising democratic powers, India and Indonesia are looking beyond non-alignment for a larger role in world affairs. This includes India’s support for UNDEF, writes Professor C. Raja Mohan of India’s RSIS.

INDIA AND INDONESIA: A NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY

Keeping up with UNDEF’s debut in Laos

UNDEF’s first project in Laos works to empower civil social organizations to contribute meaningfully to the country’s development and good governance. The project, implemented by the Kenan Institute Asia, recently launched a newsletter, to be distributed every two months during the project cycle to keep project participants informed about the training schedule and overall progress of the project.

An HONEST LOOK at PROCUREMENT in Nigeria

An UNDEF-funded report reveals the most common abuses in Nigerian public procurement, and the challenges of implementing the 2007 Public Procurement Act.

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