

EC-UNDP Electoral Assistance Project Implementation: Identifying Implementation Challenges

The EC point of view

General information

In March 2015, a same questionnaire was sent to EU delegations and UNDP country offices working in 24 countries where the EU has financially contributed to UNDP-managed basket funds delivering electoral assistance in recent years. This report presents an overview of the accounts received from the EU side. It is based on the contributions received from the following EU Delegations: Benin, Botswana, Burkina, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. For confidentiality reasons, their accounts are presented per question and not per country. This approach was chosen because it conducts us to focus on cross-cutting issues rather than contextual ones. As will be seen, the repetition of similar concerns across countries tends indeed to indicate that structural difficulties are at stake.

The EU Delegations were asked to fill in the questionnaire based on their experience with past or present projects, some of which were signed in 2010 and 2011. Given the high turnover of staff in EU Delegations, it has not always been possible to collect the accounts of those who were in charge with projects signed more than 2-3 years ago. The Delegations therefore have answered the questions based on the projects they best knew. When filling in the questionnaire, most of them used a general perspective which does not allow us to identify to which project in particular each given comment applies. A similar approach has been used when drafting this report.

All the information received from delegations has been included below. Nothing has been added, nothing has been removed. Quotations from the answers received appear in italics in the text.

Question 1: Please describe the working relationship between the EU Delegation and UNDP within the context of electoral assistance, and what are the key lessons learnt; please include both positive and negative?

As regards the working relationship between the EU and UNDP, two general observations need to be made. The first concerns the *fundamental differences between the way of working* of these two organizations which both have their own procedures and internal regulations. These differences imply that the personnel in the field have no other choice than search for common solutions and, often, make compromises. This leads us to the second observation: the success of such negotiations depends a lot on the quality of the personal relationships developed between the members of each organization. Indeed, two delegations mentioned the recent improvements they have experienced in

their relationship with UNDP since the arrival of a new leadership at UNDP side: *the change of leadership has resulted in a much greater openness and transparency and improved dialogue at all levels. Key project reports and assessment are now shared, internal project governance improved, DPs engagement welcome in formulation of activities and agenda setting. Greater and welcome emphasis is also going into joint visibility and monitoring missions: a definite move towards the right direction.*

A few other delegations provided positive answers as well to this first question. They speak of *good relations*, notably at technical and political levels: *the technical people were instrumental in getting us to where we are today.* One delegation mentioned *a common understanding of the common objectives of the projects, beyond looking at the objectives or interests of individual donors.* Another underlined that *we work as partners. UNDP always consulted the EU on crucial decisions to be taken on electoral assistance, and this gesture strengthened the professional relationship.* In a third delegation, the collaboration is described as *good, frank and constructive: there is full transparency in our relations and mutual respect.* A fourth delegation underlined that thanks to the project they developed with UNDP, no incident arose during the last presidential elections. A fifth one congratulated UNDP employees for their demonstrated willingness to account for all the requests they received.

Such positive answers, however, represent only one side of the coin. Other less positive comments were also received, and these are more numerous. One delegation even took a radical stance: *there are unfortunately no positive aspects in the relationship with UNDP, which is a shame.* Such a strong position reflects the serious difficulties faced by many delegations in their everyday collaboration with UNDP.

A major concern relates to the capacities of UNDP country offices in terms of human resources. Several delegations link the quality of their partnership with UNDP with the number of staff employed by UNDP: *the relationship and communication was better when more staff was allocated to the project.* Many delegations insist on the insufficient size of the staff employed at UNDP's country office. Internal discrepancies and at times tensions within UNDP (at country office level, between the field and the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force in Brussels, between the field and DPA in New York) are evoked as possible explanations for the long recruitment procedures which have taken place. In some places, it appears that no interlocutor at all was proposed to EU Delegations for a while: *we spent weeks without any interlocutor at local level while the Convention had been signed; our main interlocutor was not present at all times and did not have a deputy.*

In most accounts received, the EU-UNDP relationship is described as a difficult one. It is characterized as *cordial but not based on trust, difficult, very time demanding*, and sometimes *impossible to manage.* Some delegations made a distinction between the relationships they were able to build with technical and financial/legal counterparts at UNDP side: collaborating with the first would be more efficient than with the second. Several insisted on the fact that they were obliged to devote a considerable amount of energy to this partnership to see it work properly. One delegation deplored *the non-responsiveness and lack of follow-up from the UNDP Country Office.* This, they wrote, has *led to severe delays in important decision-making and implementation. UNDP is simply not correctly fulfilling its role as manager of the basket fund.*

In certain places, people have lost confidence: *I have doubt about UNDP as such. I perceive secrecy and little transparency with DPs and have the impression that some senior colleagues try to manipulate us sometimes.* Others regret that their UNDP partners have lost confidence in them: *UNDP Headquarters came to know about the project from DEVCO staff before UNDP country Office, and this was not well perceived by the local team. Basically, they perceived us as spies.* Let us underline that such a suspicion towards interventions made by the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force did not only appear on UNDP side but also on the EU's, as illustrated by the following excerpt: *subsequent technical support provided by UNDP-EC members of the Joint Task Force during the post-NAM re-formulation triggered positive results in terms of output but was received with reticence, and probably as an interference from our side.*

This issue of *interference* seems to be a central one. In a long litany, several delegations indeed have mentioned the difficulties they faced whenever they tried to contribute to the process at stake. In some cases, difficulties have appeared even before a Convention was signed: a Delegation regrets that in their country, against the donors' will, UNDP has taken the initiative to organize a meeting with civil society and invited participants to develop a Concept Note to be presented to donors. These concerns were made in relation to both formulation (*The first Prodoc was drafted without any implication of the EUD and didn't reflect its views in many aspects*) and implementation aspects (*Some important aspects for the EUD were partially taken into account in the Prodoc by UNDP staff but eventually ignored during the implementation phase*). One delegation felt unduly excluded from recruitment procedures (*The recruitment of the technical assistance team was launched without EUD representative participation. Other recruitments of technical assistants or their removal were communicated during the implementation of the project as a "fait accompli"*). As a result of these difficulties, *our messages have to be repeated in several occasions before they are taken on board. These struggles are perceived by the EU and other partners as very time-consuming.*

What can be done to address these concerns? Several delegations have insisted on the importance of developing good personal relations between the two organizations. One even wrote that *the positive relations depend more on good personal relations than on the institutional relations.* Given the complex procedures each partner has to face, it seems obvious that *if personal relations were not good, this could be a very difficult relationship. The staff of both organizations needs to be open and empathic of the others' institutional needs.* Delegations have insisted that *relations should not only be between project managers but should include the hierarchy as well as the financial/contractual staff: these should have the opportunity to talk directly rather than through the operational staff.*

Another recommendation concerns the selection of experts: *having good experts is extremely important. These, reporting both to UNDP and the EU, may have a real added value. It is important that they are not perceived as EU spies. In this sense, it is important that TORs are agreed and that the experts' selection is consensual.*

Question 2: Were there any contractual issues faced? How were these dealt with?

Here again, the picture drawn by the accounts received is a dichotomous one. A few delegations answered that they had *nothing special* to declare on this regard. One praised UNDP for its ability to comply with EU's procedures: *UNDP complied with most of the contractual requirements, including*

on reporting. UNDP's capacity to formulate their project *in due advance to elections* was praised by a second. A third delegation underlined UNDP's ability to accommodate EU's request: in that country, the EU was able to reject a first candidate who had been proposed as CTP and also succeeded in putting in place a phased approach to disbursement.

However, here again, most of the answers received draw a less favourable picture. Many concerns were mentioned. Let us start with financial issues. A delegation is concerned by the *very high costs (much, much higher than the official ceiling of 7% indirect/admin costs)* implied by UNDP-managed basket funds. This delegation considers that a considerable share of these costs *is routinely hidden in the 'direct' costs of the operation*. This concern however has only been mentioned once.

Most concerns refer to the difficulties faced by EU Delegations to have the rules applied. Many examples were provided of situations where the UNDP country office has refused to comply with what had been previously agreed with the EU. Such difficulties appear already when the contract is being negotiated:

At first, UNDP insisted to get an 8% of the Contract to cover its administrative costs, disregarding the agreement negotiated at Headquarters level.

It continues with the Convention's signature:

The UNDP representative wanted the Convention to be signed by UNDP's country office rather than by the central office, which is contrary to the rules.

It goes on with the deployment of staff:

Staff recruited on EU funds has been sent on mission to other countries.

Changes brought to the initial budget were also mentioned: in a country, the financial Contribution of the EU has been almost doubled as implementation costs proved more expensive than had been initially estimated (from EUR 7 Million to EUR 13 Million).

As can be seen, contractual difficulties appear all along the project cycle. It seems that contractual obligations are differently interpreted by EU and UNDP staff. For some UNDP offices, EU procedures are obviously difficult to deal with for. In a country, they *did not manage to send a correct request for extension*; in another, *UNDP has not managed yet to send a valid request for interim payment*. An EU Delegation regrettably concludes that *the UNDP office and the project staff seem not to be able to follow up on the engagements taken under the framework of the Contribution Agreements with the EU*.

With the arrival of the new Pagoda, EU Delegations have received many questions from their UNDP counterparts. A Delegation regrets that it took five months before the document was eventually agreed by UNDP, which impacted on other contracts. Another delegation questioned the important time spent by UNDP to discuss contractual issues while activities were supposed to start.

How to understand such situations? Some wonder if UNDP employees did take the time to properly *read the contracts and the linked obligations*. Others suggest that they are probably not familiar enough *with the text of the Contribution Agreement in terms of deadlines, procedures and content*. A

similar concern goes for the Operational Guidelines related to the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force: *these do not seem to be really applied or known either.*

In search for solutions, several delegations felt the need to remind the contractual agreements taken at several occasions. The others organized high-level and technical meetings, exchanged emails and/or official communications; they required support from the EC-UNDP JTF... Many insist on the considerable energy they had to devote to this task. While in some cases these efforts proved successful (*the UNDP Country Office has been very receptive and requested our guidance frequently*), in other cases they brought little results (*answers would never be satisfactory*). This led some of our colleagues to draw bitter conclusions: *UNDP is simply not administratively structured or attuned to complying with our specific contractual obligations. All other donors report experiencing similar problems.*

Still, constructive proposals have been made. As regards the different interpretations made by the EU and UNDP on specific documents (such as the PAGODA), *it could be interesting to run parallel consultations with the same identified people in Brussels so that they can deal jointly with the issues and thus avoid different interpretations.* To prevent interpretative issues, *certain specifications could also be included in the Conventions themselves.* A third proposal is to introduce *the possibility of revising the Contribution Agreement on the course of its implementation if this is not meeting the objectives set.* In view of enhancing the possibility for the EU to remain in control of the project and make sure the decisions are applied after it has been signed, *the pre-financing payment could be split in two tranches in order to follow closely the beginning of the project and how it is managed rather than disbursing the majority of the funds at the beginning of project implementation.*

Question 3: Were any issues faced with regards to implementation of the project that were of concern to the EU delegation and UNDP Country Office; including delayed processes, staffing, administrative procedures, visibility, etc.? How were these dealt with?

To this question, only three delegations provided clearly positive answers. The first congratulated UNDP for their efficiency in building national ownership (*UNDP managed to build capacity of officials of the EMB on a number of strategic electoral issues*). The second appreciated the M&E framework UNDP had put in place: *the M&E framework is comprehensive and outstanding.* A third delegation praised the good work done by UNDP in managing the funds: *the UNDP in managing the project detected quite early a controversial procurement made by the electoral commission and took the necessary measures to prevent the basket monies to be used in a massive IT procurement that proved to be flawed.* A few other delegations gave neutral answers. One Delegation simply wrote: *no major issues worth reporting.* Another: *progress in implementation is satisfactory.* On another questionnaire received, one reads that *at political level, UNDP tried to involve or inform the EUD in all important decisions.* However, these positive comments seem light compared to the many negative answers received.

Many delegations were confronted with delays during project implementation. In some cases, delays already occurred at identification phase: in a country, *the NAMs from DPA were usually mobilized very late (ex in 2014 NAM when elections were due to take place at the end of 2014).* In other cases, this is an issue during formulation: a Delegation regrets that *the PRODOC (already signed by the*

Government) was submitted to the Delegation for funding only few weeks before the implementation should have started. Examples of slow and late inception phases abound. The following case is particularly striking: It took 9 months between signature of PRODOC and arrival of the 2 team leaders and further 1 year to complete the recruitment of the key experts (e.g. it took 2 years to have the Voter Education specialist in country...).

The long internal procedures used by UNDP have been mentioned as a possible explanation for these late starts. Even when flexible procedures have been authorized, other factors sometimes have interfered to slow down or even prevent a quick start of the project. A Delegation mentioned the example of a project where *UNDP did not anticipate the additional human resources required to facilitate quick processing.*

The poor capacities of many UNDP country offices in terms of human resources are indeed a major matter of concern. An EU Delegation regrets that *electoral programmes were managed by short/medium term technical assistants with consequent limited follow-up after their departure.* Another expressed a high concern related to the heavy pressure put on UNDP staff due to insufficient human resources, and took the opportunity of this survey to ask for support:

The UNDP Country Director and her team of 2 people are doing an almost inhumane work to keep up with the project implementation with a complete lack of support of the UNDP local representative and their Headquarters. This situation is of high concern for the EU Delegation. This lack of capacity directly affects the implementation of the activities of the project, and therefore the calendar of the electoral process.

Many have mentioned the *inefficiency and time consuming procedures of the UNDP system to contract UNDP staff and to get them to work in the beneficiary country* as a matter of concern. It seems that *in places where the EMB has to be set from scratch, these procedures become problematic. The lack of support given by the UNDP Representative and UNDP Headquarters to the UNDP Country Office* is another concern. A Delegation also mentioned the long absence of the person in charge, regretting that *no decision could be taken* during that period.

In some places, human resources are sufficient in number but do not seem to have the expertise required: in a country, a same person has been successively employed by UNDP in different positions which should in principle require professionals with different profiles. In a country, identification, financial management and contracts were managed directly by the EU delegation with limited contribution from UNDP because of the poor technical capacities of the latter.

According to an EU delegation, *the procurement capacity of the UNDP country office is extremely weak and almost non-existent. Few staff handling procurement activities for the whole UN system in the beneficiary country. For example, request for proposals and services often go out at the last minute, affecting the efficiency of the process. Also, activities are sometimes delayed because vendors haven't been clearly identified.*

Another matter of concern is the low level of involvement of the EU throughout the implementation phase. Two Delegations explained that in their country, *the EU was not associated to project identification.* In one case, it seems that identification and initial formulation did not build on

previous UNDP own programme evaluation nor on EOM/other observers conclusions and recommendations. In another country, the EU was kept aside from staff recruitment.

Insufficient involvement of EU Delegations in political dialogue with the government was evoked as well. *Dialogue with the Government was neither regular nor inclusive when projects were instructed / managed by UNDP. UE was not permanently present on the ground, and during missions access to national stakeholders was not facilitated by UNDP.* Faced with a decrease in political dialogue which she had not chosen, an EU Delegation struggled by all means to resume political dialogue. They *requested it orally, in high-level and technical meetings and by letters.* We are touching here on a more fundamental issue that will be further addressed below: a Delegation regrets that *UNDP country office seems to have been lacking strategic analysis (or kept a rather discreet/low profile attitude) that would have permitted better EU/International engagement at times over elections related issues.*

Other concerns refer to the fact that in some countries, activities that had been planned never took place. In one case, this was due to the absence of a NAM:

The main issue we had was that there was a shift in the initial project document and a change of activities because some of the activities foreseen when we signed the contract were not feasible because no Needs Assessment Mission had been undertaken by UN-EAD in these countries. This means that UNDP could not deliver on some activities that were at the centre stage of the project.

In another country, the delegation questions the very commitment of UNDP in having the project objectives fulfilled: *the country office is more interested in showing UNDP HQ how much revenue they have been able generate from donors while paying little or no interest to the project in place and fulfilment of agreed objectives.*

Such shortcomings raised many suspicions as regards the way the budget initially foreseen in view of these activities has eventually been spent. It should be noted that concerns expressed by EU Delegations in relation with the way UNDP manages budgets are numerous. Among the major critics, let us cite *bad financial planning, inability of the project to absorb the total EU contribution for a given year, misunderstanding between the EU and UNDP on the remaining amounts of the pooled funds, and non-transparent management.* Issues related to procurement processes were mentioned as well: one delegation wrote that in their country, *procurement processes have been subject to considerable delays due to extremely weak procurement capacity within the UNDP country office.*

A case of mismanagement by a UNDP office has been mentioned by a Delegation in relation with a situation of fraud by one of the beneficiaries where UNDP had not taken sufficient guarantees *"because of political pressure to disburse."* This last comment is linked to a broader concern related to the involvement of national authorities in administrative procedures: it seems that *many of the documents are fully prepared by UNDP CTA ensuring quality, but at the same time it is unclear whether local capacity is built to also prepare.* In other words: can this support be considered as capacity building or as simple substitution?

Another point which raised a lot of concern is the issue of visibility: very few EU Delegations did not mention it as a concern.

A last comment concerns the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force: according to a Delegation, *little recognition was done of this framework with little input requested by the UNDP country office. They also observed limited input from the task force office towards the UNDP country office.* In that particular country, it seems that *there has been a gap between HQ and local offices in practical terms.*

How did the EU Delegations deal with these shortcomings? According to the accounts received, it seems that these were discussed in a considerable amount of meetings. Unfortunately, in various countries, so far these meetings have brought little success. Such a situation however is not considered as a given by EU delegations who made several proposals in view of improving the way electoral assistance projects are implemented. A general recommendation refers to the need to improve the capacities of UNDP country offices: *instead of running after contracts, UNDP should focus on a few actions and implement them properly. The EC Delegation hopes that the discussion to be held with the UNDP will help the UNDP Country Office to get proper support from its Headquarters.* EU delegations have also underlined the need to improve the capacities of some UNDP country offices in terms of the level of experience of the staff. It was also suggested that *stronger investment be given in the development of a sound M&E system in the inception phase.* A last recommendation refers to the share of responsibilities between the UNDP country office and the PUM: *as it stands, UNDP county office needs to take more responsibility as the manager of the basket fund and provide adequate support to the PMU. UNDP must also fulfil their financial commitment to the basket.*

Question 4: Were there any significant issues with regards to steering committees; including timetables for meetings, reaching agreements etc.? How were these dealt with?

Several Delegations praised the way steering committees function. They wrote that meetings were *periodic, on time and with minutes.* One delegation underlined that the dates were *always communicated well in advance. These meetings have generally been well organized and have been held according to plan. Whenever there was an issue to be discussed and agreed upon, open discussions were held, and in most cases mutual agreements were made.* Another congratulates *the joint management of the steering committee by UNDP and the Ministry in charge for having been exemplary, providing the right balance between technical and political.* A third one wrote that when difficulties occurred, *they were mainly due to the CENI and not to the UNDP.*

Unfortunately, these positive accounts are far outnumbered by more critical ones. Many Delegations blamed steering committees. These are accused of being *inefficiently managed, not well prepared, often announced at the last moment, irregular and empty of substance.* In a country, *minutes were not regularly shared, corrected and formally adopted.* One Delegation explains that *the electoral Commission, assisted by the UNDP, called for urgent meetings to raise issues with sometimes expenditures implication for donors' validation allowing continuation of the operations.* This critic related to steering committees being used for other purposes than the ones they were supposed to address has been mentioned several times. In a country, the Delegation observed that steering committees were used to discuss again points on which a decision had already been made in the technical committee whenever this decision did not suit UNDP.

This issue of how the EU was able to have a say in decision making processes is an important one. Half of the delegations who contributed to this survey criticized steering committees on that point. They wrote that *basket fund contributors were rather informed about changes to be endorsed compared to the initial PRODOC than they were actively involved*. The same goes for expenses: a delegation regrets that *Steering Committee members are informed of the expenses engaged mainly orally and after these expenses have been engaged*. Several affirm that *the steering committee is not used as a decision making body but only as a place where decisions taken outside the steering committee are announced*. Two delegations questioned the role played by UNDP in that context, explaining that *instead of promoting dialogue within the formal project governance structures it used to strictly refrain it*. Others mentioned that UNDP used *public pressure*, including at times *political pressure* to push for rapid decisions. It seems that *be it intentionally or unintentionally, partners have been pushed to approve certain documents without these reflecting discussions within the Committees*.

In a country where the political context was particularly sensitive, the fact that the Minister in charge co-leads the steering committee together with UNDP was problematic. Indeed, this Minister was the true leader of this decision-making mechanism, which *basically makes impossible to have a real discussion: there is confusion between what is the action of the government on the elections preparation (and the budget which goes with it) and the support given by the project to this process*. In this particular context, the Delegation has the feeling that the project is just there to finance whatever the government asks. As a result, *no planning is shared besides the government election chronogram, no budget and no real discussion takes place in the steering committee*. This concern has been expressed by four delegations: these condemned what they call a *lenient attitude of UNDP vis-à-vis the electoral commission*, a propensity to *act on demand or as an open fund to which the local electoral bodies send their requests*. On the same matter, two delegations regret that *decisions taken by the steering committees are not always respected by UNDP and/or the Government*.

Concerns were expressed regarding the *limited transparency and continuity between the two levels of project governance structures (Technical and Steering Committees): membership (incl. of DPs) does not correspond and the one committee does not get any information (minutes/conclusions/agenda) from the other, which obviously undermines dialogue and decision making and demand an even greater efforts amongst DPs to ensure proper flow of information, and joint decision making*. Here again, the issue of capacity building has been mentioned: a delegation wonders if the EMB is prepared to taking over a coordination role in later stages.

Faced with these difficulties, EU Delegations have tried their best to find solutions. A delegation explained that in their context, *the main partners of the basket fund teamed up to take a common position on the issue in order to suggest a fundamental change in the way the steering committee is managed and organized in view of better respecting the PRODOC*. In another country, *much dialogue has taken place in regards to the Steering Committee' mandate and capacity to stop or redefine funding. This brought positive results since the "final" version of the project document that was produced by UNDP afterwards seems to have taken into consideration the concerns expressed by the partners*. In a third country, a new issue has arisen with the EU and UNDP having different expectations related to the steering committee structure: *UNDP wants to keep the same steering committee structure while the EU insists on differentiating between a steering committee on the project and a larger donor coordination forum*. This situation is not the only one where the EU has

tried to get some autonomy from UNDP-managed coordination structures. Another delegation recommends that whenever the EU decides to embark on an electoral assistance project together with UNDP, the delegation recruits a few (up to 3) experts outside of the UNDP-managed project to be positioned directly within the electoral commission. Without this, they say, the EU Delegation is not able to closely follow-up the implementation of the project and to collect all the information required for a well-informed participation in decisions to be taken by the steering committee.

Question 5: Were there any issues with regards to reporting – both narrative and financial; including delayed reports, requests for extra reports, financial issues etc.? How were these dealt with?

A few delegations answered positively to this question. Other replies are not very enthusiastic. They indicate that financial reporting is *satisfactory*; that the annual reports are transmitted *more or less timely*; and that when asked to provide additional information, *requests were provided on a satisfactory base*. Obviously, reporting is not the strong point of UNDP. Indeed, the vast majority of answers received to this question are not positive at all.

The majority of delegations declared that *the reports were in general submitted very late*. In one country, *the report took 11 months after the end of the contract to be sent*. In another, *almost all interim narrative reports were submitted after the end of the process, a few weeks before the final report*. Of course, in several cases these delays impacted on the project's closure.

Many delegations declared that they were not satisfied with the quality of the reports. It seems that apart from a few exceptions, all of them faced difficulties in receiving reports adapted to their needs. Reports provided by UNDP are described as being *weak, scarce, light and of poor quality*. The information provided *did not adhere to the required format or did not provide sufficiently detailed information on the activities implemented and the financial management*. Financial reporting is obviously the main challenge: many delegations explain that the financial reports they have received *did not allow an appropriate monitoring of the expenses' eligibility*. Because of the scarcity of the financial information provided, some have even become suspicious. Two of them *suspect that EU (and other partners) funding is often used for core funding*. As a result, in several places this has put an additional burden on the shoulders of the EU Delegation which had to discuss these documents again and again until they received a sufficiently detailed report. This was described as being very time consuming.

Specific comments were made on the monitoring and evaluation framework used by UNDP which, it is claimed, is not sufficiently streamlined to the EU's one. One delegation explained that the two organizations do not share a *same understanding of the use of indicators, targets, outputs, etc*. *UNDPs approach appeared to be much more activity oriented rather than oriented towards results*. A similar concern refers to the quality of UNDP's evaluation and audit reports. In 3 countries, the Delegation considered that the external final evaluation that was made at the end of the project was *not of a good quality*. One EU Delegation decided to launch her own audit of the project because she considered that some of the findings presented in an audit commissioned by UNDP were controversial. It is interesting to note that in another country, the opposite situation appeared: UNDP did not accept the results of an evaluation that had been commissioned by the EU.

What could be done to prevent such difficulties in the future? One Delegation insisted on the need to better synchronize the financial reporting procedures to be used by the EU and by the UNDP. To this end, a proposal was made to produce a same template to be used by both organizations, or at least to make sure best practices are shared between them so that everyone is informed on the level of details required. More generally, it was recommended that financial and narrative reports produced by UNDP be more comprehensive in view of future support.

Question 6: Were any issues faced with regards to communication between the UNDP project and the EU delegation; including formal and informal communications? How were these dealt with?

As reminded by a delegation, *informal communication works on the basis of individuals and is therefore very subjective* and susceptible to change as people come and go. Therefore, things are not static on this level: in some cases, *this changed positively over the project implementation cycle due to constant communication between the EU Delegation and UNDP Country Office*. For five delegations, communication is not an issue: *the communication has been very fluid and sincere till now. UNDP demonstrated their maturity and professionalism by providing adequate and timely information to the EU on electoral assistance*. However, here again these positive accounts are far outnumbered by the less positive ones.

For all delegations, communication has been an issue at some stage. In one country, communication has particularly difficult before the contract was signed and was responsible for a considerable delay in the finalization of the contractual process: *the process was intense, long and unnecessarily difficult owing to a failure on the part of the UNDP country office to share information with their headquarters at the appropriate time*. Sometimes, it has been problematic all along. In one country, the relationship with UNDP was so difficult that *when requesting contractual compliance, the Delegation staff was accused of being racist*. In another, *communication with the UNDP office is limited to official exchange of letters and meetings when called by the EU to try and find a common understanding of the contractual obligations*. A third delegation underlined the gap between communication procedures as described in the Guidelines of the joint EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on electoral assistance and what they experienced in practice.

Most delegations declare having faced difficulties to access information, be it formally or informally. The information received by UNDP offices is described as *weak, not timely, poor and limited*. Accounts draw an overall picture of *very limited transfers of knowledge and information to national counterparts*. One delegation evoked a *culture of secrecy which hindered the initial formulation and the relationship with EU and other DPs*. Another expressed the same idea in other words: *UNDP seems afraid to be fully transparent. They create a "firewall" between funders and the national interlocutor; they have difficulties in listening to partners' concerns and accommodating their line*.

EU Delegations want to be better informed, and this at different levels. It starts when the NAM takes place: several Delegations wrote that they did not understand why the findings of the latest NAM could not be shared with them. More generally, critics were directed towards *information on both administrative and political issues*. It includes the *flow of information shared with national counterparts*. On this regards, several delegations wrote that they do not receive sufficient

information on the internal organization within the UNDP country office: one *did not know exactly who was doing what*, another *has never been informed of the whole composition of the PNU staff*.

Negative comments were also made on the *communication channels between Offices in Headquarters, Brussels and at Country level*, as well as *within each of the two partners (EU and UNDP): replies were slower than a dead turtle, and delays are partly to blame for the long formal circuits in both organizations*. As illustrated by this excerpt, on this particular matter the critics expressed far extend the level of country offices. This situation sometimes had important implications: one delegation explains that because of that, it became difficult for us to *have an influence on programme implementation*. To obtain the information they were looking for, EU Delegations were therefore obliged to follow other paths and some had no other choice than *seek information directly with the electoral commission and/or other relevant stakeholders*.

One general recommendation was made to improve collaboration at this level: *UNDP is asked to share with its partners the notes, analysis and reports that are done on a regular basis along the political context (for example, analysis on the new electoral calendar, analysis on the new electoral law, etc.)*. This kind of information -- *produced with the funds of donors -- is indeed very useful and feeds partners' analysis (and even considerations on further/additional funding)*. However, *this is possible only if it is shared directly and not after a week*.

Question 7: Please describe the most positive aspects of the relationship between UNDP and the EU, and how these supported the implementation phase of the project.

Since EU Delegations provided similar answers in reply to this question and to question 8, these elements were gathered together below.

Question 8: How would you describe UNDPs added-value in the implementation of electoral assistance projects?

Here is the question which received the most positive answers. In the field of electoral assistance, UNDP's added value is obviously manifold.

Several delegations mentioned the convenience of working with UNDP when it comes to committing EU funds: *from the Delegation's point of view, a contribution agreement with the UN should allow an easier implementation of EU support*. Indeed, *the UNDP basket fund has the advantage of being a relatively easy option in terms of committing our funds*.

Secondly, the *flexibility of UNDP procedures* is particularly welcome, especially *in the context of a tight electoral calendar with an electoral administration ad hoc and created just a few months before the first election*. The possibility of retroactivity is well appreciated. Indeed, thanks to this flexibility the EU is able to *intervene in a difficult environment with a non-permanent election administration body, which would not be possible for EC-FED procedures*. It is acknowledged that in some particularly difficult contexts, *it would have been impossible for the EU to provide its support without passing through UNDP*.

Another recognized added value of UNDP is its role in coordinating donors' financial contributions: *working through UNDP offers the opportunity to pool funds and have an effective coordination mechanism around support to elections. Having one single institution that coordinates and concentrates efforts brought by many is precious. Furthermore, UNDP has the political weight to request funds from other donors and partners, which the EU has not. The provision of a coordinated platform for donor engagement and interface with the competent national authorities is another important point. One of the delegations mentioned that in the country where it was present, the electoral commission repeated several times that given its burden in setting up a complete new office with new systems, procedures, staff and in preparing the elections logistics, it had not time or capacity to deal with several donors with their respective agreements requirements. It has thus called for all donors interested in supporting the electoral process to do it through the UNDP basket fund.* Such a solution, obviously, was very convenient in that case.

It was underlined also that *UNDP forms a core part of a UN system that enjoys wide respect and support by the national government. UNDP is accepted by the Government as a partner and viewed to be neutral with no hidden agendas.* In politically charged environments, this allows UNDP to open a doorway for other donors to play a role in the process as well. It seems that in some places, this partnership *allowed the EU which has been a relatively modest donor to have a good leverage on the key reform area that election was. It allowed the EU to have a dialogue with the Government and the local EMB both at political and technical level.* The fact that *through the project board meetings the EU Delegation has access to Government officials* has been mentioned by several delegations as a very positive aspect. One delegation also underlined the good job done by UNDP in their country in resisting the demands of the electoral commission: *the President of the electoral commission used all the techniques in his power to get to this budget despite the questions of the Members of the steering committee, without success.*

The *significant technical expertise* of UNDP is considered *an important added value in this particularly difficult and challenging area.* Several delegations insisted on the fact that *this is particularly true when UNDP is able to recruit good experts.* The fact that *UNDP can draw on a wide array of expertise and resource from UN organizations and has access to EAS's roster of experts* is very appreciated. Because it is part of the UN family, UNDP has *direct access to logistic resources allowing for a secured transport of material and people. Procurement facilities* are part of the same package, which another positive aspect. The possibility to receive contributions from the Joint Task Force, where both EU and UNDP staff are available to collaborate and participate in the formulation process, is another welcome element.

Unfortunately, here again the answers provided by EU delegations were not always positive and less positive comments bring dark nuances into this sunny picture. Half of the delegations questioned the fact that UNDP would have any added value at all: *those in the Delegation who worked operationally in the framework of the last 'UN basket fund' would most strenuously challenge UNDP's assumed monopoly in electoral assistance. It is hard to see an added value,* observed one of them. *This proved very limited,* said another. *UNDP is supposed to have the knowledge and legitimacy,* observed a third one before adding that *in practice, the description of the action to be carried out was a cut and paste version of a former UNDP contract done with the EU in another country.* The same conclusion was drawn several times: *while in theory UNDP should have an added value, in terms of expertise and technical competences unfortunately this was not visible, and the Delegation did have to contract*

special expertise (TA) on top of the UNDP programme to support the national electoral commission. We believe that UNDP has no added value anymore, concluded still another Delegation. This conclusion was drawn upon the fact that *electoral assistance projects based on logistic support are less relevant than "intelligent" support.* Such a comment was made twice.

Some delegations made a distinction between the level of expertise demonstrated by UNDP staff and the way this could effectively been applied in practice: *they have the required skills and knowledge, unfortunately logistics do not follow.* The *tremendous lack of human resources of the UNDP office* has been the subject of a lot of criticism, as well as the poor efficiency of UNDP's interventions in some countries and the limited transfer of skills towards national authorities that such projects allow:

Since 2000, the UNDP project has had very limited impact on the ground. Elections were organized and accepted, but no capacity was built at the national level, nor national ownership and responsibility promoted. As a consequence, in 2014 the Interior Ministry had no information at all on previous electoral processes.

Two delegations wrote that the choice that was made to contribute to a UNDP-managed basket fund *had limited the Delegation's access to information and its possibility to influence the dialogue with the authorities.* A third Delegation regrettably concluded that *it would have been wiser to choose another implementing partner.* The same idea was expressed by a fourth one in other words: *there is a generalized tendency to fund UNDP for electoral assistance, basically only because we have lacked an alternative.* A colleague simply reminded that collaborating with UNDP goes *against the current evolution in DEVCO policy on funding modalities with UN agencies (as outlined during the DEVCO Days of 2-6 March 2015).*

It seems that when the EU chooses to collaborate with another partner in a country where it had previously contributed to UNDP-managed funds, this provokes strong and sometimes aggressive reactions from UNDP which does anything it can to recover the privileged position it enjoyed before. One delegation explained that *during the last meeting that was held with the UN, the latter adopted an aggressive stance, accusing the EU and its new partner to "push for neo-colonialists interests through electoral support".* In another country, *UNDP will get up to all kinds of manipulative tricks to preserve what it sees as its international assumed monopoly in (inter alia) electoral affairs. This has recently included – literally - putting pro-UNDP words into the mouth of a highly inexperienced PM behind the backs of the lead Ministry and the National Electoral Commission, both of which have repeatedly asked donors not to channel their funding through UNDP.*

What can be done to improve the situation? It was suggested that in the future, the EC-UNDP joint Task Force (if still relevant) better interacts with projects on the ground by providing some assistance during the electoral cycle, and wherever possible through field visits to assist UNDP country offices and EU Delegations at critical times, notably when projects are being designed. It has also been recommended that in the future, *not all funds available for electoral support should be channelled through UNDP as this prevents other activities that the EU delegation can finance and that appear relevant over the time. This of course should be done in good cooperation with other interventions on electoral assistance to avoid any duplication.*

Question 9: Do you have any other comments; including additional concerns of either the EC or UNDP?

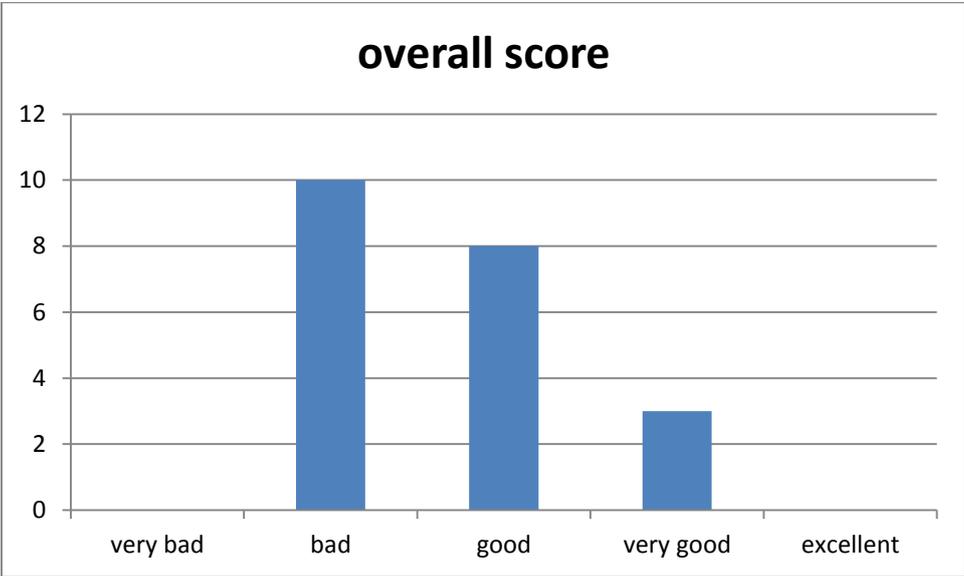
Two general comments were made in reply to this question.

The first concerns a country where *the government withdrew the authorisation previously granted to the UN Needs Assessment Mission, therefore making it impossible to work through UNDP*. Such a situation shows that UNDP is not a solution in all contexts.

The second comment is more general: *it is often assumed that working with UNDP in electoral assistance will facilitate the work of EU Delegations. However, many problems appear as far as implementation is concerned, especially in countries where democratic governance is at stake. In such countries, the implementation of electoral assistance projects must be accompanied with a political dialogue with the authorities of the beneficiary country. So far, unfortunately, UNDP is not ready to get involved in such a dialogue. Indeed, as was underlined by a second delegation, UNDP has a basic conflict of interest as an interface between donors and a partner government since by its very nature, it cannot and will not have a robust critical dialogue with that government (which represents a UN member state). This is not UNDP's fault, but it fundamentally undermines UNDP's appropriateness as an implementing partner for the EU in such politically charged operations.*

One EU Delegation also mentioned an important issue related to financial commitment: in that country, *UNDP paid less than 30% of the funds they had pledged into the basket*. As a consequence, the EU had to bring an additional contribution of *15 MEUR in support to the preparation of the upcoming elections*. To avoid repeating similar difficulties, they requested that this money *be channelled separately and not via the basket fund*.

Question 10: On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate the EU-UNDP relationship on Electoral Assistance while implementing electoral assistance?



Annex

EC-UNDP Electoral Assistance Project Implementation: Identifying implementation challenges.

Introduction

The relationship between the EC and UNDP in the field of elections is one of shared benefit and convergence of interests in supporting democratic governance processes.

Since the creation of the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance (JTF) in 2006 and since both the signing of the EU-UNDP Strategic partnership Agreement in 2004 and the signing of the first EC-UNDP Guidelines on Electoral Assistance over a billion Dollars of EU funds has been implemented through UNDP in over 100 countries.

Implementation will always have challenges and the JTF intention is to discuss openly about these issues in order to address them and ultimately strengthen the partnership.

A stronger relationship will enhance our ability to support electoral processes, our national counterparts and the common goals of both organizations. As we work to strengthen this, we wish to collect the issues faced in the past by electoral projects implemented by UNDP, which had EU contributions and consider how such might be prevented in the future. The purpose of this review is not to re-open previous problems, they are typically addressed or in the process of being so. Rather, to understand the basis of past problems to inform future policies at an institutional level. We would be interested in understanding issues you have faced while working with the EU or UNDP and difficulties encountered.

Your feedback will help to; inform internal reflections, regarding the redrafting of the EC-UNDP operational guidelines and support the discussion between the two organizations during the forthcoming high-level policy dialogue to be held in April 2015 on Elections in Africa. Our aim is to understand and identify common issues, common patterns and subsequently identify joint solutions.

The EU Delegations and UNDP Country Offices will be receiving the same questionnaire through their channels and their feedback will be sent to either EC HQ (for EU side) or the Joint EC-UNDP Task Force on Electoral Assistance (for UNDP side). EC colleagues are invited to send their contributions to Carole VERREYS until **Wednesday 11th of March**.

Guidelines

We would be highly appreciative if you could complete the below questions.

Please be open with regards to sharing both your past and current experiences.

Further, if you feel there were particular actions that were taken to prevent problems in these areas, or effective remedies to problems, these would also be gratefully received.

Please note, we will not share your feedback forms outside of the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force. We will not share names and these will remain strictly confidential and within your organization. The contents of your form shall be treated with utmost sensitivity. Further, if there are any issues you would seek to raise but do not wish to include within here, please feel free to contact us directly.

Florence Vandendorpe – 32 2 295.05.62

Questions

Please describe the working relationship between the EU Delegation and UNDP within the context of electoral assistance, and what are the key lessons learnt; please include both positive and negative?
Were there any contractual issues faced? How were these dealt with?
Were any issues faced with regards to implementation of the project that were of concern to the EU delegation and UNDP Country Office; including delayed processes, staffing, administrative procedures, visibility etc.? How were these dealt with?
Were there any significant issues with regards to steering committees; including timetables for meetings, reaching agreements etc.? How were these dealt with?

Were there any issues with regards to reporting – both narrative and financial; including delayed reports, requests for extra reports, financial issues etc.? How were these dealt with?

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Were any issues faced with regards to communication between the UNDP project and the EU delegation; including formal and informal communications? How were these dealt with?

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Please describe the most positive aspects of the relationship between UNDP and the EU, and how these supported the implementation phase of the project.

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How would you describe UNDPs added-value in the implementation of electoral assistance projects?

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Do you have any other comments; including additional concerns of either the EC or UNDP?

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On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate the EU-UNDP relationship on Electoral Assistance while implementing electoral assistance?

1	2	3	4	5
Very bad	bad	good	Very good	Excellent