UNDEF The United Nations Democracy Fund

An innovation at the heart of the United Nations

UNDEF Update – No. 24, December 2014

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

To celebrate the approach of the new year, the UNDEF team presents a selection of our newest projects, all launched in the past two months. Some of them are the first of their kind ever endeavoured in the countries concerned; all of them are innovative, implemented by local civil society orgnaizations, and work against the odds in challenging environments. With this issue, we at UNDEF send our best wishes for a happy new year to all our courageous civil society partners around the world.

A first for Ukraine: A school of democratic procedures in all regions

UNDEF funds the first initiative in Ukraine to introduce parliamentary procedures in the daily work of selected local Councils in all 24 regions of the country, including in the East, so as to increase the transparency and accountability of local self-governance. The project is selecting 24 local authorities, one for each region of Ukraine, to attend a School of Democratic Rules and Procedures. It will promote the adoption of amendments to the regulations of the relevant local authorities to introduce parliamentary procedures and democratic rules. This will enable Councils to broadcast their sessions on the internet. By bringing together representatives from all the 24 regions, the School of Democratic Rules and Procedures will also advance the concept of holding organized inclusive and peaceful political debate. The project is implemented by the West Ukrainian Resource Centre, a local civil society organization based in Lviv with long experience of working in both East and West Ukraine.

Empowering people with learning disabilities in Belarus

Among adults with learning disabilities in Belarus, the most vulnerable are those who reside at care homes, because of social isolation, lack of education, lack of employment and lack of awareness of rights. This is why UNDEF's new project in Belarus -- the second to be funded by UNDEF in the country -- works to create the educational framework for adults with learning disabilities residing in social care homes as they prepare to live in society, so as to enable them to develop and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The project will promote state reform for de-institutionalization, by strengthening dialogue and cooperation between government and civil society, and engage the general public to integrate people with learning disabilities. It will train care home staff in providing education in literacy and essential ICT skills, with a view to ultimately reaching over 20,000 beneficiaries. The project is implemented by International Public Association Voice of the Heart, a local local civil society organization based in Minsk with 12 years experience in working with people with learning disabilities.

The United Nations Democracy Fund
1 United Nations Plaza, Room DC1-1300
New York, NY 10017, USA

Tel: +1 212 963 3399
Fax: +1 212 963 1486

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

A first for Georgia: Advancing pedestrian rights

Lack of pedestrian rights, frequent public space violations and a prioritization of machines over humans is an acute issue in Georgia, as in many other post-Soviet societies. It ties in with social inequality and low public representation in the decision-making processes and urban planning. To cross a busy street, be prepared to trek half a kilometre or more out of your way to the nearest underpass, take the steps down and then up, then walk back the same distance. Even this is usually not for the disabled and those with a baby carriage, since few underpasses have escalators. many underpasses are badly lit, insecure and unsanitary, like this one under Tbilisi's most imposing street, Rustaveli Avenue. Against this background, UNDEF funds the first project in Georgia to improve the rights of pedestrians. It works to ensure pedestrian access, especially to counter developments prioritizing motor vehicles. An Association for Pedestrians is being will act as an advanced platform bringing together non-governmental organizations working in related fields, social movements, government institutions, the private sector and individuals. The association will address the issue of pedestrian rights on several different levels: from grass roots initiatives and small community groups to municipal and national strategies for more pedestrian friendly cities. The project strategy is based on stakeholder collaboration, raising awareness, and lobbying. The project is implemented by Iare Pekhit: a local civil society organization based in Tbilisi.

A first for Myanmar: Debate education for democracy ahead of elections

Myanmar faces landmark elections in 2015. This is why UNDEF funds the first initiative in the country to use debate education to empower civil society organizations and strengthen constructive criticism in the democratic transition process. The project, focused on youth and social activists, builds skills in debate, analysis and public speaking to enable civil society to examine sensitive social issues; provides trainings in six different regions to develop ethical debaters who can deliver logical convincing arguments to a wider public; creates space for people to share and exchange ideas through public forums; and establishes debate education networks with local organizations to deliver debate trainings and to serve as a resource for local communities. The project is implemented by Mandalay-based Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School, founded in 1993 as a primary school with the purpose of providing free education to poor children and encourage development at a grass root level. It now teaches over 6000 students including high school level, with debate as a method to develop critical thinking, analytical, public speaking and communication skills.

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

Consolidating democratic practices among youth and women in Eastern Sierra Leone

Amid the onslaught of the Ebola epidemic in Eastern Region Sierra Leone, a new UNDEF-funded project works in the, , to promote the core principles of democracy and human rights among women and youth. It uses a multi-stakeholder approach to respond to issues of impunity for human rights abuses and violence, while working to measurably increase women and youth participation and representation in the 2017 elections. Ultimately, the project will transform the mindset of key target groups and provide a basis for a collective response to issues of discrimination and abuse. The project is implemented by Dignity Now, a Kenema-based civil society organization established in 2002 with experience in programmes to support youth, women, rule of law and access to justice.

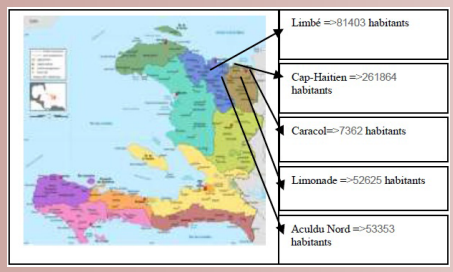
Strengthening participation of women in geographically deprived communities in local governance in Ghana

The gender gap in Ghana's district assemblies means there is no common advocacy platform for women and socially excluded to meet, engage, dialogue, gather their concerns or develop actions plans. Women groups are poorly organized and unable to attract the attention of policymakers at the district level. To address these gaps, UNDEF funds a project to educate and inform local citizens, traditional authorities, local government officials in gender inclusive decision-making, social accountability, and quality service delivery; mobilize, strengthen, and unite women's groups under one platform to be mutually recognized by the district assemblies and other non-actors as champions of women concerns at the district level of policy engagement. The project is implemented by the Gender Centre for Empowering Development, a local organization established in 2011 to close the gender deficit in governance through political education and sustainable human resources development services to the marginalized, especially women.

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

Using new technology to empower women in Haiti's reconstruction

The reconstruction process following the devastating Haiti earthquake in 2010 has experienced many challenges. The failure to strengthen the engagement of Haitian civil society in governance processes has been a particularly strong criticism. This is why a new project funded by UNDEF works to empower grassroots women in the North and Northeast of the country through creative and context-specific ICTs. This will enable them to engage, influence and represent thei communities in decision-making and public policy processes at local, national and international levels. It will also advance accountability in development processes related to access to land and sustainable agriculture in partnership with a local grassroots platform. The project is implemented by ActionAid Haiti, which has worked since 1997 with the country's poorest communities to develop sustainable agriculture and livelihoods, secure women's right to food and education.



Strengthening indigenous and peasant communities in Bolivia

The Constitution of Bolivia 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. That is why UNDEF funds an initiative to legally and politically empower indigenous and peasant communities in the departments of La Paz and Oruro, by assisting them to acquire basic legal documents such as ID --a prerequisite for democratic participation; gathering evidence-based input for institutional change; strengthening their knowledge to participate in democratic processes and to exercise their rights via capacity-building workshops and public-awareness broadcasting. The project is implemented by Fundación Microjusticia Bolivia, established in 2007 to legally empower poor, vulnerable and excluded people, and to contribute to a more just society with protection and opportunities for all.

Executive Head a.i. and Editor:
Annika Savill, savill@un.org

Editorial Assistant:
Beth Baja, baja@un.org