



Electoral Processes Team Working Paper

Evaluation exercises conducted in a number of donor agencies following 10-15 years of support to elections indicate that the building of a strong and stable electoral administration capacity is a better long term investment than 'ad hoc' contributions to electoral events. The most extreme examples show that investments made in 'first' elections have dissipated in time for second and third elections, particularly when electoral functions are outsourced to foreign companies.

While International IDEA's electoral programme has had election administrators as its primary clientele, nonetheless, we have been working with several of member countries as they have reviewed their electoral assistance policies and track records. In addition, our close contacts with election administrators have provided us with some interesting insights even before embarking on this project. Some of these insights, in terms of donor behaviour, include:

- *Observing rather than strengthening elections* - funding observation missions can be an 'easy' way out in terms of disbursing funds allocated to an electoral process. In reality, international observation of elections falls rather low on the priority scale of the myriad of elements required to deliver a credible election.
- *Inappropriate structures or material* - Be it the procurement of certain electoral materials or the restructuring of an electoral system, the recommendations of outside consultants have often been shown to be incompatible with the cultural, political, climatic conditions of an area.
- *Election Day Focus* - The first years of electoral assistance were characterized by an overemphasis on the election day itself. Most donors and observation groups have subsequently recognized the importance of other aspects of the election process, including registration, boundary delimitation, the nomination process, the count and the distribution of seats. What has not yet been adequately acknowledged is the elections planning process: the development of an electoral calendar, of an operational plan, drafting and reviewing of electoral laws, the drafting of forms and procedures manuals, are critical and oft-neglected pre-election tasks which should begin several years prior to election day.
- *Time Lines Too Short* - Extremely short preparation times as dictated by the international community, such as the nine months 'standard' in the Balkans as set in motion by the Dayton Peace Accords, create great pressure to spend donor funds with little time to contemplate best practices. Even in non-peace agreement elections, international donors tend to begin thinking about supporting election between three and sixteen months ahead of time. This thinking leads to 'head over heels' procurement and the need to resort to expensive options, such as helicopter transport of ballots or chartered plane transport of out-of-country materials.
- *First election focus* - The high visibility of first elections is a great attraction for donors. This creates a situation where the second and third elections are often not funded nearly as well, jeopardizing the high standards set in place by the well-funded first elections.

- *Spending rather than spending wisely* - At the recommendation or even insistence of the donor, money is often spent on high cost and single use items or services that do not necessarily add a corresponding benefit to the elections. Computers, observers, consultants, helicopter travel, high quality ballot papers and material kits brought from abroad are just some areas where money is spent, rather than on more cost-effective local solutions.
- *Money and knowledge taken from abroad* - Dependence upon foreign assistance for conducting elections not only ultimately compromises sovereignty, but also makes timely election planning extremely difficult for an election administration. In the case of knowledge being taken from abroad in the form of consultants, external observers and the like, numerous problems arise including a loss of institutional memory, a lack of continuity, and a lack of ownership among stakeholders in the election process. The result is the 'reinvention of the wheel' at each subsequent election.
- *Everyone wants to pay for the 'plums'* - Like many other aid projects, certain aspects are more attractive to funders than others, often leaving recipient countries 'jigsaw puzzle' approach to their election planning.

While there is recognition that concepts such as 'sustainability' and 'capacity building' are the way forward, what is less clear is how, by which methods, these words can be made meaningful. As listed above, donors have sometimes tended to give money related to electoral events because they have an easily identifiable and measurable outcome, provide high visibility and are politically attractive and justifiable internally. Moving from event based support to long term support and institution building, which is not particularly visible, difficult to measure, and possible opens to corruption and other difficulties.

By reviewing existing evaluation documentation, and by working closely with experts and practitioners (beginning with our member states), from donor agencies, implementing agencies, and from electoral management agencies who have received electoral support, we are including in our work programme the identification of guiding principles and good practice in the field of electoral assistance.

The types of questions that need to be answered when developing a sustainable electoral aid policy such as:

- What can past experience teach about funding new initiatives?
- What does sustainability mean in an election context? What are the elements of a 'good' electoral aid strategy? This might include:
 - Affording own elections
 - Support to core, permanent structures with the capacity (experience, knowledge) to hold election
 - Established legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate and candidates
 - A long-term perspective beyond the immediate, upcoming elections
 - Longer planning horizons/lead times for elections
- What should be the criterion for judging proposals for implementing electoral assistance?

The types of outputs that we have in mind are:

1. a forum for debate on what makes donor assistance in relation to electoral support effective - and ineffective;
2. a publication on 'guidelines for donor assistance to electoral processes';
3. a website section with links to key documentation including evaluations and academic papers on the subject, as well as key statistics on expenditures
4. a professional development workshop series for desk officers of member states and beyond on the topic of electoral assistance;

5. op-ed pieces and articles on the subject, with a view to affecting aid policy
6. direct and targeted policy advice to member states and beyond.
7. input and enhancement to the current 'package of tools' for election administration
 - a. Bridge Project (a curriculum and course series for election administrators) 'sustainability' and 'dealing with stakeholders' modules;
 - b. to the ACE project (an on-line encyclopaedia of election administration) 'electoral integrity' section as well as a freestanding 'in-focus';
 - c. to the CORE Project (a major website compendium in progress)

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