

IDEA Framework Programme of Activity 2004-6

Executive Summary

Despite significant steps towards democratisation in the last two decades, problems of consolidation are evident. The situation varies within and between continents. In several countries, semi-authoritarian regimes persist, manipulating electoral processes or otherwise allowing little space for opposition forces. Elsewhere, elections may produce a change of governing elite, but little change in levels of corruption or delivery on election promises. Electoral processes may be well managed in many countries, but voter registration may be biased and inadequate, election systems may freeze out specific interests and ignite tensions. In older as well as newer democracies, ethnic, religious and social divides tend to become magnified and polarized in the discourse of competing political forces. Political parties across the globe fail to inspire trust or respect, and in most countries appear unable to demonstrate a worthy role between elections. Women must still struggle to participate in the political system, most party elites still being willing to pay only lip service to the value of gender equality. Civil society and the media may well give voice to some public concerns, but cannot replace inclusiveness or representivity.

Too often, steps towards democracy disappoint, bring few benefits in terms of more equality or better governance and leave the people disenchanted. However, despite problems in building and sustaining democracy, there is developing much greater understanding about the complexities of building democracy. The challenges involved in rebuilding functioning states from above and outside, as in Afghanistan and more recently in Iraq, have drawn attention as never before to problems of security, legitimacy, local ownership, the interplay of cultural, religious and democratic values, the importance of the "process" of decision making as well as design of political institutions, the need also for a long term perspective. In many parts of the world, there seems to be increasing commitment by political elites as well as pressure from civil society to work at improving the functioning of democracy - to adapt institutions and electoral processes so as to give a more voice to the underrepresented, to strengthen the rule of law, improve transparency and limit the role of money in politics. Democracy assistance from the wider international community is not necessarily adapted to support such processes.

IDEA's areas of expertise and concentration remain relevant to the needs of the newer democracies. Its basic philosophy of people participation and local ownership of democracy holds good and highlights the continuing need to privilege dialogue and inclusiveness in order to manage conflict and build sustainable democracy. IDEA's experience in the field with dialogue processes in constitution building and political reform is now recognised to be of special relevance and gives it reason to systematise that knowledge, in liaison with user bodies and other resource centres. IDEA's work on reconciliation illustrates the need for patient work on democracy building at a deeper level in society. Electoral processes, part of IDEA's core expertise, remain at the forefront of concerns in many parts of the world, with increasing calls on IDEA's technical support and policy advice. With political parties, beginning to be acknowledged as key actors in democracy building, IDEA will build on its initial work in this field and develop a new world of contacts with political party actors. The political participation of women, on which IDEA has shown clear ways forward, remains a key indicator of commitment towards political equality, especially by political parties, which may also be relevant for other underrepresented groups.

Objectives and overview of activities

IDEA's general aim, in working to support sustainable democracy, is to improve knowledge and understanding, among governments as among those engaged in democracy promotion at national, regional and international level and also among the public at large, on issues that condition progress on democratisation. IDEA also aims to contribute to greater efficiency of democracy promotion, notably through cooperation with IDEA members and with other partner organizations such as the UNDP and the EU.

IDEA's objective is to improve both the design and effectiveness of certain key democratic institutions and processes, such as electoral processes, especially in newer democracies. IDEA places particular emphasis on enhancing public confidence in institutions, including political parties, and facilitating participation by all, especially those currently underrepresented or marginalised from political life, so as to ensure an "inclusive" form of democracy. This is considered crucial to the sustainability of democracy as well as to the capacity of a democracy to respond to the challenges of poverty alleviation, social justice and economic development.

IDEA's particular concern in 2004-6 will be to assist in:

1. **the design of political and electoral systems and democratic institutions, so they are better capable of channelling and managing conflicting interests.**
2. **the establishment of effective reconciliation processes to contribute to a social context in which democracy can become sustainable.**
3. **the use of extensive dialogue and inclusive decision making processes, whenever there are political reforms or major public policies to be adopted, so as to ensure maximum consensus and local ownership.**
4. **the development of more credible and efficient electoral processes, so as to enhance confidence in the electoral process and facilitate the participation of all groups.**
5. **generating a more supportive environment, conducive to reform and development by political parties, so they become more effective actors in democratisation, more trusted, responsive and representative. This implies that parties move decisively to achieve Beijing targets (30%) for the proportion of women MPs and generally take measures to facilitate access to political responsibility by underrepresented groups, including youth and cultural minorities.**

The programme of work for 2004-6 reflects a commitment to work at four levels:

- streamlining the production and dissemination of user friendly **materials** and advisory services, based on the analysis of comparative experience of democracy building, and made freely available essentially through the IDEA web site;
- a new emphasis on the building of **expertise** and networks of experts in specific areas of democracy building, in collaboration with partner organisations;
- implementation of a few targeted **interventions** and technical assistance operations of particular strategic interest, as well as to test materials, develop expertise and facilitate links with mainstream democracy assistance;

- collaboration with the international community in order to contribute to greater effectiveness of **democracy assistance** and the democracy dimensions of development cooperation.

The programme has three parts:

- **Democracy Building and Conflict Management (DCM)**
- **Electoral Processes (EP)**
- **Political Parties and Institutions (PPI)**

(1) Democracy Building and Conflict Management (DCM)

This relates to all five objectives, and in particular to objectives A, B and C, covering a number of horizontal issues. It will combine general information and advisory services, production of user-friendly training materials, a particular focus on reconciliation processes and specific interventions related to reconciliation and institution building.

The establishment of a comprehensive resource centre on democracy building will bring together on IDEA's web site a wide range of data on political and institutional reform, updating and presenting in more accessible formats materials from IDEA handbooks (such as those on Deep Rooted Conflict, Reconciliation, Electoral system design) as well as new reports and case studies relating to dialogue processes. The resource centre will be linked with a portal enabling experts and stakeholders to share experience.

Particular emphasis will be placed on further capacity building in reconciliation processes working in close collaboration with the OHCHR and the International Centre of Transitional Justice. Specific interventions are foreseen to assist in building consensus on constitutional or electoral reforms (eg Georgia), implementing such reforms (eg Indonesia) and in reconciliation processes (eg in Sierra Leone, Peru, Sri Lanka).

With regard to democracy assistance, the emphasis will be on systematising the use of dialogue and inclusive processes, working especially with the UNDP. Facilitating external support for reconciliation processes will also be a priority.

(2) Electoral Processes (EP)

This will aim especially at increasing trust and confidence in electoral processes and facilitating electoral participation (objective D) but also contribute through work on electoral system design to objective A.

IDEA's work over the next three years will continue support for the development of credible and efficient electoral processes, involving improving the capacities of Election Management bodies (legal framework, management, financing...) as well as developing a supportive environment (notably with the judiciary and the media)

This will entail the streamlining and integration of existing information and training tools, such as ACE, EPIC, and BRIDGE, to establish by 2006 a comprehensive advisory and support service on Electoral Processes, to be called AESOP, focused primarily on the needs of emerging democracies and post-conflict transitions and the actors within them.

IDEA will in parallel support networking and dialogue between those professionally engaged in election processes across the world. Specific strategic interventions are foreseen to upgrade election management capacity and capacity building with particular reference to the African Union. Working with the donor community, IDEA will seek to contribute to greater effectiveness of international election assistance, especially that of IDEA member states and the EU.

IDEA will continue and update its work on electoral system design, in close coordination with other aspects of IDEA's work on constitutional processes and institutional design, as referred to in the DCM sub programme above.

(3) Political Parties (PP)

This will focus on supporting political parties as institutions that have a vital role in democratisation, providing they become representative and responsive to public needs and concerns, as well as equipped to support government and a constructive opposition (objective E).

IDEA will focus in a first stage on extensive research and analysis both on the external regulation of political parties and on internal management challenges facing political parties, thus building on existing work on political party finance and on women's political participation. IDEA will then seek to develop cooperation with reform-inclined political parties and politicians to work on target setting, guidelines and production of useful materials.

In parallel, IDEA will contribute to public debate on the role of political parties, their relations with civil society and the general public and their responsibilities in democratisation. It will cooperate with party internationals and foundations and with other international actors in identifying expertise and effective means of support towards political parties, especially in emerging democracies.