

Basic Facts

Innovative and Unique Role

The United Nations Democracy Fund was created by the UN Secretary-General in 2006 at the joint initiative of the United States and India. It supports projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights, and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes. It is the UN entity that has the word “democracy” in its name; the only UN body with the primary purpose of supporting democracy through empowering civil society; and one of the youngest entities in the UN system.

Demand Side of Democracy

UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan announced the creation of UNDEF at the Africa Union summit in Sirte, Libya, in 2005. Since then, it has funded almost 600 projects in over 100 countries in Africa, the Arab region, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, bringing total disbursement to some 150 million dollars. The large majority of funds go to local civil society groups. In this way, UNDEF plays a new and unique role, complementing the UN's traditional work with Governments to strengthen democratic governance around the world. It targets the demand side of democracy, rather than the supply side.

Proposals and grants

A call for proposals is issued in November-December every year and yields on average 2,000-3,000 incoming applications. Project proposals are subject to a highly rigorous and competitive selection process, and only some 50 can be expected to be selected for funding. UNDEF grants range from US\$100,000 to US\$300,000.

UNDEF projects are in seven main areas:

- Community Activism
- Rule of Law and Human Rights
- Youth Engagement
- Women's Empowerment
- Media and Freedom of Information
- Tools for Knowledge
- Strengthening Interaction with government

Pioneer of Transparency and Comparative Advantage

UNDEF posts all completed post-project evaluations on its public website at <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/Docs/PostProjectEvaluations.html>, making UNDEF a pioneer of transparency in the UN system. So far, 80 per cent of evaluations have been highly positive. What is already clear is one of the overall advantages of UNDEF support to local NGOs: the UNDEF brand carries a convening power and a catalyst effect in the work for democratic development.

Wide Range of Donors

UNDEF depends entirely on voluntary contributions and has been supported by more than 40 Governments so far, who have contributed cumulatively more than 160 million dollars, led by its two co-founders and largest donors, the United States and India. So far, the Fund has been Contributions to UNDEF qualify as ODA, and several donors choose to make multi-year commitments. Contributors include a range on non-traditional donors in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Fund was one of only two UN entities that President Barack Obama mentioned in his speech to the UN General Assembly on 23 September 2010. Declaring that "it's time for every Member State... to increase the UN Democracy Fund", President Obama spoke of democracy as the form of government that delivers most for citizens. He described civil society -- the focus of UNDEF's work -- as the shapers of human progress and the conscience of communities.

Effective Governance

The Advisory Board of the UN Democracy Fund offers the Secretary-General policy guidance, considers proposals for funding, and recommends funding proposals for approval by the Secretary-General. The Board comprises 18 members: 13 Member States, including the seven largest contributors to UNDEF and six countries reflecting geographical diversity and commitment to democratic principles; three individual members, including the Chair of the Board; and two civil society organizations. The UNDEF Programme Consultative Group serves as UN inter-agency mechanism that provides expert advice on project selection.

Rigorous assessment

A team of seven international assessors -- combining some 60 years of programme and project experience -- score each proposal against 10 set criteria and produced a long-short-list of some 300 projects. To narrow down the list further, UN Resident Coordinators and Experts of the UNDEF Advisory Board are invited to provide comments, quality vetting, and views on how proposed activities would fit in the overall context of existing UN work in the countries and fields proposed. The same comments are sought from the UNDEF Programme Consultative Group, making use of the specific expertise of each of its entities: the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women. Based on this collective input, a short list of some 60 project proposals is sent to the Secretary-General for approval.

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