

Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP



Independent
Commission
for Aid Impact

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The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) is the independent body responsible for scrutinising UK aid. We focus on maximising the effectiveness of the UK aid budget for intended beneficiaries and on delivering value for money for UK taxpayers. We carry out independent reviews of aid programmes and of issues affecting the delivery of UK aid. We publish transparent, impartial and objective reports to provide evidence and clear recommendations to support UK Government decision-making and to strengthen the accountability of the aid programme. Our reports are written to be accessible to a general readership and we use a simple 'traffic light' system to report our judgement on each programme or topic we review.

	Green: The programme meets all or almost all of the criteria for effectiveness and value for money and is performing strongly. Very few or no improvements are needed.
	Green-Amber: The programme meets most of the criteria for effectiveness and value for money and is performing well. Some improvements should be made.
	Amber-Red: The programme meets some of the criteria for effectiveness and value for money but is not performing well. Significant improvements should be made.
	Red: The programme meets few of the criteria for effectiveness and value for money. It is performing poorly. Immediate and major changes need to be made.

Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses whether DFID funding for electoral support through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is being managed so as to be effective and deliver value for money. It is a review of DFID's management and oversight, not of UNDP itself. DFID has channelled £140 million in electoral assistance through UNDP-managed projects between 2001 and 2011 (71% of DFID's total support for electoral assistance of £197 million). This evaluation draws on lessons from that decade of experience, together with recent case studies of Malawi, Burundi, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. It also refers to Commissioners' observations in respect of Sierra Leone.

Overall *Assessment: Green-Amber* 

DFID's choice of UNDP as the primary channel for electoral assistance is credible. DFID should, however, make efforts to cultivate alternative or additional delivery partners to complement its work with UNDP. It should also strengthen management and oversight arrangements over UNDP electoral support programmes.

Objectives *Assessment: Green-Amber* 

DFID has clear and relevant objectives for its electoral assistance which are shared with the UN. As well as promoting democracy abroad, UK assistance helps to mitigate the substantial risks of conflict and political crisis associated with elections in many developing countries. In turn, building stable democracies enables better development. Differences in approach within the UN system, however, mean that DFID's good high-level objectives for building sustainable democratic institutions are not always reflected in the design of individual programmes.

Delivery *Assessment: Amber-Red* 

UNDP has demonstrated an ability to deliver technically sound assistance but design processes are often rushed and budgets unrealistic. UNDP does not have a strong culture of cost control and tends to support over-complex solutions and technologies. Contrary to both UK and UN policy, it prioritises the direct delivery of particular elections over the longer-term development of national capacity to manage elections throughout the entire electoral cycle.

Impact *Assessment: Green-Amber* 

DFID's electoral assistance through UNDP has contributed to the successful conduct of elections and the reduction of conflict – both important results for the UK aid programme. Sustainable national capacity to manage electoral processes has, however, been slow to emerge

and impact on overall political development has been limited.

Learning *Assessment: Amber-Red* 

There has been a wealth of analysis of what works in electoral assistance but the lessons have not always been taken on board. In particular, learning that assistance for elections is most effective when part of a programmatic approach to supporting democracy is insufficiently applied. There is a need for more real-time monitoring of UNDP-led electoral assistance around a broader set of outcome-based metrics.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: DFID should actively cultivate alternative delivery channels suitable for implementing electoral support. This means seeking out alternative or additional implementing partners where feasible, in order to complement and compare with UNDP and to provide additional resources for capacity-building.

Recommendation 2: DFID should immediately engage with the UN at headquarters and local levels to improve performance. It should encourage the UN to resolve differences in approach to elections between UN agencies. This should form part of the 2013 update to the Multilateral Aid Review of UNDP by DFID.

Recommendation 3: DFID should place greater emphasis on ensuring value for money in electoral assistance. This means encouraging more realistic budget processes and advocating appropriate electoral systems and technologies. DFID also needs to improve its identification of the costs of different aspects of electoral systems in different countries, to enable better cost control.

Recommendation 4: DFID should strengthen governance arrangements over UNDP-managed programmes. This includes separating political dialogue from technical oversight and making more use of third-party monitoring that will act to challenge and hold UNDP better to account for performance. Risk management arrangements to cover these issues should be fully integrated into the design of assistance through UNDP. Where possible, programmes and basket fund arrangements should be maintained through the electoral cycle.

Recommendation 5: DFID should ensure that each example of electoral support is anchored in a strategy for democratic development. This should include how the elections assistance relates to governance objectives beyond the time frame of a specific election. It should also include active engagement with a wider range of national stakeholders and political institutions.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This evaluation assesses whether the Department for International Development's (DFID's) funding for electoral support through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is being managed so as to be effective and deliver value for money. It is a review of DFID's management and oversight, not of UNDP itself.
- 1.2 The evaluation has been conducted in parallel with a larger UNDP evaluation of its own electoral assistance. This is the first time an ICAI report has been co-ordinated with another organisation's study. There has been regular communication and exchange of information between the two evaluation teams. This has enabled both to have a broader perspective than each could have had on its own. Each organisation has drawn its conclusions independently.

UK electoral support

- 1.3 The UK Government is strongly committed to promoting democracy internationally (see Figure 1). It believes that democracy is the system of government that best meets the hopes and aspirations of people around the world. It also believes that a democratic system of government helps to promote peaceful and stable societies, safeguard human rights and promote social and economic development.¹ While elections alone do not improve development outcomes, they are an essential part of deepening democracy, which does.

Figure 1: Why the UK supports elections abroad

'Democratic politics plays a vital role in the fight against poverty. It is politics that determine how a society makes choices, how competing interests are mediated and how resources are allocated. That is why the UK puts support to inclusive, democratic politics at the very heart of our development efforts.'²

Stephen O'Brien MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development

'Britain supports democracy worldwide because we believe it is the system of government that best allows for individual freedom. But it is not only about values: supporting democracy is also in our enlightened national interest. There is correlation between societies that are secure and prosperous and those that enjoy participative democracy... Democracy creates the right framework for poverty alleviation, reduces corruption and supports sustained economic development.'³

Jeremy Browne MP, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

- 1.4 Over the past decade, DFID has provided £197 million in support to elections in 26 countries, through 90 separate projects. (The UK also funds electoral support through the EU, for example via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights).
- 1.5 £140 million or 71% of the UK's electoral assistance over this period has been delivered by UNDP.⁴ The UK and other bilateral donors usually choose to combine their assistance through a basket fund managed by UNDP (see the Annex for an example from Burundi). With its global mandate, the UN is often considered the most appropriate channel for support in a politically sensitive area. A basket fund for electoral support also helps to share the cost of elections among donors.
- 1.6 Of the remaining £57 million or 29% of UK electoral assistance, most is provided to

¹ *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, DFID and FCO, December 2010, page 3, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/elections/how-to-on-elect-asst.pdf>.

² Speech to launch the joint DFID-FCO *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, 13 December 2010, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/Speeches-and-articles/2010/How-to-Note-on-Electoral-Assistance/>.

³ Speech to launch the joint DFID-FCO *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, 13 December 2010, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=378338682>.

⁴ ICAI review team calculations. DFID provided a database of all election projects over the last ten years. ICAI analysed these and identified all projects implemented through UNDP.

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international⁵ and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for election monitoring, voter education and related activities. There are a few other options. In Rwanda, electoral support is provided directly to the government, while in Nigeria and Uganda some of the funding is channelled through other bilateral donors. UNDP is, however, almost always the delivery partner of choice for large-scale electoral support.

1.7 The majority of UK electoral support goes to countries emerging from or at risk of conflict. More than 60% of the total expenditure on elections over the past decade took place in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Afghanistan, Nigeria, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Liberia (see Figure 2). Elections in post-conflict countries are often considered critical events in breaking the cycle of violence and restoring the constitutional process. They also tend to be far more expensive than elections in stable environments, particularly if voter registration has to be conducted from scratch.

Figure 2: Largest recipients of UK electoral support, 2001-11

Country	UK electoral support (£ million)	Proportion of total UK funds for elections
Democratic Rep. of Congo	38.9	19.6%
Afghanistan	25.8	13.0%
Nigeria	24.8	12.5%
Sudan	17.8	9.0%
Sierra Leone and Liberia	16.9	8.5%
Bangladesh	16.3	8.2%
Tanzania	9.7	4.9%
Pakistan	6.1	3.1%
Malawi	5.7	2.9%
Rwanda	5.0	2.5%
Uganda	4.6	2.3%
Kenya	3.0	1.5%
Zambia	2.2	1.1%
Somalia	2.1	1.1%

Source: Data provided by DFID from ARIES

1.8 Electoral assistance can cover a wide range of activities. It may include support for the design of an electoral system, determination of electoral boundaries, voter registration, education of voters and training for political parties and the media. It usually includes building the capacity of an Electoral Management Body (EMB) and making a contribution to its administrative costs. Elections pose extremely complex logistical challenges. These include printing voting materials, equipping voting stations, training large numbers of temporary staff, establishing secure methods for counting, tabulating and communicating results and establishing procedures for dispute resolution. International election observation missions are not usually funded from DFID country programmes (although the UK may contribute from other sources) but DFID's electoral assistance sometimes supports domestic observation by local NGOs. In post-conflict situations, electoral assistance may incorporate additional items such as training and equipping police to provide security at polling stations.

⁵ These have included the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Carter Center and Interpeace.

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1.9 As well as being technically complex, electoral assistance is often highly political in nature. One of the challenges facing DFID is to support the independence and integrity of EMBs against any threat of interference from the incumbent government. This calls for an active political strategy, often involving UK diplomatic representatives.

1.10 Electoral assistance is only one of the ways by which DFID supports political development in its partner countries. It also provides assistance for empowerment and accountability.⁶ This may include support for parliaments and parliamentary committees, accountability institutions like ombudsmen or anti-corruption commissions and a more active and engaged civil society. This report, however, focusses solely on electoral assistance provided through UNDP.

Methodology

1.11 Our evaluation examines the management of UK electoral assistance delivered through UNDP. It does not focus on election monitoring but rather on the delivery of and capacity-building for elections (the focus of UNDP assistance).

1.12 The evaluation took place between November 2011 and January 2012. The methodology consisted of a number of elements:

- an analysis of UK expenditure on electoral assistance, to identify patterns and trends;
- a survey of DFID staff responsible for electoral assistance regarding their experience of working with UNDP;
- interviews with UN officials in New York;
- two country case studies – Malawi and Burundi – involving visits by an ICAI team;
- two lighter case studies – Bangladesh and Afghanistan – involving a desk review of available documentation (see Figure 3 on page 5 for a summary of the case study countries and Figure 5 on page 9 for a summary of our findings in these countries);

- a literature review of electoral support;⁷ and
- in addition, the evaluation is informed by Commissioners' observations from their visit to Sierra Leone in May 2011.

⁶ *Empowering Poor People and Strengthening Accountability*, DFID, 2011, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/empower-account-summary-note.pdf>.

⁷ Case studies were chosen to represent a) the broad geographical spread of UK electoral assistance in Asia and Africa, b) contexts likely to be most representative of future UK engagement (fragile states, emerging from conflict) and c) countries where elections had taken place recently to be relevant but where enough time had passed for some analysis of lessons to have been collected.

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Figure 3: Summary of assistance for elections in the four case study countries

	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Burundi	Malawi
Election dates	August 2009 and September 2010	December 2008	May-September 2010	May 2009
Type	Presidential, Provincial, Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Commune, Parliament, Senate, President and Hamlet (<i>Colline</i>)	Presidential and Parliamentary (2010 Local - cancelled)
Total country population	32 million	148 million	8.4 million	15.3 million
Registered voter turn-out	38.8%	87.6%	70.3% ⁸	78%
Value of UNDP administered funds	£241 million ⁹	£52.3 million ¹⁰	£17.3 million	£12.5 million
DFID contribution through UNDP (UK % of total UNDP funds)	£4.9 million (for 2009) £5.6 million (for 2010) (4% of total)	£16 million (30%)	£1 million (6%)	£4.5 million (36%)
Timing of UK funds	August 2008-September 2010	July 2006-December 2008	Single payment December 2009	July 2007-May 2009
Number of contributing donors	26	9	15	9
Key activities of UNDP fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ capacity of EMB built; ■ effective legal and institutional framework for elections created; ■ register of voters prepared; and ■ public participation encouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ assistance provided to government to prepare credible voter rolls; and ■ capacity of EMB built to maintain and update rolls after elections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ technical assistance and logistical support provided to EMB; ■ security of election materials; ■ civic and voter education; and ■ administrative costs supported. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ management and technical capacity of EMB strengthened; and ■ electoral process delivered, including voter education and facilitation of observer missions.
Other major expenditure on elections through DFID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None found. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ £2.2 million for civic education, registration and observation; and ■ £124,000 for State of the Nation debates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ £282,000 for media reporting; and ■ £150,000 for a specialist electoral adviser. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None found.

⁸ The 2010 elections followed the pattern of those of 2005: a rolling timetable of polls for all levels of government over a three-month period (June-August). These were (in order) for: Communes, equivalent to districts (turnout 90.67%); Parliament and Senate (turnout 66.68%); the President (turnout 76.98%); and Hamlets, the smallest administrative area (turnout 53.77%).

⁹ US\$378 million, exchange US\$1 = £0.638.

¹⁰ US\$82 million, exchange US\$1 = £0.638. Includes £18.5 million from the Government of Bangladesh (US\$29 million).

2 Findings

Objectives

Assessment: Green-Amber 

- 2.1 This section considers whether DFID's objectives for its expenditure on electoral assistance are clear, relevant and realistic. It also assesses whether these objectives are shared with UNDP and adequately reflected in the design of individual programmes.
- 2.2 DFID's most recent guidance on electoral assistance is a *How To Note* published jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in December 2010.¹¹ It discusses some of the higher-level objectives behind UK electoral assistance. These include promoting democracy abroad, safeguarding civil and political rights, supporting post-conflict political settlements and reducing the risks of conflict and political crisis associated with elections.
- 2.3 The *How To Note* also introduces a change in the UK's approach to electoral support. In the past, the usual practice was to mobilise short-term funding for the conduct of particular elections. Often, this meant engaging international experts to help directly with the management of the election, as well as funding much of its cost. This short-term assistance inevitably focussed on the successful delivery of a particular election, rather than the development of national capacity to manage the electoral process as a whole. According to analysis conducted by DFID, a consistent lesson from international experience is that a succession of short-term, event-based interventions with little continuity from one election to the next achieves few sustainable results.¹²
- 2.4 DFID and FCO have, therefore, adopted the Electoral Cycle Approach as the preferred model for UK electoral assistance (see Figure A1 in the Annex). This involves long-term support for the electoral process as a whole, to help put in place the systems and capacities required for nationally-run elections. We commend DFID and FCO for adopting the Electoral Cycle Approach. It acts as a tool for diagnosing the weaknesses of current electoral systems and for planning an integrated approach to addressing them. It makes the development of national capacity to manage the electoral process a central objective.
- 2.5 Few DFID electoral assistance programmes have commenced since the release of the *How To Note*. The shift from event-based assistance to the Electoral Cycle Approach is therefore still underway.
- 2.6 The UN has been supporting elections around the globe for more than half a century. It has been central to the development of international standards on democracy, including through the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹³
- 2.7 In a post-conflict context, the UN may take on direct responsibility for running an election under a Security Council mandate. In such cases, the lead agency is the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) within the UN Department of Political Affairs. Other agencies, such as UNDP, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), undertake implementation. The objective in this case is primarily to deliver the election, rather than to build capacity.
- 2.8 The UN also receives periodic requests from developing countries for electoral assistance, in which case the support is delivered by UNDP under the policy guidance of EAD.¹⁴ In this case, the objectives are likely to be a balance of delivering a specific election and building more sustainable capacity. While EAD is responsible for approving that assistance is provided, it is UNDP that mobilises a design team. Sometimes (as was the case in Burundi), the local UNDP office will begin preparing assistance prior to a formal request being made by governments or approval

¹¹ *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, DFID and FCO, December 2010, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/1/elections/how-to-on-elect-asst.pdf>.

¹² Roger Wilson and Sharma Bhavna, *Review of UK Electoral Assistance in the Context of Lessons Emerging from Best Practice in International Experience*, December 2008, http://www.gsdc.org/docs/open/Review_UKElectoralAssistance_2008.pdf.

¹³ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), December 1966, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>.

¹⁴ *Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization*, Report of the Secretary General, UN, 19 August 2011, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/458/24/PDF/N1145824.pdf?OpenElement>.

2 Findings

being provided by EAD. The decision-making process does not support the Electoral Cycle Approach since it is designed to approve only single interventions. See the Annex for the UN's decision-making process.

- 2.9 Once the UN has taken the decision to support elections, an approach will be made to donors such as DFID for funds. At that point, DFID may have the opportunity to influence the UN's design. Such funds may form part of a larger package of UK assistance or, more often, may be provided directly to UNDP as a specific grant.
- 2.10 On paper, the UN's objectives for electoral assistance¹⁵ are fully consistent with the UK's objectives (see Figure 4). A UN General Assembly Resolution also makes direct reference to the Electoral Cycle Approach.

Figure 4: UN objectives for electoral support

- a) 'To assist Member States in their efforts to hold democratic elections in accordance with obligations, principles and commitments outlined in universal and regional human rights instruments';
- b) 'To contribute to building, in the recipient country, a sustainable institutional capacity to organize democratic elections that are genuine and periodic and have the full confidence of contesting parties and candidates and the electorate'; and
- c) 'To reduce the potential for election-related violence.'¹⁶

- 2.11 In practice, however, we observed differences in policy and approach between different UN agencies on the relative merits of event-based assistance and the Electoral Cycle Approach. With its permanent presence in developing countries, UNDP is in favour of a longer-term horizon for electoral support. EAD, by contrast, has a clear preference for short-term support for particular electoral events. UN headquarters staff interviews and our own observations indicate that differences

in structure and incentives between the two agencies have led to serious disagreements on this point. EAD staff, for example, dispute that a longer-term engagement produces better capacity-building outcomes, arguing that it creates dependence. As EAD is responsible for the approval, scoping and policy content of UN electoral support, even where delivered by UNDP, this difference of opinion has substantial practical implications. It helps to explain why the UN system to date has not fully embraced the Electoral Cycle Approach.

- 2.12 We also found that the way in which UN electoral support work is designed is not always consistent with achieving the UK's higher-level objectives. In practice, the initial request for support often arrives too close to the election date for adequate advance planning. Design processes are then truncated and consultation is often inadequate. The imperative of delivering a successful election on short notice takes over from addressing systemic issues and long-term capacity needs.
- 2.13 Our case studies indicate that, when allowed sufficient time, DFID engages actively with the design process in-country and can be influential in ensuring that UK objectives are incorporated. In many instances, however, the truncated design process limits the scope for influence.
- 2.14 Where the design of UNDP electoral assistance does not fully address UK needs, DFID sometimes mobilises additional or complementary support through other channels. For example, in Burundi DFID provided £282,000 to La Benevolencija, a Dutch NGO, to train a pool of 16 journalists as part of a co-ordinated donor plan to support the media.¹⁷ DFID decided to provide this support in response to concerns about the capacity of media support planned within the UNDP basket fund and the risks of conflict associated with inconsistent media reporting.
- 2.15 In each of the case study countries, UK support for elections produced important preventative results, helping to mitigate a risk of conflict. In Malawi and Bangladesh, risk tracking took place, linked to a set of constantly updated 'likely scenarios'. This

¹⁵ Revised Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, October 2010, <http://www.beta.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/new---note-of-guidance-on-electoral-assistance/Note%20of%20Guidance%20Final%20September%202010.pdf>.

¹⁶ Revised Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, October 2010, paragraph 5.

¹⁷ Plan d'Action Commun d'Appui aux Médias (PACAM).

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rolling process of monitoring enabled the international community to put in place measures that were seen to reduce opportunities for violence. In countries where DFID provides significant development funding, supporting electoral assistance could thus be seen as being part of a risk management strategy, helping to protect the UK's overall country programme. While elections do not necessarily improve development or reduce poverty, periodic elections are an essential part of deepening democracy, which does.¹⁸

- 2.16 It is notable that DFID has not chosen to make electoral support issues a priority for its discussions with the UN at headquarters level. DFID's primary focus of engagement has been through UNDP at a country level.
- 2.17 Overall, the objectives of UK electoral assistance are generally relevant and appropriate. As well as meeting an important UK policy objective of promoting democracy internationally, DFID's electoral support is a prudent investment that reduces the risk of election-related violence or political crises causing reversals to the development process. There is scope, however, for greater clarity in defining the objectives of electoral assistance in particular countries. DFID should also work with the UN to resolve tensions between UN agencies around the Electoral Cycle Approach.

Delivery

Assessment: Amber-Red 

- 2.18 In this section, we consider how well the elections assistance is delivered, examining:
- DFID's choice of UNDP as the delivery channel;
 - UNDP's approach in-country;
 - UNDP's political mandate;
 - financial management;
 - value for money;
 - risk management; and
 - DFID's oversight of UNDP.

DFID's choice of UNDP as the delivery channel

- 2.19 DFID usually perceives UNDP to be the only option available for the delivery of large-scale electoral assistance, despite staff concerns about its

delivery capacity. The choice of UNDP is generally a defensible one. UNDP is able to deliver electoral assistance even in very difficult environments. Its global mandate also helps to provide legitimacy to donor involvement in an area that touches closely on questions of national sovereignty. UNDP's near monopoly in the area, however, leaves the UK's assistance uncomfortably exposed to any shortcomings in UNDP capacity. We would have more confidence in UK electoral assistance if other agencies were being used more regularly to complement (and act as a comparator for) UNDP. It is not clear, for instance, that UNDP is the best partner for delivering capacity-building in all cases. A more diverse set of deliverers would enable the assessment of which agency is most effective at particular tasks. Increased diversity would also help DFID to assess whether UNDP provides value for money.

- 2.20 Our assessment of UNDP's delivery capacity reveals that, in many respects, UNDP is a good choice of partner. Its assistance is generally technically sound. It has access to good technical capacity and is able to draw on lessons learned from many years of electoral support around the world. It has built up experience in the management of electoral basket funds. These findings are consistent with DFID staff's own assessment. See the Annex for a summary of the results of our survey of 19 DFID staff who have worked closely with UNDP on electoral assistance over the last decade.
- 2.21 Our four case studies and the DFID staff survey provide a consistent picture. UNDP can deliver well in specialist areas such as legislative reform, voter registration and the participation of women (although respondents noted that this is often sub-contracted to UN Women, previously the United Nations Development Fund for Women – UNIFEM). In other areas, such as dispute resolution and supporting domestic observation, it is usually less effective (often a result of being constrained by its political mandate to maintain relationships with the government of the day).

¹⁸ Craig Johnson, *Local Democracy, Democratic Decentralisation and Rural Development: Theories, Challenges and Options for Policy*, Development Policy Review, 2001, 19 (4): 521-532.

2 Findings

Figure 5: Key findings from the four case study countries

	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Burundi	Malawi
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary objective was appropriate; to support Afghan electoral authorities to prepare for and conduct credible elections in an insecure and unstable environment. Activities were adapted throughout project lifecycle resulting in support being more effective after redesign in 2010, with better integration and co-ordination of political and technical support and more focus on Government of Afghanistan as leader of process (not project staff). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The national 'road map' (developed with support from UNDP and international funders) effectively focussed on delivering credible, peaceful and transparent elections. UNDP projects had clear, relevant and realistic objectives and were designed to fit the country context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives were appropriate: 'To contribute to free, transparent, credible and inclusive elections in 2010'.¹⁹ Funders reported to us that (while consulted) they were insufficiently involved in UNDP's project design, which was rushed, partly due to a late request for assistance from the Government of Burundi. As a result key elements were missed, such as the design did not include sufficient work with political parties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective to contribute to freer and fairer elections than previously had taken place was appropriate and design was informed by lesson-learning from 2004 elections. Consultation around the design was not wide enough or sufficiently collaborative.
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project management and implementation faced huge constraints and challenges, especially in terms of time and security. UNDP could have been more proactive in its risk monitoring – many problems/risks were not anticipated. Evidence of fraud at a number of levels albeit IEC/the Electoral Complaints Commission had been strengthened to manage this. Co-ordinated international assistance began too late, although UNDP provided some technical and managerial support to IEC before, during and after elections. Focus of activity was almost exclusively on electoral events. Complementary approach within wider UN to political, technical, logistical and security support around the elections worked well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNDP provision of long-term capacity-building to the electoral commissions for ten years prior to elections had a very positive impact in 2008. A co-ordinated flexible package of technical support from all donors was highly effective. UNDP technically capable and neutral and played an important role in harmonising agendas and avoiding duplication. Some opportunities for engagement missed (such as with Anti-Corruption Commission and political parties) although DFID key in brokering meetings of politicians. Scenario planning and risk management very effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and effective oversight of the elections by members of the international community at diplomatic, strategic and technical levels. UNDP proved capable of delivering support to the elections and risks were well managed. Funders we spoke to told us they would have liked more choice than only UNDP as their implementing agent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate support to the electoral cycle; focus was on the elections as an event. Lack of role clarity within UNDP – its political function dominated over its role in providing technical support. Funders sceptical about the future potential of UNDP to play multiple roles (fund manager, diplomatic co-ordinator and provider of technical assistance). Little evidence of external oversight or challenge of UNDP having an effect on operations in practice.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elections took place despite weak political structures and extensive violence. 38.8% turnout for 2009 elections and 40% turnout for 2010 elections. Widespread accusations of fraud and other problems. 20% of votes annulled.²⁰ Runner-up presidential candidate withdrew from second round of balloting. DFID targets on civic education and voter turnout exceeded. International observers noted²¹ that climate of impunity and insecurity severely damaged citizen faith in the credibility and effectiveness of democratic governance. Almost 6,000 challenges and complaints in 2010 election process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2008 Bangladesh overall results accepted as the most free and fair election since the reintroduction of parliamentary democracy in 1991 by national and international observers.²² 81.1 million voters registered (51% female). Very limited evidence of fraud during elections. Largest voter turnout in country's history (87%). No violence. Electoral commission supported in establishing long-term operational and technology strategies. Concern that gains against corruption may be rolled back. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the election process went well; five polls were held over a short space of time. Elections followed lengthy civil war yet were conducted with little violence. Despite being technically successful,²³ the main opposition party withdrew resulting in political blockage.²⁴ Financing was transparent but costs could have been better controlled. Slight improvement in domestic capacity for election management but gains fragile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elections were deemed free and credible and an improvement on previous elections in 2004; voter turnout was 78% compared to 54% in 2004. Some observers (such as the EU) assessed the elections as falling short of some international standards on fairness.²⁵ Results were not questioned and there was no electoral violence. No sustainable impact on capacity for running elections. Technical assistance to the Malawi Electoral Commission Secretariat has not led to sustainable knowledge and skills transfer.
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of IEC implementing lessons learned between 2009 and 2010 elections. More in-depth capacity-building should be done between elections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFID and other funders noted that elections assistance has to be conducted in the context of broader democratic objectives. Funders applied learning that elections need to be seen as part of a continuing process of support throughout the electoral cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most robust monitoring of the elections and the UNDP-managed basket fund came from the DFID-funded specialist electoral advisor. Capacity-building for political parties needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite a large amount of learning from previous elections, this was not fully being turned into concrete actions. Focus remains too much on delivering elections rather than supporting capacity-building through the electoral cycle.

¹⁹ Project Completion Report, DFID, August 2011 and Project Memorandum: Support to the 2010 Elections in Burundi, DFID, November 2009.

²⁰ ELECT Final Evaluation Report, UNDP, June 2011, <http://www.undp.org.at/Projects/Report2011/elect/ELECT%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf>.

²¹ Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People, 2010, <http://asiafoundation.org/country/afghanistan/2010-poll.php>.

²² International monitoring reports - See People's Republic of Bangladesh, Final Report, European Union Election Observation Mission, EU, March 2009, <http://www.euom.eu/files/dmfile/EUEOMBangladeshFinalReport2008.pdf>.

²³ EU observers rated voting as positive in 88% of observed stations and counting as positive in the majority of stations. See Rapport Final, Elections Communales, Présidentielle, Législatives, Sénatoriales et Collinaires 2010: Mission d'Observation Électorale de l'Union Européenne (MOE UE), http://www.euom.eu/files/pressreleases/other/final-report-burundi-2010_fr.pdf.

²⁴ Project Completion Report, DFID, August 2011 and Rapport Final, Elections Communales, Présidentielle, Législatives, Sénatoriales et Collinaires 2010: Mission d'Observation Électorale de l'Union Européenne, MOE UE, undated, http://www.euom.eu/files/pressreleases/other/final-report-burundi-2010_fr.pdf.

²⁵ Malawi Final Report Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2009, European Electoral Observer Mission, May 2009, http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/election_observation/malawi_2009/2010_election_observation_malawi_final_report_0509_en.pdf. Other observers are reported as being more positive (such as the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament).

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UNDP's approach in-country

- 2.22 UNDP establishes good relations with its national counterparts and responds flexibly to their needs. Most importantly, it has a track record of successful delivery of elections, even in the most difficult environments, that is unmatched by any other possible implementing partner.
- 2.23 UNDP is, however, a highly decentralised organisation and there is considerable variation in the capacity of different country offices and their leadership. This is an observation confirmed in our interviews with UN officials in New York. Sound technical capacity is not always supported by adequate management capacity. Communication with donors can be patchy and relationships vary from very good to at times rather fraught. There are often delays in deploying staff, mobilising funds and commencing activities, which undermine the effectiveness of the assistance provided. In Malawi, for example, civil society partners reported to us that they received funds for voter education only after election day and were therefore obliged to return them.
- 2.24 Our case studies from Burundi, Malawi and Afghanistan showed that UNDP prioritised the delivery of a particular election over capacity building, thus undermining the potential for sustainable impact. It is entirely legitimate for UNDP to become directly involved in the management of an election where national capacity is still too weak or where it is necessary to ensure the integrity of the process. Even where the main focus is the delivery of a particular election, however, there should be a clear strategy and dedicated resources for building national capacity over time (as indicated by the UN's own guidance²⁶).
- 2.25 An exception to this tendency was shown in our Bangladesh case study. Here, UNDP put in place programmes to build capacity with the Bangladesh Election Commission several years before the 2008 election, scaling up substantially over the last

18 months. The assistance was provided in the context of political agreement on a 'Road Map' for restoring democracy, with an agreement between donors and the Bangladesh Election Commission governing external support. UNDP therefore had ample time to address systemic and capacity issues. These included strengthening the legal framework and the electoral system, building management capacity, establishing a training institute for election officials and conducting large-scale civic education programmes. This form of support was provided from 2005 onwards at an annual cost of US\$4.6 million. Larger-scale assistance was then mobilised closer to the election date to help with specific tasks, particularly voter registration. Both the longer time frame for capacity building and its separation from assistance for delivering the election itself contributed to more sustainable outcomes.

UNDP's political mandate

- 2.26 A second theme concerns the relationship between UNDP, EMBs and governments. Electoral assistance should help to support the independence and integrity of the EMB against interference from the incumbent government. Where events suggest that the EMB's independence may be under threat, the situation may call for strong diplomatic intervention by the international community to safeguard the process. In our interviews, senior staff in the UN and other agencies noted that UN Resident Representatives are required by their mandate to maintain very close relations with the government of the day. Evidence from the case study countries shows this makes them reluctant to deliver hard messages on behalf of the international community. Similarly, UNDP also tends to minimise its engagement with opposition parties and civil society, which may be critical of government.
- 2.27 As a result, there has been tension when donors have looked to UNDP to take a robust stance with government. DFID, in conjunction with other donors, needs to retain the ability to raise political issues directly with EMB management or the government if required.

²⁶ Revised Note of Guidance on Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, October 2010, <http://www.beta.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/new---note-of-guidance-on-electoral-assistance/Note%20of%20Guidance%20Final%20September%202010.pdf>.

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Financial management

2.28 From the evidence gathered for the case studies in this report, UNDP's financial management of donor funds is generally sound and its financial reporting accurate, if sometimes slow. Its reporting focusses on the detail of expenditure, however, without providing information on what that finance is achieving, which is needed for effective management decisions. Corruption risks in electoral assistance are often high but we encountered a number of instances of fraud being effectively picked up by UNDP's financial controls. DFID does not undertake due diligence of UNDP's in-country financial management capacity before committing funds, relying instead on the general assessment of UNDP's systems carried out through the Multilateral Aid Review (see Figure 6 on page 12).²⁷ We suggest that a more thorough assessment of local capacities would be appropriate where the expenditure is substantial.

2.29 DFID's oversight of UNDP's financial management appears to be active. In the cases we examined, there were examples of DFID challenging UNDP's financial reporting and asking for further evidence and, in the case of Malawi, audits. UNDP-administered basket funds are externally audited. Currently, both external and internal audit reports can only be accessed by physically going to UNDP's New York headquarters to read them (as set out in the UN's agreements with funders). DFID has only made occasional use of this arrangement to view reports via the UK Mission to the UN in New York. We are aware that UNDP has decided to change this process to provide online access during 2012.

2.30 UN administrative costs are determined by headquarters agreements. Where an element of a UNDP-administered programme is implemented by another UN agency (such as UN Women wanting to increase women's participation), UNDP's administrative charge is limited to 1%.

²⁷ *Multilateral Aid Review*, DFID, March 2011, http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/multilateral_aid_review.pdf.

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Figure 6: Multilateral Aid Review - UNDP's value for money

In 2010, DFID assessed all its multilateral partners for the value for money they provide when delivering UK aid. The Multilateral Aid Review concluded that UNDP offered good value for money overall²⁸ but raised a number of concerns about its organisational capacity. The key findings included:

- UNDP is critical to the delivery and achievement of DFID's development objectives;
- UNDP's country delivery is often weak;
- UNDP's results framework, human resources and prioritisation on areas where it can add most value are all weak and reduce its impact;
- UNDP's financial management is above average but with some weaknesses; and
- there is insufficient evidence that UNDP is driving forward cost control across its programmes and administration.²⁹

2.31 In our view, DFID's oversight of UNDP's fiduciary controls suggests that they are generally adequate. We are not convinced, however, that UNDP's budgeting processes maximise value for money. UNDP's chief concern is to mobilise funding from bilateral donors for its electoral assistance, rather than to control costs. We saw examples where UNDP's reviews of its own financial management measure success in terms of whether enough funds were raised to cover the budget. Inevitably, when budgets are prepared as fundraising tools, rather than against a known budget constraint, they tend to be expansive in nature. Both UNDP and EMBs share a common interest in setting generous budgets. As a result, we found no sign of effective cost control by UNDP. We noted instances in which DFID intervened with UNDP after a programme of electoral assistance had already commenced in order to revise the budget downwards. This raises a clear risk of poor prioritisation and resource management.

Value for Money

2.32 It is not easy to control costs in electoral assistance. There is huge variation in the cost of

elections, ranging from £0.36 per voter in Ethiopia in 1992 up to £13.33 per voter in Angola in the same year (in the UK, for comparison, the cost is £0.48 per voter).³⁰ Cost is determined not just by geography and population but also by the type of electoral system that each country chooses. Post-conflict elections are usually considerably more expensive. The 2004 Afghanistan elections, for example, cost in the region of £12.50 per voter (excluding international security operations). Nearly 40% of this was the cost of voter registration in a population of unknown size where identity card ownership was limited.³¹ In short, international cost comparison is difficult because the challenges involved in conducting elections vary so greatly.

2.33 We did not see any examples in our four case study countries where DFID or UNDP undertook an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of election budgets or made use of cross-country comparators to assess value for money.³² We would expect to see DFID working with UNDP and other donors to carry out a proper analysis of the determinants of the unit costs of different aspects of the electoral process, to enable more rigorous choices to be made about what activities to fund.

2.34 A related problem is a tendency of partner countries to choose overly complex or technologically advanced options. In countries such as Sierra Leone and DRC, the UK has helped to fund an investment in biometric technology for voter registration, requiring equipment such as laptops, webcams, fingerprint scanners, colour printers and mobile generators. In Malawi, delicate computer equipment used to collect photo identification of voters was damaged because it was transported in the back of uncovered vehicles.³³ In Sierra Leone, Commissioners saw an

³⁰ Professor Rafael Lopez-Pintor, *Electoral Management Bodies as Institutions of Governance*, Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme, September 2010, <http://www.beta.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/electoral-management-bodies-as-institutions-of-governance/Elections-Pub-EMBbook.pdf>.

³¹ *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, DFID and FCO, December 2010, page 19, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/elections/how-to-on-elect-asst.pdf>.

³² We were subsequently informed by UNDP that this had taken place in Sierra Leone.

³³ ICAI interviews with the Malawi Election Commission and UNDP.

²⁸ DFID's value for money ratings were: Very Good, Good, Adequate and Poor.
²⁹ *Multilateral Aid Review*, DFID, March 2011, http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/multilateral_aid_review.pdf.

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ambitious voter registration programme being rolled out, using biometric data collection technology. Donor and civil society stakeholders noted the risk to the political process of this technologically advanced approach. While we acknowledge the potential of new information technologies to strengthen electoral processes, deploying such sophisticated technologies in difficult environments has a high failure rate and does not usually represent good value for money (see Figure 7 for the UN Secretary-General's views).

Figure 7: UN Secretary-General on electoral technologies

'Elections are expensive, regardless of the way in which they are conducted. But some processes are more costly per voter than others; and some of the poorest countries in the world have chosen some of the most expensive electoral processes and technology. While the choice of electoral systems and process is of course the sovereign right of Member States, I am concerned about techniques and systems that might cause a State, in the conduct of its own elections, to be financially dependent on donors, or technologically dependent on specific vendors for extended periods... [E]xperience throughout the world has shown that it is not the case that the more complex or expensive a system, the more successful the elections will be.'

*Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General*³⁴

2.35 While we agree that the choice of electoral system is the sovereign right of each country, such choices should be made in the light of realistic budgets. In Sierra Leone, UNDP staff had attempted to share lessons on the costs and risks of using complex technology with the EMB. We remain concerned, however, that UNDP's institutional interest in maximising donor support for elections is preventing it from fully challenging the choices made by partner countries.

Risk management

2.36 Elections are risky processes. Our analysis of DFID data shows that 65% of electoral assistance projects have high risk ratings. This is partly due to the risks of conflict and political crisis in many

countries. It also reflects the fact that preparations for elections are long, complex and time-critical.

- 2.37 UNDP risk management practices are not well developed. Our investigations indicated that not all electoral support involves robust risk management tools such as critical path analysis and scenario planning, so that any problems are identified in time for corrective action to be taken.
- 2.38 The UK is seeking to improve risk management. We noted an example of good practice in Malawi, in which DFID introduced a detailed Electoral Risk Register setting out plausible risks (e.g. abuse of incumbency, interference with the EMB and opposition boycotts), indicators to suggest when they might be occurring and steps to be taken in mitigation. Such tools need to be accompanied by an active monitoring strategy, in which DFID and FCO staff meet regularly with the political parties, journalists and civil society representatives to collect up-to-date intelligence on events around the country. Such risk management tools were not employed in Burundi, despite the high level of risk, arguably weakening international engagement with a very volatile political situation.

DFID's oversight of UNDP

- 2.39 Overall, DFID has been an active and engaged donor, taking its oversight responsibilities seriously. UNDP staff acknowledge the value of DFID's support and contribution.
- 2.40 Formal governance and oversight arrangements of UNDP-managed basket funds, however, are not always well designed. We found that oversight was achieved effectively in Burundi, where the following arrangements were implemented:
- political oversight, undertaken by senior representatives of international partners in-country (Heads of Mission);
 - technical co-ordination of international support to the elections as a whole, involving all active donors; and
 - oversight of the UNDP basket fund, involving the contributing donors.
- 2.41 By contrast, oversight structures were not as clearly articulated in Malawi. There was evidence of role confusion and tension among the

³⁴ *Strengthening the Role of the United Nations in Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Principle of Periodic and Genuine Elections and the Promotion of Democratization*, Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations A/64/304, 14 August 2009, paragraphs 39-41, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/64/304.

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stakeholders. We would expect DFID and UNDP to invest more effort in the design of governance and oversight arrangements from the outset.

Impact

Assessment: Green-Amber 

2.42 The UK supports how individual elections are conducted and seeks to build sustainable capacity to manage them over the longer term. This section considers the impact of the UK's support through UNDP over the last decade and for the four case study countries.

2.43 We have assessed the impact of DFID's assistance through UNDP primarily in terms of the operation of specific elections, not the Electoral Cycle Approach. This was adopted too recently (December 2010) to have an impact on the programmes considered here.

The conduct of elections

2.44 Electoral assistance is a challenging area in which to demonstrate impact. Because electoral support goes predominantly to high-risk cases, frequent problems with internationally-supported elections are to be expected. It is hard to demonstrate improvements over successive elections, as political conditions may be different from one election to the next. In many cases, the main impact of international assistance will be preventative in nature, in the form of violence or political crises avoided. This can be extremely important. In Kenya, for example, the Finance Minister estimated that electoral violence in 2007 cost the economy US\$1 billion (£650 million)³⁵ – but this is very difficult to measure.

2.45 Figure 8 on page 15 summarises the quality of 26 elections supported by the UK over the past decade. The ratings have been prepared by combining independent election observation reports from at least three sources, including the European Commission, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center.³⁶ Elections have been scored against eight criteria, including whether they were peaceful, free and fair.

2.46 The results are mixed. There have been some problematic cases, including Pakistan (2002 and 2008), Ethiopia (2005 and 2010), Nigeria (2007 and 2011) and Sudan (2010), some of which have seen deteriorating results over time. There have also been some examples of good quality elections, including in Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia, all of which show promising signs of maturing democratic systems. There are also cases such as Rwanda where peaceful and well-managed elections have corresponded with political systems that allow little genuine competition.³⁷

2.47 In our case studies, the quality of the management and conduct of elections would have been significantly lower without the support of DFID and UNDP. In each case, elections were conducted successfully despite a range of practical and political challenges. In Burundi, five elections were held over three months with little violence, despite the country's recent history of civil war. The 2009 Malawi election was judged to be significantly more credible than the previous one in 2004. In Afghanistan, international support for successive elections culminated in the first Afghan-managed election in 2010. Bangladesh was the most successful of all the case studies, with a well-managed process of electoral reform leading to a return to democratic norms.

³⁵ Kenya Turmoil May Cost Economy \$US1bn, Reuters, 9 January 2008, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/business/206930>.

³⁶ Figure 8 on page 15 provides data for those countries where reports from at least three of the monitoring bodies are available.

³⁷ The World Bank ranks Rwanda in the bottom 10% of countries for 'Voice and Accountability', http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wqi/sc_chart.asp.

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Figure 8: Summary of election observation mission findings in UK-supported elections

Election	Primary channel for UK funds	Peaceful	Free	Fair	Regulatory quality	Registration and turnout	EMB capacity	EMB independence	Participation of women	Overall
2002 Kenya	UNDP									
2002 Pakistan	UNDP									
2003 Mozambique	Carter Center									
2003 Rwanda	UNDP									
2004 Indonesia	UNDP									
2005 Ethiopia	UNDP									
2005 Tanzania	UNDP									
2006 Uganda	Joint donor/NGO fund									
2006 Yemen	UNDP									
2007 Kenya	UNDP									
2007 Nigeria	International Foundation for Electoral Systems and UNDP									
2007 Sierra Leone	UNDP									
2008 Bangladesh	UNDP									
2008 Ghana	UNDP									
2008 Nepal	The Asia Foundation									
2008 Pakistan	UNDP									
2008 Rwanda	Government of Rwanda									
2009 Indonesia	UNDP									
2009 Malawi	UNDP									
2009 Mozambique	Not available on DFID system									
2010 Afghanistan	UNDP									
2010 Ethiopia	Contractor									
2010 Sudan	UNDP									
2010 Tanzania	UNDP									
2011 Nigeria	UNDP and USAID									
2011 Zambia	National Democratic Institute									

Key

Poor	
Partial	
Good	

Source: ICAI assessment, combining independent assessments from the Election Monitoring Reports of at least three of European Commission, Commonwealth Secretariat, Carter Center and the National Democratic Institute for each country. *N.B. This list is not comprehensive. Only those countries where at least three independent assessments were available are scored, thus not all elections mentioned in the text are included.*

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2.48 It is harder to conclude that UK electoral support has led to lasting improvements in the quality of democracy. In Burundi, the main opposition party rejected the election results and withdrew from the democratic process.³⁸ In Malawi, a progressive deterioration in political conditions has led DFID to discontinue direct budget support to the government.³⁹ In Afghanistan, there are reports that popular support for the electoral process has declined.⁴⁰ In Bangladesh, while democratic government was successfully restored, the underlying tensions in the political process have not been resolved. Independent evaluations in Bangladesh have noted that electoral reforms remain vulnerable to reversal.

2.49 These larger dynamics are of course influenced by many factors beyond DFID's control. They illustrate the importance of anchoring electoral assistance in broader strategies for political engagement and support.

Sustained capacity to manage elections

2.50 UK support through UNDP has led to the development of some national capacity to manage elections. Across our case study countries, electoral laws have been improved, voter registration, voting and counting systems strengthened and new technology introduced. National staff have worked alongside international experts, picking up useful knowledge and skills. In most cases, however, these are islands of achievement, rather than visible improvements in overall capacity. In Burundi and Malawi, it is unlikely that the EMBs will be able to manage future elections without international assistance on a similar scale. Even in Bangladesh where the capacity development outcomes were most visible, the Bangladesh Electoral Commission will require continuing support.

2.51 In all of the case studies, the late mobilisation of assistance led to a lack of sustained effort on capacity development.⁴¹ There is scope for significantly greater impact in this area.

2.52 Few of the results described here are likely to be sustainable. The evidence is that any improvements in the capacity and integrity of EMBs are vulnerable to reversal from one election to the next. This comes as a result of changes in the political environment or interference from the executive. These risks may to some extent be mitigated through wider political engagement strategies but are ultimately beyond the control of DFID or UNDP.

2.53 Our view is that the UN system does not have a coherent view as to whether, or how, to support sustainability due to the internal differences between EAD and UNDP highlighted above.

2.54 We encourage DFID to consider how sustainability in electoral assistance can be supported. Sustainable capacity to hold free and fair elections means not just investing in the skills and internal systems of EMBs. It also means creating robust governance arrangements to safeguard their integrity and empowering the media and civil society to respond if their independence comes under threat. Safeguarding and building the credibility of domestic and international election observers is especially important in fragile contexts where election results face the risk of being contested. We note that DFID already supports some of these activities (as we saw in all the case studies and in Sierra Leone). In all cases, however, the bulk of the UK and UNDP's assistance was channelled to the EMB. In order to reduce the risk of election-related violence in a sustainable way, it might be necessary to build wider national capacity to manage conflict. This includes not just official mechanisms for adjudicating electoral disputes but also stronger dialogue among political parties. In short, the solutions to problems of sustainability in electoral assistance may lie in DFID's broader programming choices and political engagement.

³⁸ *Rapport Final, Elections Communales, Présidentielle, Législatives, Sénatoriales et Collinaires 2010: Mission d'Observation Électorale de l'Union Européenne*, http://www.eueom.eu/files/pressreleases/other/final-report-burundi-2010_fr.pdf.

³⁹ See *Government to Suspend Aid to Malawi*, DFID, 14 July 2011, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/press-releases/2011/government-to-suspend-general-budget-support-to-malawi/>.

⁴⁰ See for instance *Afghanistan's Elections Stalemate*, International Crisis Group, 23 February 2011, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B117%20Afghanistans%20Elections%20Stalemate.pdf>.

⁴¹ Roger Wilson and Sharma Bhavna, *Review of UK Electoral Assistance in the Context of Lessons Emerging from Best Practice in International Experience*, December 2008, http://www.qsdr.org/docs/open/Review_UKElectoralAssistance_2008.pdf.

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Learning

Assessment: Amber-Red 

- 2.55 There is no shortage of reviews of international electoral assistance. In all our case study countries, a considerable body of analysis has been undertaken. Following each election, UNDP carries out a retrospective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the election system as revealed during the election, with a view to informing the design of future assistance.
- 2.56 We did not see much evidence of these lessons being applied in practice, in spite of them being identified for some time. Some of the key lessons – starting early, sustaining capacity-building efforts over time and embedding electoral support within a broader strategy for democratisation – have not been implemented, despite being well known to UNDP staff. This may be in large part a result of the structural problems in the UN system described in the objectives section above, which have hampered its adoption of the Electoral Cycle Approach.
- 2.57 Monitoring and evaluation of electoral assistance is an underdeveloped field. We saw no sign of the use of formal impact evaluation in electoral assistance. While there are technical challenges, some aspects of electoral assistance could be suitable for quasi-experimental evaluation methods. For example, such methods could be used to test the effectiveness of different approaches to civic and voter education or to local conflict reduction strategies. We would expect to see studies carried out which examine electoral assistance within the context of broader support for political development, in order to build up a better understanding of how the two fields interact. We would also expect to see a more thorough analysis of the record on sustainability – that is, assessments of whether capacities and systems built up in one electoral period survive until the next election and why they often fail to do so.
- 2.58 In our view, UNDP’s monitoring and evaluation of its performance in the delivery of elections could be strengthened. For instance, we would like to see UNDP set criteria for effectiveness and success in advance and report on them more robustly after the event. Respondents within the UN system told us that some UNDP evaluations were poor quality and that reports are disowned by staff if the findings are negative. This seems to us to be an area of weakness.
- 2.59 We also suggest that DFID and other donors should strengthen real-time monitoring of UNDP assistance. We witnessed an example of good practice in Burundi, where DFID funded an international elections expert attached to the EU observer mission. The expert produced regular and detailed briefing notes on various aspects of the preparations for the election. This ensured that the donors were well informed and allowed a healthy level of challenge to UNDP operations. A modest investment in regular monitoring thus made a significant contribution to the quality of decision-making. We note that there is no third-party monitoring of the effectiveness of electoral institutions beyond the immediate monitoring of elections. We encourage DFID, therefore, to make more use of this approach.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- 3.1 The choice of UNDP as the primary partner for UK electoral assistance is credible and to an extent inevitable. UNDP has proved able to mobilise international technical expertise on elections, to manage multi-donor basket funds and, above all, to deliver elections successfully even in very difficult environments.
- 3.2 This dependence on UNDP to deliver UK electoral assistance leaves DFID exposed to various operational weaknesses in UNDP. These include:
- planning and design processes that routinely commence too close to the election date, leading to truncated design, poor stakeholder engagement and at times late delivery of key components of the assistance;
 - resource mobilisation processes that emphasise fundraising over cost control, leading to poor prioritisation, a lack of attention to value for money and the need to revise budgets during the life of the assistance;
 - a tendency to support over-complex technical solutions and sophisticated technologies, rather than encouraging partner countries to choose financially and technically sustainable options;
 - the UN's close positioning to the incumbent government, which makes it poorly suited to taking decisive action when EMB independence is under threat; and
 - ambivalence within the UN system to the Electoral Cycle Approach, leading to a neglect of long-term capacity building in favour of short-term support for specific electoral events.
- 3.3 DFID has attempted to manage these shortcomings in country delivery in various ways. It engages well with UNDP planning and budgeting processes when time allows. It participates actively in governance arrangements and supervises delivery and financial management. On occasions, it channels supplementary funding to other actors to make up for shortcomings in UNDP programming. It is notable that DFID's influence on the operation of a UNDP basket fund can be significant, even when it is providing a small proportion of the funding (as in Burundi). Overall, DFID has proved itself to be an active and responsible donor whose input is valued by UNDP at country level.
- 3.4 Nevertheless, similar problems recur over multiple elections and in different countries. This calls for a more concerted response from DFID, including:
- more engagement with the UN system at headquarters level, to resolve differences in mandates and institutional incentives;
 - stronger governance arrangements over UNDP operations in the field; and
 - cultivation of alternative delivery channels for electoral assistance, to introduce healthy competition.
- 3.5 Despite the guidance provided in the December 2010 *How To Note on Electoral Assistance*, the Electoral Cycle Approach is not yet incorporated into UK assistance except for some newer DFID programmes. At present, it is not clear that the UN system is up to the challenge. There is constant tension between the imperative to deliver specific elections successfully and the goal of long-term capacity building, with the latter routinely neglected. The exception to this from our case studies is Bangladesh. Here, political events leading up to the election facilitated a much more sustained approach, confirming the lesson that much better capacity-building outcomes are achievable.
- 3.6 While the Electoral Cycle Approach encapsulates the long-term goal of electoral assistance, it is clear that in many instances this co-exists with the more immediate goal of ensuring the successful delivery of a particular election. DFID needs to consider more carefully how to balance these two goals within the design of each electoral assistance programme, to prevent the urgent from crowding out the important. The appropriate solution will need to be specific to each case. We encourage DFID to consider splitting the two objectives into separate strands of assistance, with different delivery channels for longer-term capacity building.
- 3.7 Sustainable impact on national capacity to manage elections and on broader democratic processes is

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

hard to discern. To achieve these ambitious objectives, electoral assistance needs to be anchored in wider support for political development – an aspect of DFID assistance we may look at in more detail on a future occasion.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: DFID should actively cultivate alternative delivery channels suitable for implementing electoral support. This means seeking out alternative or additional implementing partners where feasible, in order to complement and compare with UNDP and to provide additional resources for capacity-building.

- 3.8 DFID should seek out alternative implementing partners where feasible, in order to complement and act as a comparator for UNDP. We support the practice of using supplementary funding outside the UNDP basket fund where it helps to make up for shortcomings in the design or delivery of UNDP's assistance. When planning its electoral support, DFID should ensure greater clarity between the immediate objective of delivering a successful election and the longer-term objective of building national capacity to manage elections. It should design its assistance so that the former objective does not crowd out the latter. This may involve using different partners or funding streams for long-term capacity building or technical areas such as dispute resolution.

Recommendation 2: DFID should immediately engage with the UN at headquarters and local levels to improve performance. It should encourage the UN to resolve differences in approach to elections between UN agencies. This should form part of the 2013 update to the Multilateral Aid Review of UNDP by DFID.

- 3.9 DFID should seek to support the UN to resolve the inconsistencies in mandate, philosophy and incentives between EAD and UNDP. DFID should engage at Executive Board level to drive corporate improvements in value for money and performance management. It should make routine use of UNDP's audit reports, which should be more readily accessible if they are available online from June 2012 as planned. The Multilateral Aid Review

update in 2013 provides a further opportunity to measure UNDP's value for money against other providers. DFID should support UNDP in tightening the definition of success in electoral assistance and in ensuring that UNDP's own country evaluations cover effectiveness and value for money. Following each UK-supported election, DFID should initiate dialogue with the partner country as soon as feasible to begin planning the next phase of assistance, if required. In so doing, it should make sure that any request for UN assistance is made early enough to allow for effective planning, resource mobilisation and active engagement with national stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: DFID should place greater emphasis on ensuring value for money in electoral assistance. This means encouraging more realistic budget processes and advocating appropriate electoral systems and technologies. DFID also needs to improve its identification of the costs of different aspects of electoral systems in different countries, to enable better cost control.

- 3.10 DFID should engage closely with UNDP design processes to encourage realistic (although flexible) budgeting. DFID should press for UNDP to improve its concern for and management of costs. UNDP staff should be requested to clearly demonstrate and be held to account for value for money in UK-funded activities. DFID staff have demonstrated their ability to do this where they are present and have time to do so. Value for money means advocating electoral systems and technologies that are appropriate to specific country conditions and financial resources. We encourage DFID to commission analysis into the determinants of the cost of different aspects of electoral systems in different country contexts, to serve as a reference point for cost control.

Recommendation 4: DFID should strengthen governance arrangements over UNDP-managed programmes. This includes separating political dialogue from technical oversight and making more use of third-party monitoring that will act to challenge and hold UNDP better to account for performance. Risk management arrangements to cover these

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

issues should be fully integrated into the design of assistance through UNDP. Where possible, programmes and basket fund arrangements should be maintained through the electoral cycle.

- 3.11 There should be clear separation between the political engagement of donors with the electoral process and oversight of programme activities and funding. DFID and other donors should retain direct channels of communication with governments over election issues. It may also be appropriate to create a mechanism for technical co-ordination across different strands of electoral assistance, separate from oversight of the UNDP basket fund. We encourage DFID to make more use of third-party monitoring of UNDP electoral assistance, in order to keep donors informed of progress and to allow for challenge at a technical level. The EU (with its considerable experience in monitoring elections) may be an appropriate partner to play this role. DFID should consider supporting third-party periodic health checks of readiness for elections throughout the electoral cycle. DFID should also ensure that an active approach to risk management is built into the

design of UNDP assistance, making use of tools such as risk registers and scenario planning. There should be clear assignment of responsibilities for monitoring risk factors. Programme management and funding arrangements should be maintained through the electoral cycle in order to ensure institutional memory is maintained and key support is not overlooked.

Recommendation 5: DFID should ensure that each example of electoral support is anchored in a strategy for democratic development. This should include how the elections assistance relates to governance objectives beyond the time frame of a specific election. It should also include active engagement with a wider range of national stakeholders and political institutions.

- 3.12 Many of the factors that determine the effectiveness and sustainability of electoral assistance lie beyond the immediate scope of electoral assistance programmes. They should therefore be complemented by active engagement with a wide range of national stakeholders and political institutions. The impact of democracy on development needs to be further reinforced.

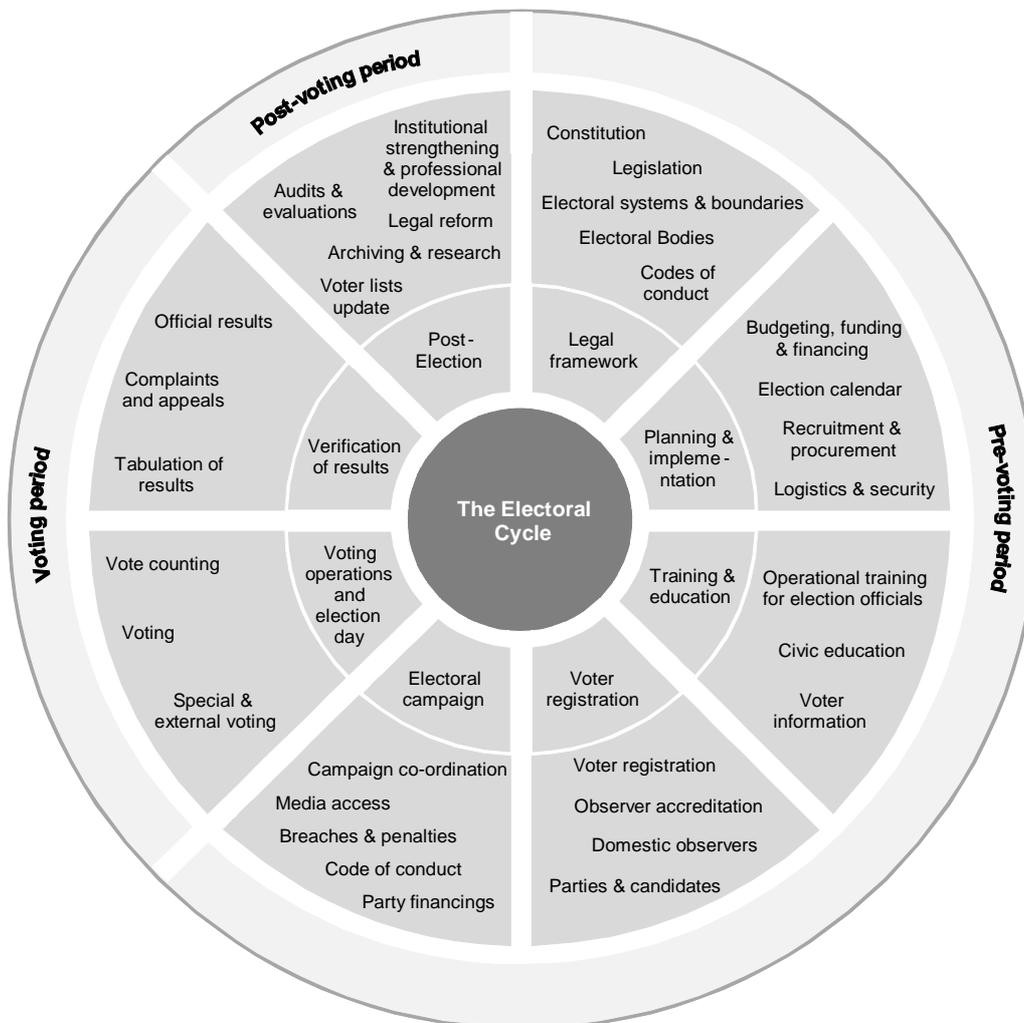
Annex

In this Annex, we set out further information on:

- the Electoral Cycle Approach;
- the UN's decision-making process for providing electoral assistance;
- our survey of DFID advisory staff on UNDP's capacity; and
- funding flows within the UNDP basket fund for Burundi's 2010 elections.

Figure A1: The Electoral Cycle Approach

Throughout this report, reference is made to the Electoral Cycle Approach. This approach emphasises that, rather than being one-off occurrences, elections are periodic events. Between elections, activities are underway that influence their success. The following sets out what these activities are prior to, during and after the voting period.



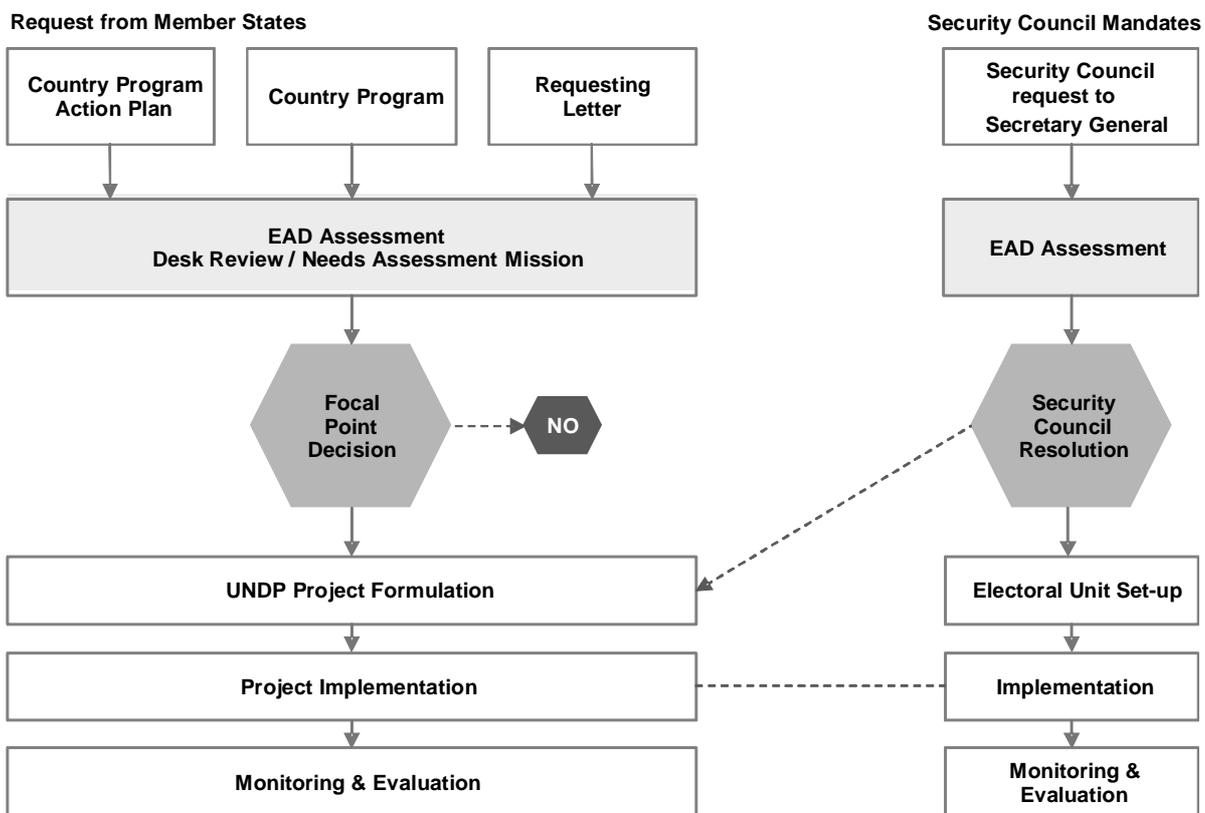
Source: European Commission/UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance⁴²

⁴²The Electoral Cycle, http://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=125&Itemid=136&lang=en.

Annex

Figure A2: Decision-making process for UN electoral assistance

The following sets out the different processes used by the UN for deciding to provide electoral assistance. Where a country is subject to a mandate of the Security Council, elections are subject to the direct authority and oversight of the Security Council. In such cases, the UN is directly responsible for delivering the elections. Where this is not the case, the UN (normally UNDP) supports national governments with their elections only after it has been requested to do so.



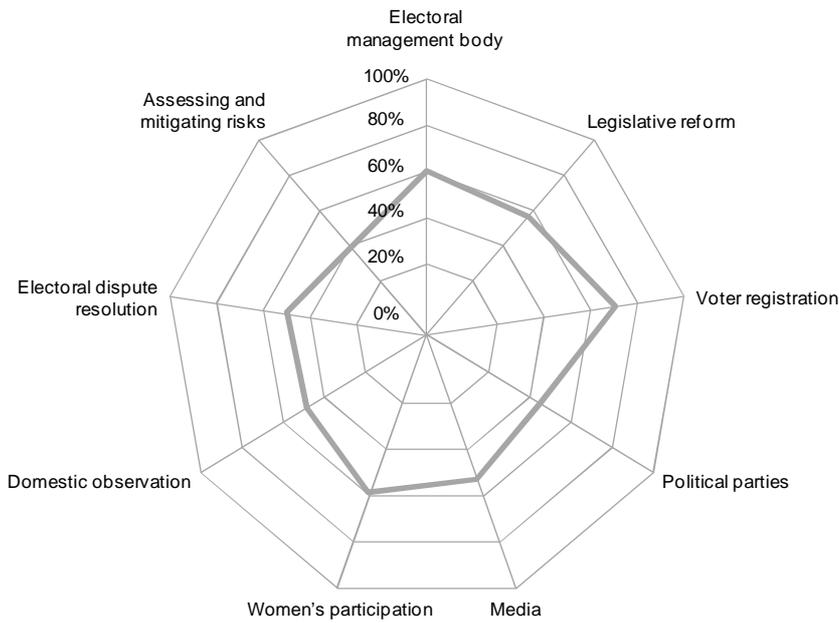
Source: European Commission/UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance

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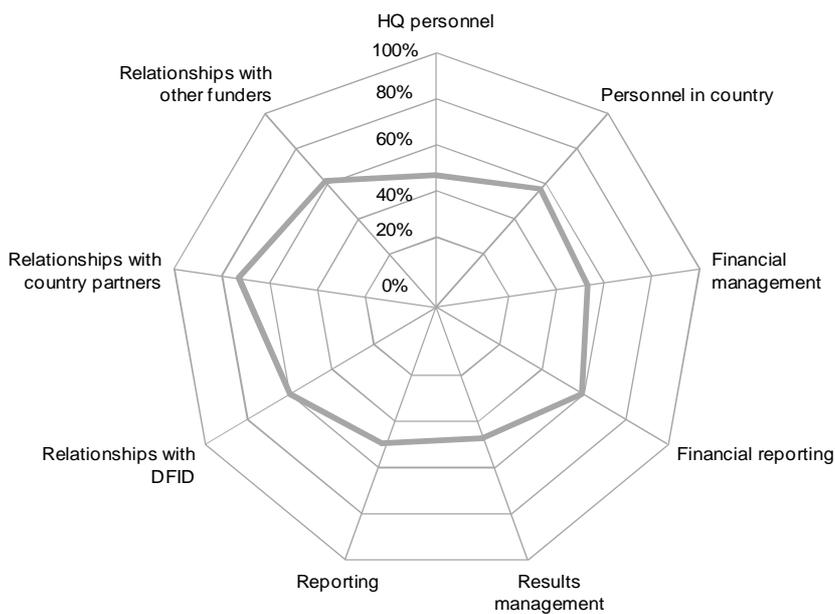
Figure A3: DFID staff assessment of UNDP capacity – summary of ICAI survey of 19 DFID advisory staff

As part of the background to this report, a survey was conducted of DFID staff who have been responsible for working with UNDP in the delivery of elections over the last decade. The following summarises their detailed ratings of UNDP’s technical and managerial capacity according to a percentage scale of effectiveness, where 100% would be ‘fully effective’.

Technical capacity



Management capacity



Annex

Figure A4: UNDP basket fund for Burundi's 2010 elections

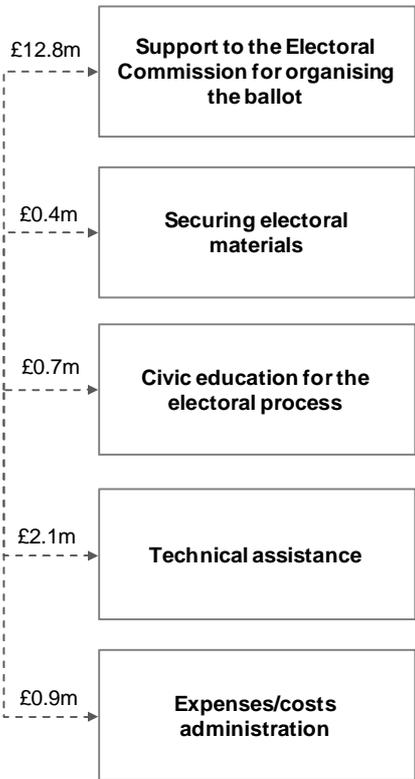
The report refers to basket funds that are managed by UNDP. The following shows the basket fund for donors' support to the 2010 Burundi elections. As can be seen, DFID was one of fifteen funders. Of the £17.3 million transferred into the basket fund, £16.9 million had been spent by the end of 2010 on the areas set out below.

Total funds received (£17.3 million)

EU	£4.3m
Belgium	£2.9m
Netherlands	£1.9m
Sweden	£1.5m
Norway	£1.4m
UNDP	£1.3m
Japan	£1.1m
DFID	£1m
PBF	£0.9m
France	£0.5m
Australia	£0.3m
Switzerland	£0.1m
Luxembourg	£0.06m
Canada	£0.03m
Egypt	£0.006m

Basket fund (£17.3m)

Funds spent at end of 2010 (£16.9 million)



Source: Rapport du Projet d'Appui au Processus Electoral 2010 du Burundi, UN, undated

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