



DAC NETWORK ON GOVERNANCE (GOVNET)



Draft Principles on International Elections Assistance

March 2010 – updated June

Revised based on discussions by participants in the “**First Roundtable on International Support to Elections**” on 1 March 2010, hosted by the OECD-DAC Governance Network (GOVNET) and also supported by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), Department of Political Affairs (UN, DPA), the European Commission (EC), the United Nations Development Programme and the UNDP-EC Task Force on International Assistance, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

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Preamble

Supporting democracy is a crucial endeavor for the international donor community, both because of the intrinsic value of democracy as a political system that helps foster human dignity and the contributions that democratic governance makes toward better developmental outcomes for individual citizens.

Elections are only one element of democracy, yet they are an irreplaceable one—without regular, genuine elections democracy does not function. Elections give form to citizens' political voice, constituting both a fundamental root of political accountability and an orderly process for successions and alternations of power.

Through substantial support for elections in many countries attempting democratic transitions over the past several decades, the international donor community has helped improve numerous electoral processes. By identifying lessons from these experiences and incorporating some of those lessons into improved methods and practices, international elections assistance is positively evolving.

Nevertheless, given the complexities, difficulties, and risks of electoral processes in many developing countries elections assistance continues to face numerous challenges, especially in post-conflict contexts and in fragile states with sharp sociopolitical divisions.

Marking a renewed commitment to make elections assistance as effective and useful as possible, the major funders and implementers of international elections assistance agree to the following strategic and operational principles:

Take the local context seriously through careful, comprehensive assessments.

Elections assistance efforts should be grounded in incisive political economy analyses that identify and examine the determinant power dynamics and political constraints that shape the electoral environment, as well as the specific roles that elections are likely to play in particular settings.

Be alert to electoral risk. Elections assistance providers must respond to the recent rise in electoral and post-electoral violence in developing countries by giving greater attention to electoral risk and long-term causes of political violence that could ignite in election processes. These concerns should be reflected in the design and implementation of elections assistance interventions.

Don't misuse electoral assistance and promote transparency. Elections assistance should be employed based on the highest standards of impartiality and only to promote free and fair elections, not to advance other donor policy goals, such as burnishing the legitimacy of favored partner governments or building friendly relationships with governments. Assistance should be provided on a transparent basis: information on who is providing funding and assistance should be readily available and cost-effectiveness should be ensured so that state expenditure is in line with efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Ground electoral aid in complementary diplomatic policies. Elections assistance should be grounded in complementary diplomatic policies that seek to nurture or reinforce the commitment on the part of partner governments to follow accepted electoral norms.

Recognize the role of regional organizations. Elections assistance providers should take full account of the valuable role that regional organizations can play both in election monitoring and election assistance and seek the greatest possible complementarity with such organizations.

Embrace a full concept of ownership. Aid to strengthen an electoral process should be owned not only by the relevant partner government but by the broader political society in question. Elections assistance providers should embrace an interpretation of local ownership that takes account of this political imperative.

Build on donor coordination. Elections assistance providers should build on the progress they have made in creating cooperative mechanisms for elections assistance by assessing the record of such mechanisms and seeking ways to broaden and deepen communication, cooperation, and coordination among all relevant aid providers, including around joint funding mechanisms

Be as comprehensive as possible. Designing elections assistance to be comprehensive horizontally across the many domestic institutions and sectors that are involved in an electoral process will ensure better synergies and overall coherence. Elections assistance and observation should be well coordinated, as observation plays a key role in effective electoral support.

Think and act across the electoral cycle. Elections assistance should be designed, planned, and implemented in a long-term fashion across the full length of electoral cycle and if possible across multiple cycles, avoiding the common tendency to focus primarily

on activities relating to elections day. Donor support should encourage sustainability to ensure that local capacity is built as quickly as reasonably possible.

Push for integration. Elections assistance should be actively integrated into the wider domain of democracy support, especially assistance for political party development, legislative strengthening, media assistance, and civic education programs.

Emphasize citizens' understanding and engagement. Efforts to help citizens understand the utility and significance of elections as one part of a broader set of accountability mechanisms should be an integral element of elections assistance. Experience shows that it is important to support consultative approaches to help election stakeholders to be jointly responsible and to build their confidence, and that of the wider public, in election management bodies and other institutions involved.

Add the local to the national. Aid providers should complement their traditional focus on national elections with greater attention to strengthening local elections.

Make the connection with accountability. Elections assistance providers should actively connect their activities with the wider set of donor programs supporting accountable governance at all levels.

Don't neglect gender. Although progress has been made to widen and deepen the role of women in politics in many developing countries, elections assistance providers should do more to incorporate a full gender dimension in elections assistance, especially concerning candidate selection and voter participation.

Respond more consistently to flawed elections. Donor governments committed to advancing free and fair elections should strive toward greater normative consistency in responding to flawed elections.

Keep learning about impact, and act on it. Building on the important learning efforts undertaken in recent years, elections assistance providers should carry out deep-reaching evaluations of the impact of elections assistance in varied contexts and incorporate the learning from those evaluations into assistance practice.

ANNEX: Draft Action plan for further elaborating the Draft Principles

The 1st Roundtable on International Support for Elections agreed to further discuss and develop the *Draft Principles for International Support for Elections* over the coming year in various international and regional fora on elections. **The following presents some initial ideas on a follow-up.**

1. The Draft Principles should be taken to a higher political level and been further developed in light of feedback from different communities and international and regional fora. The GEO (timing to be determined) and the IDEA Democracy Forum in Ghana (30 November – 1 December 2010 in Accra) will be excellent opportunities to present and discuss the draft principles more widely, in particular with regional organisations and electoral bodies. Other ideas on opportunities for discussion should be collected.

2. Further understanding about building coherence between the technical and the political level of electoral assistance is needed and might be explored at upcoming meetings:

- The challenges of electoral assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states needs further exploration. International IDEA held an expert meeting on May 24-25 on the development of an early warning and response assessment tool for electoral violence. The meeting served as a basis for further discussion at the GEO on elections and conflict. Within the OECD, the Statebuilding task team of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) and GOVNET are exploring collaboration on a workshop on elections in fragile and conflict-affected states.
- It was agreed that the group should further explore basket funding issues with a lead from the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force. It may also be interesting to hold a seminar on whole-of-government approaches for elections and to reach out to colleagues working on elections in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
- Increased consultation with regional organisations and electoral bodies is needed, and the GEO could be used to this effect; other possible events for regional discussion should be considered.

3. The draft principles could be piloted in an upcoming election in a developing country.