1. Introduction

The UNDP Electoral Project Manager was hired in July 2011 to manage UNDP Elections Projects which were designed and implemented with the overall goal of strengthening electoral processes in Iraq. During the assignment, the following four electoral projects have been managed:

- Support for the Enhanced Media Coverage and Monitoring of the Electoral process (December 2009 to December 2012). This project supported the electoral process by building capacity of three key institutions – the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), the Communications and Media. Commission (CMC) and the professional media.
- Technical Assistance to the IHEC Phase II (December 2010 to December 2012). The programme aimed to provide the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC) with essential and urgent technical assistance through securing the required number of international electoral experts and advisers for electoral events.
- Institutional Development Support to the IHEC Phase I (October 2010 to October 2013). This Programme provided capacity building support to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to effectively plan, implement, monitor and evaluate its short and long term goals through application of best electoral management practices, policies and processes.
- Institutional Development Support to the IHEC Phase II (October 2013 to February 2015). This programme continued to support the institutional development of the Independent High Electoral Commission to enable it carry out its constitutional mandate of conducting the electoral processes in Iraq independently, efficiently, transparently and accountably, in line with professional standards.

Between 2011 and 2015, a total of 7 international staff, 8 national staff, 12 individual consultants and 4 companies were deployed to perform various functions within the UNDP projects. In order to achieve the programmes’ goals and objectives, key advisers were deployed in the areas of capacity building, legal framework, public outreach, political parties and external relations, media, procurement, graphic design and voter registration.

This report highlights key achievements made during this period, support gaps that still exist and proposes some recommendations for the future.

2. Key achievements

The following positive changes have been achieved as a result of the UN electoral support:

- Human resource capacities and skills in IHEC have been enhanced both at Governorate and national levels.
• Better engagement between the IHEC and the general public as well as the media through an effective public outreach mechanism and media strategy.
• High level of election information security.
• The IHEC has enhanced its electoral knowledge base to enable it make well informed and sound policy and operational decisions.
• The IHEC has improved technological capacity to manage electoral processes in a sustainable manner, especially in areas of results management, complaints resolution and voter registration.
• IHEC’s internal coordination has been enhanced at all levels.
• The IHEC has improved institutional management structures and practices.
• Gender mainstreaming has been entrenched in the IHEC as well as the electoral processes.
• The Iraq electoral process is responsive to the minority groups such as People With Disabilities (PWD), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), women Refugees and people living in other countries.
• Capacities of three national project staff have been developed in the area of electoral support, in line with UN policy of developing national staff.

With the support of the UN, the IHEC has attained the capability of planning and implementing the entire electoral process without external support. This was demonstrated during the conduct of the 2014 Council of Representatives and Kurdistan Regional Government provincial elections.

3. Lessons Learnt and Best Practices
• The integrated UN approach to electoral support played a major role to the success of the programme.
• The synergy with other UN programmes (UN Women, JAU, UNAMI, UN Gender Task Force, UNAMI Public Information Office, UNAMI Political Section, UNDP Youth Project) added value to the IHEC support.
• The positioning of the programme in the IHEC national office provided an opportunity for constant interaction with the beneficiary. The transfer of knowledge and skills from international experts to national counterparts in IHEC was very effective under such working arrangements.
• Effectiveness of South-South exchange which reinforced the advice and recommendations of the international experts to the IHEC.
• A mandatory 25% female quota in UN activities for IHEC worked well as one of the affirmative actions for the entrenchment of Gender in IHEC’s electoral administration.
• Cost-Sharing between the UN and IHEC on funding project activities helped generate additional resources for the project.

4. Implementation Challenges
There were a number of challenges that were experience, some common to the UNDP and others specific to the Elections Projects. Below are some of the notable challenges:
The security situation. This affected so many things such as implementation of project activities inside Iraq, monitoring of IHEC’s electoral activities beyond the international zone and “security permissible” locations, and hiring and retention of some key international advisers.

The political impasse delayed/affected some key parliamentary decisions. Appointment of IHEC Commissioners and the electoral legal framework review processes are a few examples.

High IHEC staffing changes was detrimental to the capacity building efforts.

Lack of institutional memory in the Board of Commissioners. A complete change of commissioners at the end of tenure of office took the programme a few years back.

Difficulties in selection of targeted beneficiaries for project activities such as workshops and trainings.

Competing circumstances between the UN and other international organizations providing the same support to IHEC.

5. Gaps that still need to be addressed

- Need for a credible voter registry. Biometric Voter Registration is currently being implemented and this requires the technical guidance of the UN.
- Electoral legal framework review process and Parliamentary oversight role.
- IHEC’s poor external stakeholder relations, especially with CSOs and political parties.
- The establishment of Kurdistan-High Independent Electoral Commission and the need for new support, preventing overlaps and enhancing coordination between the two electoral management bodies.
- Capacities of other key electoral stakeholders such as Parliament, Civil Society Organizations, Political Parties, Religious Organizations, and key government institutions should be strengthened. This will promote inclusive participation as well as transparency and collective responsibility in the implementation of electoral processes.

6. Major Observations, Action Points and Recommendations

- The UNDP Elections project is winding down just before the EAD Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) evaluates the Iraq Electoral support programme from mid-March 2015. It is recommended that the NAM be followed closely by UNDP as it will determine the future of electoral support in Iraq.
- UNDP should seriously consider having the “Support to Electoral Processes in Iraq” as one of its strong pillars of the Governance portfolio. While significant support has been provided to the IHEC, there is a lot of support that should be provided to other key stakeholders in the electoral process such as Parliament, Civil Society Organizations, Religious Institutions, Youth Groups, Security Enforcement Agencies and the Media. UNDP should consider taking the lead in this area as UNAMI draws down.
- The UNDP Regional Elections project will continue to engage the IHEC in all regional activities. In the absence of the UNDP Elections Project, there is need to...
appoint a desk officer in UNDP who should be collaborating with UNAMI, IHEC and UNDP Regional Elections Project in Amman on all electoral related activities.

- The UNDP Project is operationally closed but the Electoral Programme is still continuing under UNAMI Electoral. It is highly recommended that UNDP still engages with UNAMI Electoral to ensure that it is not completely detached from the electoral activities and major developments in this area.
- In the absence of a UNDP Elections Project, and in the event of an electoral process in Iraq, other cross-cutting projects and initiatives such as Human Rights, Youth, Gender, Constitutional Review, Parliament, E-Governance, Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law should incorporate a strong elections component within their programming. These programmes have a lot to offer in the promotion of credible elections in Iraq.
- Following the closure of the Project, all useable assets (laptops, printer, and camera) should be transferred to existing programmes for the benefit, as determined by senior management.

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