

GPECS II



Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support II



REGIONAL COMPONENT



Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support: Arab States

June 2015

Amid an evolving political context with challenges of peace, nation building and citizenship, the Arab States continue to witness new debates on democratic reforms and institutions. The recent political transitions demonstrate the need for mutual understanding and discourse on democratic norms and principles, including electoral processes and institutions. The GPECS Regional Component for Arab States, currently funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) as the 'Regional Electoral Support Project for Middle East and North Africa' works to address this need by strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing regional electoral knowledge, and promoting a greater and more effective role of women and youth in the electoral process. The Regional Project contributes to the overall goal of strengthening electoral management bodies (EMBs) to administer electoral processes that reflect the will of the people. GPECS Arab States engages closely with electoral management bodies in the Middle East and North Africa region, the League of Arab States (LAS), and other regional and global electoral stakeholders in providing support in the following areas:

Establishing the Organization of Arab EMBs

GPECS Arab States is supporting the establishment of a regional organization of Arab EMBs. This association will enable more effective regional exchanges of ideas and best practices on electoral issues, as well as strengthen linkages between regional activities and country priorities, and support the development and implementation of South-South exchanges. The Organization of Arab EMBs is set to be launched in June 2015 with a secretariat based in Amman, Jordan. Similar EMB networks already exist in Europe, Africa, South Asia, and East Asia, and provide a forum for collaboration, problem solving and visibility

to the EMBs. Following a number of supported initiatives aimed at encouraging regional cooperation, electoral management bodies from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine and Yemen came together to form a preparatory committee to work towards the establishment of the regional organization. In addition to finalizing a charter and related bylaws for the organization, the preparatory committee is also focused on operationalizing the organization during a six month interim period. UNDP will continue to support the organization during the interim period and work towards making it fully functional with a view towards its long-term sustainability. GPECS Arab States will also support the organization in developing a strategy and action plan that takes forward the overall goals of enhancing capacity of EMBs through cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Strengthening Electoral Capacities

Through trainings, conferences and workshops, GPECS Arab States enhances the capacity of electoral stakeholders on internationally accepted principles of democracy and good electoral practice. For example, using the BRIDGE training curriculum, 23 participants from the Arab States have already gained the confidence, the necessary knowledge and the required skills to become semi-accredited facilitators. It has also contributed to enhancing the capacity of the League of Arab States, which took a policy decision to adopt the BRIDGE curriculum for its own programs. Following the BRIDGE Training of the Facilitators, the semi-accredited facilitators conducted subsequent trainings in their respective organizations using the BRIDGE modules. This growing pool of electoral expertise in the electoral institutions is expected to contribute to the building and maintaining of a sustainable electoral culture in the region.



Enhancing Electoral Knowledge

GPECS Arab States supports the development of knowledge products specifically designed for the region as well as making global knowledge products available in Arabic. As an example of this type of work, GPECS developed the first Arabic lexicon of election terminology. In regard to this achievement, further activities, focused on expanding the use of the reference material are being planned as well as a smart phone app, an updated and extended version of the written publication, and potentially short-educational films are foreseen within the framework of GPECS II.

Building Partnerships: League of Arab States & Others

Recognizing the importance of working together with partners to enhance democratic practices in the region, GPECS Arab States, jointly with the UN's Electoral Assistance Division (EAD), partners with the League of Arab States (LAS) to enhance its capacity in electoral assistance and conduct joint programs on elections. Through this partnership, GPECS has supported LAS in carrying out BRIDGE trainings, developing a pool of accredited BRIDGE facilitators, as well as taking part in regional and international conferences. In addition, it has also reached out to Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE), a renowned electoral institute that brings together the experiences of Latin America on elections and engages with EMBs from around the world to share experiences with the Arab States and impart knowledge on electoral topics. To enhance capacity on elections in the Arab States and promote South-South cooperation, GPECS has established an understanding with INE to provide opportunities for exchanges, experience sharing forums and trainings through a two year agreement; this MOU enables the exposure of the region to the experiences, challenges and best practices of other regions, particularly Latin America offers historical and political similarities with the Arab States. Some of the activities to be undertaken with INE include a technical workshop bringing Arab EMBs together to share voter registration practices in the region and exposing them to the similar experiences and lessons learned of Latin America. Other areas of engagement include supporting a session on Arab States at the annual Democracy Forum where EMBs from Latin America and other regions come to exchange ideas and experiences related to the electoral cycle.

Promoting the Participation of Women and Youth

Promoting the participation of women and youth in electoral processes is a key priority area of GPECS Arab States; the foundation for this support has been established through initiating activities and partnerships designed to promote a regional strategy on enhancing women and youth participation throughout the electoral cycle. GPECS Arab States supports trainings, workshops and forums, and raises awareness on the role and importance of women and youth in electoral processes as voters, candidates and electoral administrators. These activities not only enhance capacity of participants taking part but it also encourage the coming together of women and youth groups to identify the needs and strategies for taking forward the gender and youth agendas in the Arab States. Some of the already implemented activities have led to a set of recommendations that will guide the project's implementation in 2015. GPECS Arab States has supported the coming together and formation of a network of women constitution makers from the Arab States to share experiences, exchange ideas and lessons learned on enhancing women's roles in constitution making processes. GPECS is also putting in place a gender quota, to be implemented in 2015, throughout all its activities, ensuring at least 30% representation of women in all trainings, workshops, conference and other activities.

Providing Policy Advice and Country Office Support

In addition to the above activities, GPECS Arab States also prioritizes support to UNDP country offices through quality advisory services. Support to country offices includes conducting strategy review and need assessment missions, contributing to policy briefs, research papers, and the codification of lessons learned. In addition, to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration between UNDP country offices, GPECS Arab States organizes annual electoral team meetings to discuss relevant electoral topics, share information and jointly identify, create and share knowledge relevant to solving challenges faced in the region. It also supports distilling knowledge and experience into usable products and tools, collecting and disseminating them within the region.