Background

With 730 million voters spread over 35 states and Union Territories, India's voter base is larger than the voter base of the US, Europe and Australia combined. The electoral process of India managed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) remains unparalleled in the world given the numbers, the geographic spread and the organizational logistics involved. Major strengths of India's electoral process include the use of ICTs (electronic voting machines) and zero error results available within a few hours. These results have led to a demand for sharing of experiences and best practices with other developing countries.

At the same time, for democracy to represent the actual will of the people, elections should be inclusive, representing the participation of people from all strata of the society. Although concerted efforts by ECI and other bodies have succeeded in increasing the voter participation significantly, further action needs to be taken to enable the electoral system to reflect the immense diversity of the country and in order to achieve stronger participation of women legislators.

In 2011, UNDP initiated a partnership with the ECI to support and promote the newly established India International Institute on Democracy and Electoral Management (IIIDEM) as a training and resource centre to meet the demand of capacity development of electoral management from other countries.

As part of the partnership, on 11 October 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between ECI and UNDP to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the field of election management in the context of South-South cooperation.
About the project

The project ‘Strengthening Partnerships for Empowered Electoral Democracy’ aims to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the field of election management and administration with other developing countries through ECI.

The objectives of the project include-
- Promoting exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise in the field of electoral management and administration
- Assisting in the identification of capacity needs with a focus on strengthening electoral systems and democratic institutions and designing learning and exchange programmes
- Facilitating relationships with other electoral authorities and organizations

Developments so far

- Facilitated the visit of representatives from the Election Commissions of 20 countries to witness management of India’s 2014 national elections
- Facilitated the visit of delegates from seven countries from Africa and the Middle East during assembly elections of November 2013 to enable them to better understand India’s electoral processes
- ECI participation in the Electoral Cycle Regional Community of Practice meetings in Cairo and Manila enabled sharing of experiences with participating Asian and Arab countries on issues related to election management bodies, reform and management
- Supported participation of ECI in a seminar on Electoral Management Bodies and Democratic Reform in Mexico in Sept 2011 and in South Asia Regional Conference on Women’s Political Leadership in Bangladesh in Oct 2011
- Facilitated participation of ECI in a workshop on ‘Information Technology and Elections Management: Informed Decisions for Sustainable Outcomes’ that took place from 5 to 9 March 2012 in Mombasa, Kenya. The workshop provided a forum to ECI to share experiences and learning with African countries on the use of Electronic Voting Machines for elections
- Provided support to the newly established India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) at ECI in order to make it a premier training resource center that will meet the demand of capacity development on election management from other countries. UNDP supported the training of election management body officials of Maldives and Nepal in 2012 at IIIDEM and supported the setting up of a library resource center
- Facilitated the first ever consultation with civil society organizations and the Election Commission of India that enabled collaboration between ECI and CSOs. Partnerships with CSOs is crucial in making electoral processes more inclusive for marginalized groups through voter education and awareness programmes
- To advocate a stronger focus on South-South cooperation in September 2013, UNDP facilitated participation of senior ECI officials to Australia for a consultation with the Australian Electoral Commission in developing a strategy to address problems relating to urban registration and urban apathy in Electoral process
- Facilitated participation of ECI to attend the 6th Global Electoral Organization Conference in Seoul, Korea in Oct 2013

Looking to the future

- Research and advocacy for better election management
- Strengthening training at India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management
- South-South exchange of experiences on election management
- Advocacy for enhanced women participation in electoral democracy
- Advocacy for increase in electoral participation with focus on inclusion

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