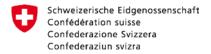**Learning Project on Election Support**

Promoting democratic practices in election processes

By
Didier Péclard
and
Lukas Affentranger
Swisspeace

February 2012

Synthesis and evaluation report.

0. Introduction

Elections are a crucial element of democratization processes. Since the 1990s international support for election processes has rapidly increased. Elections have become part of the standard mechanisms supported by the international community, especially in post-conflict contexts, and they are generally considered a cornerstone in the process of building strong, legitimate and accountable political institutions. However, as many examples have shown in recent years, the conflict potential of elections is important. Elections can either (re-)ignite dormant conflicts, open up new arenas for violent confrontation, or lead to a return to war. Thus, "troubled elections" have increased in recent years. This led policy and donor circles to question the established practices and the OECD is in a process of working out "Principles on International Elections Assistance".

SDC, in particular in the framework of its country cooperation strategies, also supports democratic institutions and processes. The present evaluation report is part of the "Learning Project on SDCs' good practice on promoting democratic practices in election processes" which aims to learn from experiences made by SDC COOFs in order to produce recommendations on how SDC can best use its comparative advantages in support to democratic processes. The primary objectives of this document are to highlight the comparative advantages of SDC interventions and elaborate synergies under a "whole of government approach" with other Swiss institutions active in the field of election support, in particular PD IV.

This evaluation report is divided into three parts. Part one offers a synthesis of the experiences made by SDC in election assistance programmes in five different countries based on an internal survey. In the second section the lessons learned from the COOFs experiences will be compared with OECD/DAC "Draft principles on International Elections Assistance" (March 2010) in order to put forward niches in which the SDC has comparative advantages and could play a leading role in the future. The last part elaborates potentials for synergies with PD IV.

1. Synthesis of the Survey

This section synthesizes the results of a survey conducted with SDC experience carriers in COOFs (in Mozambique, Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bangladesh and Pakistan). It aims to show what approaches have been successful and what practices should not be repeated. The section follows the original structure of the questionnaires. One questionnaire was filled in each country.

1. **(Niche-) Strategies based on SDC's comparative advantages in the partner country**

   ➤ Long term commitment and long term experience allow to build in-house experience/capacity and to develop mutual trust with national NGOs. Further, this allows establishing good personal relations with civil society representatives

   ➤ SDC programmes are part of the local NGO network. Ground realities are taken into account when technical inputs are made

   ➤ Focus on domestic observation (by fostering collaboration between national NGOs and facilitating partnerships with experienced organizations; training of journalists)

   ➤ SDC intervenes on different levels (from community to state). Some COOFs have also focussed on local level processes which are rather neglected by the international community

   ➤ All interventions are facilitated by the fact that SDC has a high credibility and good reputation as neutral and free cooperation

   ➤ Providing civic education has proven to be a success. Most of all concentrating on marginalized groups and fostering women empowerment

   ➤ Only some SDC election support programmes are integrated parts of the respective SDC Country Strategies

2. **Dealing with risks**

   ➤ Wide and diverse networks of contacts allow analyses of political situations according to first hand information (and can even make SDC a source for other stakeholders); institutional experience can provide SDC a leading role in political dialogue processes

   ➤ Union or close collaboration between SDC and embassy has proved to be efficient (embassy concerned with political matters and information exchange, SDC with technical issues): gives room for permanent cross-feeding

   ➤ UNDP seems to have difficulties to manage and prioritize risks and does not have the sufficient competence (small sample)

3. **Partnerships and coordination; Whole of Government Approach**

   ➤ In contrast to some larger donors, SDC is not perceived by local stakeholders to follow hidden agendas

   ➤ By long experience a vast network of formal and informal contacts and interaction with local actors could be established

   ➤ Alliances should be made with international partners who have a good track record and intimate knowledge of the local context, independence and willingness to engage with local stakeholders

- To be partners of SDC, national partners should be independent and have some weight in the political agenda
- UNDP coordination is not always up to expectation. There is a lack of transparency, capacity building and trust
- International community is not pushing constitutional reforms which have been initiated by local actors

4. Thematic, methodological, and conceptual support, partners' dialogue, backstopping

- Some COOFs can act as a resource for other donors to conceptualize support because of staff member with experience of support programmes to previous electoral processes in the local context
- Collaboration with COOFs who already went through similar processes, other donors, national and international NGOs, resource centres and external consultants
- Since elections are a highly politicised issue political support, rather than technical, was demanded

5. Dealing with SDC Head Office (information, communication)

- Inputs of the Head Office mainly at the credit/design proposal stage
- PDIV involved in conceptualization and implementation of electoral support and in political analyses

6. Lessons learned

- Due to long term commitment some COOFs have an exceptional level of thematic experience in house (institutional memory)
- More involvement of local organizations should be encouraged in order to reach more sustainability and capacity building. The involvement of local organizations in the domestic election observation network was a success story
- SDC has the potential and capacity to support innovative processes like Parallel Vote Tabulation[1] by national observers
- Impact within UN-coordinated multi-donor funds rather limited. UNDP is unable to manage everything. It is not recommendable to have all election assistance activities under one project and basket fund
- It is suggested to give bilateral support, especially on civic education and empowerment

---

[1] Parallel Vote Tabulation is an election observation methodology used for independent verification of election results.

➢ High and lasting impact was observed after supporting professionalization of electoral observation by creating the conditions for nation-wide timely independent reporting

In short, the **main strengths of the SDC** are:

➢ **Long term commitment** that allows the building of institutional memory and intimate knowledge of the local context
➢ Strong **involvement** of national actors **on all levels**
➢ **High credibility**.

Those strengths predestine SDC to be active in the **following niches**:

➢ Focus on **local election processes**;
➢ Focus on **civic education** and **gender issues**;
➢ Focus on enabling **local observation and reporting**.

2. SDC practices in the international policy context

The international community agrees that supporting democracy is an important undertaking and the efforts in this area have multiplied since the 1990s. In this process, assisting elections is a crucial element. But electoral processes are complex, difficult and risky – most of all in the context of fragile and post-conflict contexts. In recent years, the number of "troubled" elections has multiplied, some of which resulted in outbursts of violence, as was the case in Kenya in 2007/8, while in other cases, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, elections ended in institutional and political deadlocks despite the fact that they apparently respected international standards in terms of transparency and organisation. This has led the donor community to look for new strategies on how to make elections processes assistance more effective and less conflict prone. As International IDEA has put it: "There is a clear need for a more strategic approach, integrating electoral support with the long-term need for sustainable democratic progress as a cornerstone of peace, security, political stability and socio-economic development."[2]

The OECD/DAC is currently in a process of working out "Principles on International Election Assistance" on which the "major funders and implementers of international election assistance" agree. This section presents the (draft) principles of OECED/DAC

---

[2] International IDEA (undated): Protecting and Promoting the Integrity of the Electoral Process. A joint initiative between International IDEA and the Kofi Annan Foundation. Concept Note. p. 2.

and shows how the good practices and strategies of SDC as outlined in the survey presented above match with the good practices accepted by the international community.

> **Electoral Cycle Approach**. This approach is currently promoted by international key policy makers in the field of election assistance (OECD/DAC, EC, UN, International IDEA, etc.). Characteristics for that approach: not event-driven, no election-day focus but more comprehensive, long-term outlook, support of different interrelated processes from the constitutional framework to post-election complaints procedures or conflict mitigation/resolution. According to this approach, programmes should be planned and implemented across the full length of the electoral cycle and across multiple cycles. The long term commitment of SDC in the countries where it has activities of election support is an important starting point for such an approach.

> OECD/DAC stresses the importance to **take the local context seriously**. Democracy must be reflective of history, values and culture of the society in which it is developed. Analysis of the power dynamics and political constraints that shape the electoral environment are crucial in conducting election aid efforts. This again clearly speaks in favour of long-term presence and deep knowledge of local political context.

> In a similar direction goes the appeal to recognize the **important role regional organizations can play**. Elections assistance interventions should be largely coordinated and complemented with such organizations. This is probably a potential area of collaboration between SDC and other political divisions.

> **Potential electoral and post-electoral violence** should be given greater attention in the design and implementation of electoral aid interventions. Thus the analytical tools for assessing electoral risks should be strengthened and the assessments should be followed-up. Whereas the SDC has the local networks that are essential to provide the basic information required for assessing conflict risks linked to elections, it may gain from collaboration with the political divisions and with other actors specialised in early warning for the development of such tools.

> **Electoral aid should not be misused**, that is it should not be employed to support other policy aims than the electoral support such as the development of good relationships with partner governments, irrespective of their stand on elections and democratisation. The fact that SDC is generally not perceived to follow hidden agendas which would undermine the credibility of any intervention is a case in point here. Nevertheless, there may be tensions between the necessity for development actors to establish trust and long lasting relationships with the authorities of a particular country and the necessity to engage with all political actors in an electoral cycle, including the opposition. This issue requires particular attention.

> 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. This also includes pushing toward greater normative consistency in responding to flawed elections. For reaching those aims, tight collaboration between SDC COOFs and the Swiss embassies of the

respective countries may be crucial. Further, it facilitates a recommended shift from mere technical to more policy-oriented conception of elections assistance.

➢ The electoral process should be **owned not just by partner governments but by a broader political society**. Hence, as SDC is partially doing already, it is important to work with as many domestic institutions and sectors as possible and to take measures which add to "democracy support" like assistance to political party development, legislative strengthening, media assistance and civic education. The latter point, which may be a niche for SDC interventions, is especially important in order to emphasize citizens understanding of the significance of elections in order to increase accountability. All COOFs should integrate election assistance into their Country Strategies and connect them with other activities relating to supporting accountable governance at all levels.

➢ Another area of SDC experience promoted by the OECD/DAC guidelines is the **involvement not only in national but also in local elections**. The move of international donors out of state capitals is also highly appreciated by civil society organisations.

➢ It is explicitly recommended by the OECD/DAC that election aid providers "**do more to incorporate a full gender dimension in elections assistance**, especially concerning candidate selection and voter participation." This an area where SDC already has important experiences, and a niche to be further developed, whenever necessary in collaboration with specialised entities and organisations both on the ground and in Switzerland.

➢ Despite the fact that SDC is looking for niches for interventions and made difficult experiences with basket funding it **should not neglect coordination**, communication and collaboration with other relevant aid providers, especially UNDP. As Thomas Carothers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) puts it, "to search for distinctive niches rather than broad coordination" can also be an obstacle to implementation of the electoral cycle approach.[3]

3. Differences, complementarities and synergies between Swiss actors (SDC and PDIV)

The work that the SDC has been conducting in electoral support is part of wider efforts by Swiss actors to support democratization processes through electoral assistance. This last section sketches out the main particularities of SDC and PDIV electoral assistance work, their differences in approach and concrete initiatives, as well as existing and potential synergies. It is based on existing document as well as on discussions with Kuno Schläffli and Anne Gloor, in charge of elections support at the PDIV.

3.1. Current division of labour between SDC and Political Division IV[4]

---

[3] T. Carothers, "International Elections Assistance: Context, Challenges, and Possible Strategic Principles A Discussion Paper for the March 1, 2010 OECD DAC Network on Governance First Roundtable on International Support for Elections."

[4] Source : A. Gloor, 'Elections and conflict in Africa', presentation, Swiss Ambassadors' conference 2010.

a. SDC (via COOFs)

➢ Promotion of Women's participation in electoral processes and as candidates;

➢ Civic education as a long term task;

➢ Engagement in harmonized (with local authorities) preparation and conceptualization and donors' coordination;

➢ Financial contribution to organization of elections (e.g. voter's registration);

➢ Local/national monitoring, strengthening role of civil society, of the Media and of civil rights organisations.

b. Political Division IV

➢ Election observation and support through experts (on average 15 missions per year);

➢ Prevention of conflicts around elections (incl. conflict analysis, preventive measures, mediation, training);

➢ Election support in country/regional programs.

3.2. Synergies and complementarities

One of the main challenges to the international community in terms of elections support is to move from an election-day focus to a broader approach that takes into account the full electoral cycle. This requires a shift from the technical mechanisms of elections to the general political context within which they are framed. This shift also requires a combination of long-term engagement both at the grassroots (civic education, promotion of women, focus on local governance, etc) and at the national level (constitutional and legal framework, electoral system and electoral bodies, post-election evaluation etc.), with short-time concrete measures of election support (observation and monitoring, technical and logistical support, voting operations and counting, etc.).

In other words, the implementation of the electoral approach will make election support more comprehensive and more complex, with a mix of different kinds of competencies. It is therefore clear that one institution or one division within a ministry cannot have all the experience, know-how and competencies required. Existing synergies must be reinforced, and new synergies developed. On the limited basis of the present evaluation mandate, the following preliminary points and suggestions can be made.

➢ SDC and PD IV seem to share a common perspective on election support in terms of support throughout the electoral cycle and, whenever possible, through various electoral cycles. This is a good basis for synergies, as the experience in

Mozambique showed, where PD IV and SDC directly collaborated in an assistance programme over several years.

➢ These synergies should be built on the particularities of both institutions and on the complementarities of their work. SDC has in that sense a number of comparative advantages:

  o Long-term involvement in one single context;
  o Wide networks of governmental and non-governmental partner organisations on the spot;
  o Deep knowledge of the local political context and experience in local governance programmes;
  o High credibility;
  o Focus on elections at the local level;
  o Comparatively (to PD IV) more important financial means to invest in bi- and multi-lateral election support.

➢ On its part, PD IV can offer:

  o Experience with international election observation;
  o Know-how in conflict prevention and management in the field of elections;
  o Distance to local context that may facilitate contact with all actors concerned by election cycle, including opposition parties, former rebel movements, etc.
  o Link to other political divisions, as well as to other relevant Swiss actors in the field of election support

Clearly the specificities of both institutions seem complementary, and the risk of overlap limited. In particular, the combination of long-term presence on the ground (SDC) and the capacity to provide the short term technical and political support needed in order to organise elections (PD IV) seems promising. Another important area of complementarities is SDC's focus on societal networks, grassroots governance and long-term democratisation processes on the one hand, and, on the other hand, PD IV's political expertise in conflict prevention. This speaks for an integrated strategy towards elections and election support. One option to discuss could be the creation of a **Swiss election support pool**, where all relevant actors could meet, exchange on respective experiences, and elaborate common objectives and strategies. This pool could include representatives of SDC, PD IV, PDs I-III, representatives of cantonal and federal bodies active in contact with foreign delegation, as well as academics.

However important it is to provide efficient, credible and comprehensive election support, one important aspect should not be left out. The electoral cycle approach imply that elections are but one aspect, one moment, albeit a very important one, in long historical processes of institutional, political and social change. In other words, reflection on elections should be developed in connection with reflection on wider processes of state formation which, as another recent OECD/DAC report[5] argues, are

---

[5] OECD/DAC, International Support to Statebuilding in Situations of Fragility and Conflict, September 2010

essentially **political** processes (rather than the result of political and social engineering) and primarily the result of **endogenous** historical and political dynamics. This means that outside interventions, be it through elections support, can only have a limited impact on political transformations of the state.

Bern, 28 February 2011

swisspeace

Dr. Didier Péclard
Head of Statehood & Conflict Program
didier.peclard@swisspeace.ch

Lukas Affentranger
Research Assistant
lukas.affentranger@swisspeace.ch