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Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Electoral Assistance

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Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Foreword by the EBA

In 2019, the government of Sweden launched its Drive for Democracy. The aim is to counter the increasing authoritarian tendencies that mean that previous democratic achievements are lost or challenged. The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2020 is down to levels last found around 1990, according to the V-Dem institute. No less than 68 percent of the world's population currently live in autocracies, while a 'third wave of autocratization' accelerates.

Sweden's Drive for Democracy shall permeate all parts of its foreign policy. In particular, it builds on a legacy of Swedish Democracy Assistance. Democracy aid has formed part of the Swedish development cooperation for decades. A key element of this assistance has been, and is, support to elections. While elections are not sufficient to bring democracy, the element of choice and participation are fundamental preconditions for the long-term endeavours to build democratic societies.

However, our knowledge about what constitute good practice in Election Assistance has been limited, not least since such support is given both to democratic and autocratic partner countries.

In an attempt to tap a hitherto mostly untapped source of knowledge, a team of authors from International IDEA set out to investigate the insights, perspectives and views of practitioners in the field of Election Assistance. The ethics and norms of this corps of mainly civil servants and civil society agents, together with an infrastructure of professionally run election management bodies and peer-to-peer networks, constitute a source of soft power in the pursuit of democratisation. However, there turns out to be a gap between normative principles for conducting Election Assistance and the practice in the field.

This report dwells on the sources and potential causes of this gap, and what may be done to overcome it in times of increasingly contested election processes.

It is our hope that this report may benefit the design and implementation of future Swedish ODA in the field of Election Assistance. It may hopefully also be of use in the process of further developing international norms around election processes.

The study has been accompanied by a reference group that has vividly engaged with the team. The reference group has been chaired by me. However, the authors are solely responsible for the content of the report.

Gothenburg, November 2021

Helena Lindholm

Sammanfattning

Inledning

Valstöd syftar till att stödja demokratisk utveckling genom att främja deltagande, stärka centrala institutioner och säkra legitimitet för en tillträdande regering. Idealt leder detta i sin tur till att andra utvecklingsmål uppfylls inom ekonomi och hälsa, medborgares demokratiska förväntningar samt nationell och regional stabilitet. Mot den bakgrunden har stöd till valprocesser varit en integrerad del av internationellt utvecklingssamarbete och utrikespolitik.

Valstödets utformning har förändrats avsevärt över årtionden – och det fortsätter att förändras. Till en början fungerade det som stöd för länder som övergick från kolonialism till självständighet, från auktoritärt styre till demokrati, från krig till fred eller för att övervinna djupa politiska kriser och nå stabilitet. Medan detta tidiga valstöd inriktades på vad som sker på valdagen, så har senare tiders stöd utvecklats till att täcka in olika aspekter på enskilda eller multipla cykler av val. Denna valcykel-ansats omfattar en lång rad system, processer och beteenden som exempelvis bygga kapacitet hos valstödsnämnder, utforma lagliga ramverk och främja inkluderande deltagande i valprocesser.

Maktpolitik, korruption, brist på ansvarsutkrävande och djupt rotad splittring i samhällen har gjort att förhoppningar om ett snabbt införande av demokratisk infrastruktur kommit på skam. Men trots sådan tillnyktring har valprocesser fortsatt stor betydelse. Långsiktigt utvecklingsarbete, livskraftiga institutioner, lagar och processer är garanter för att demokratins mekanismer fungerar och att återhämtning från demokratiska bakslag är möjlig. På kortare sikt har val, deras genomförande och utfall, betydelse för utrikespolitiken

och internationella relationer. Ett godtagbart valresultat ger ett minimum av legitimitet – tillräckligt för att en inkommande regering kan sätta igång med att genomföra det mandat de fått av medborgarna. Ett omtvistat valresultat kan leda till inhemsk instabilitet likväl som geopolitisk osäkerhet. Dessa höga insatser förklarar varför valstöd förblir utrikespolitiskt relevant världen över.

För Sverige är det andra motiv än geopolitik som formar utvecklings- och utrikespolitiken. Med dess värderingsdrivna "Demokrati-satsning" (UD, 2019), formulerar Sverige en bred agenda för att undersöka var och varför utrymmet för det civila samhället krymper eller stängs. Den rättighetsbaserade ansats som ligger till grund för satsningen ser demokrati som ett mål i sig att värna och främja. Sverige sätter också ett meningsfullt folkligt deltagande främst när det gäller effektiviteten i valstöd.

Valstöd har hittills gett blandade resultat. I vissa länder – Sydafrika, Namibia, Bosnien och Herzegovina, Tunisien – har valstödet bidragit till övergång från auktoritära till demokratiska system, eller från krig till fred. I andra länder – Libyen, Myanmar, Kambodja, Jemen och Haiti – har de demokratiska framgångarna blivit kortlivade. I många fall utgör valstöd en komplex och omtvistad medelväg mellan auktoritära förhållningssätt och de som strävar efter demokratiskt styre. Denna rapport försöker svara på flera grundläggande frågor. Vad vet vi om hur effektivt valstöd är? Vilka är de främsta hindren för valstöd att uppnå lyckade och hållbara resultat? Vilka former och ansatser kring valstöd har större möjlighet att uppnå demokratiska målsättningar?

Forskningssteg och resultat

Det empiriska underlaget för slutsatser kring valstödets effektivitet är splittrat. Den vanligaste dokumentationen består av utvärderingar av insatser i enskilda länder över en enda valcykel. Det finns också få akademiska studier som givit sig i kast med att studera valstöd på något sammanhållet vis. Detta leder till en brist på systematisk och tillförlitlig information om hur effektivt valstöd är (Judith 2012; Borzyskowski 2016; Lührmann 2016, 2019). För att bygga en kunskapsbas, dra slutsatser och ge rekommendationer har denna studie designats för att engagera praktiker som är verksamma inom valstöd.

Litteratur förankrad i, och sprungen ur, praktiska tillämpningar av valstöd ger ramarna för studien, medan praktikers reflektioner – insamlade genom enkäter, intervjuer och fokusgrupps-intervjuer – ger insikter i valstödets policy och praktik över åren. Slutsatser och rekommendationer bygger på analys av dessa öppna och ingående diskussioner.

Deltagande ansatser är inte ovanliga i policy-inriktade studier och utvärderingar. Dess värde har framhållits av flera forskare. Det har till exempel argumenterats att när intressenter deltar kan det ge "bättre data, bättre förståelse av data, mer relevanta rekommendationer och en bättre användning av resultaten." (Guijt, 2014:2). Intressenters deltagande kan även ge en kunskapsbas som kan stärka legitimitet och känslighet i policy och interventioner (Torrance, 2011, Griggs and Howart, 2012), samt främja en förbättrad förståelse av "vad det är med detta … som fungerar för vem och under vilka förutsättningar?" (Pawson et al., 2005).

Samtidigt inser vi som författare att studiens ansats, med ett fokus på att fånga praktikers uppfattningar, leder till en risk att slutsatser och lärdomar huvudsakligen återspeglar deras uppfattningar och

perspektiv, särskilt då författarna själva är verksamma inom valstöd. Dock har forskarteamet satts samman utifrån en medveten strävan att göra en aktions-inriktad analys, grundad på rigorösa och objektiva analytiska kategorier hämtade från kvalitativ forskning. Denna ansats beskrivs och diskuteras ytterligare i rapportens metodavsnitt. Underlag till den kunskap som presenteras i rapporten finns tillgänglig i appendix och i ytterligare dokumentation vid förfrågan. Författarnas egna bedömningar är möjliga att spåra i texten.

Sammanställning av principer för valstöd

Granskning av över 80 policydokument och utvärderingar gav insikter kring dynamik och svårigheter i genomförandet av insatser för valstöd. Studier av akademisk litteratur var avgörande för att identifiera problem, definiera och tillämpa relevanta metoder och på så vis placera lärdomar i ett bredare utvecklings-sammanhang.

Under perioden 2000 till 2014 genomfördes en rad övningar för att sammanställa lärdomar, och undersöka de brister i hållbarhet och de höga kostnader som präglat många tidiga insatser för valstöd. Som en följd av detta formulerades flera uppsättningar av principer, vars syfte var att identifiera hinder för effektivt valstöd och att ge rekommendationer för att övervinna dem. Sådana principer utvecklades av EU, Sida, brittiska biståndsmyndigheten DfID, FN och OECD-DAC.

Rapporten systematiserar dessa överlappande principer genom att gruppera dem i 15 projekt- respektive kontext-relaterade principer:

Projekt-relaterade principer	Kontext-relaterade principer
• Lokalt ägarskap och empowerment	• Kontext-kännedom
• Valcykel-ansats	• Samordning med diplomatiska insatser
• Kvinnors deltagande	• Harmonisering och anpassning
• Inkludera marginaliserade grupper	• Behandla demokratiska svagheter
• Hantera risker i samband med val	• Regionala organisationers roller
• Agerande på flera nivåer (nationell och lokal)	• Hantering av snedvridna valprocesser
• Kopplingar till valobservation	• Timing och sekvensering av valstödsinsatser
• Uppföljning och utvärdering	

I denna rapport sammanfattar vi dessa som "Valstöds-principer". Detta normativa ramverk har fungerat som vägledning kring valstöd för samtliga större givare och internationella genomförare. Valstöds-principerna omfattar begrepp som lokalt ägarskap, empowerment och inkludering. Rapporten bekräftar att dessa principer fortfarande är avgörande för att nå effektivitet i valstödsinsatser.

Litteraturgenomgången visar på en kraftig diskrepans mellan valstöds-principerna och tillämpningen av dem i praktiken. Retoriken skiljer sig från praktiken när det kommer till utformning, leverans och utvärdering av principerna i fält. Denna klyfta motiverar fokus på aktörer och genomförare: Är dessa etablerade och överenskomna principer verkligen fortfarande giltiga? I så fall, är de möjliga att förverkliga? Om de inte är det – vilka är de viktigaste hindren? Och slutligen, vilka handlingsvägar kan användas för att försäkra att valstöds-principer också blir tillämpade i praktiken?

Mellan principer och praktik

En enkätundersökning kastade ljus över diskrepansen mellan principer och praktik genom att kartlägga praktikers uppfattningar om detta samspel. Svaren visar att principerna fortsatt ses som relevanta, men de svarande hade olika uppfattningar om vilka principer som är viktigast. Exempelvis poängterade aktörer på nationell nivå betydelsen av 'brett deltagande', medan utförare av valstöd istället höll fram 'stabila och trovärdiga valmyndigheter' som viktigast. Representanter för givarländer poängterade 'acceptansen för valresultat' som viktigast. Som helhet visar svaren att genomförande av valvstöd kräver erkännande och inkluderande av olika perspektiv, intressen och målsättningar.

Intervjuer och gruppdiskussioner syftade till att ytterligare undersöka avståndet mellan principer och praktik genom att dra på praktikers yrkesmässiga erfarenheter och reflektioner kring framgång, underlättande faktorer och utmaningar. Syftet var inte att utvärdera resultaten av dess praktikers arbete, utan att förstå vad hindren för genomförande av valstöds-principerna består i, vad som tycks fungera bättre och vilka lärdomar som kan dras.

De framsteg som konstaterats tenderar att röra sig på en övergripande nivå och vara kumulativa, snarare än kopplade till enskilda projekt och händelser. Valstöd har haft stor betydelse för att gradvis konsolidera demokratiska system över de senaste fyrtio åren. Framstegen handlar om stärkta reglerande ramverk, kompetenta valmyndigheter samt civilsamhällsorganisationer som förmår utkräva ansvar av relevanta institutioner. Dessa framsteg har också varit viktiga byggstenar för demokratiska landvinningar inom ramen för bredare freds- och statsbyggnads-ansträngningar. På regional och global nivå syns framsteg i form av ett antal olika kunskaps-produkter och praktiska redskap för professionell

utveckling i organiserandet av valprocesser, främjandet av regionala och globala nätverk och tillhandahållande av specifik rådgivning – vilket bidragit till demokratiska övergångar.

Centrala hindrande faktorer har bland annat varit motstridiga motiv och mål bland olika aktörer inblandade i valstöds-processer, otillräckliga metoder för genomförande, dåligt anpassade finansieringsformer och miljöer motsträviga mot reformer på grund av bristande politisk vilja. Ett centralt tema var timingen av valstödsinsatser, vilket visar att förseningar i genomförande och brist på hållbarhet fortfarande är faktorer som präglar valstödsprocesser.

Systematiska hinder för genomförande

En bredare analys lyfter fram centrala frågor som behöver hanteras för att valstöd ska vara effektivt på nationell, regional och global nivå.

Som visats ovan bedöms valstöds-princierna vara relevanta och viktiga. Empiriskt stöd finns för att insatser som tillämpat dessa principer har nått framgångar. När principerna å andra sidan inte har åtföljts har resultaten blivit sämre. Exempel på detta beskrivs i fallstudie-boxar löpande genom rapporten.

Vad styr en god tillämpning av principerna i praktiken? Symptomatiskt nog saknades i stor utsträckning systematiska ansatser för att förankra valstödsprinciperna i utformningen av program eller genomförande. De intressenter som tillfrågats hade också ofta svårigheter att dra sig till minnes var de fått kunskap om principerna från, detta trots att en global övning för att sprida kunskap om principerna genomfördes så sent som 2014.

Studier av valstödets olika mekanismer visade på tre systematiska utmaningar: *Bristande spridning av kunskap* och lärdomar; *Dysfunktionella relationer* som en del av valstödsprocesser; Oförmåga att svara upp mot ett *föränderligt valstöds-landskap*.

Vad gäller skapande och delande av *kunskap* finner vi en bred kunskap om "vad valstöd bör göra" och om "hur valstöd bör genomföras". De främsta hindren mot att omsätta principen[1] i verkligheten gäller hög personalomsättning bland aktörer, vilket leder till att institutionellt minne och goda rutiner går förlorade, brist på lärande genom eftervals-analyser, brist på politisk vilja och bredare motsträvighet, eller att mål på en högre nivå, exempelvis fredsbyggande, ges företräde gentemot valstöds-principerna.

Exempel på hinder och problem med att översätta principer till praktik återfinns på alla nivåer av valstöds-processer. På givarsidan leder bristande expertkunskaper, svagt institutionellt minne, i samspel med korta tidsramar och hög personalomsättning, till att oerfarna handläggare ges ansvar för komplexa och riskfyllda planerings- och finansierings-beslut. För nationella partners och genomförare av valstödsinsatser består hindren oftare i svårigheter att knyta bredare kunskap om det berörda samhället med specifik kunskap om valstöd (vilken typ av stöd finns tillgänglig och är relevant?). Vidare har ryckighet i genomförande förhindrat en professionell utveckling och spridande av kunskap över tid. När det gäller hög-profilerade valprocesser, blir de långsiktiga principerna ofta underordnade mer prioriterade utrikespolitiska mål, som exempelvis migration, ekonomiska mål eller fredsbyggande. Av detta skäl framträdde frågan om relationer mellan konkurrerande intressen som en andra övergripande förklaring bakom gapet mellan principer och praktik i valstöd.

"*Dysfunktionlla relationer*" framstår som en nyckelfråga. Brist på tillit och svårigheter att hålla kommunikationskanaler öppna försvårar möjligheter att navigera i laddade situationer med många olika

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[1] Genomgående i rapporten använder vi dessa *valstöds-principer* som sammanfattande beskrivning av den gemensamt omfattade förståelsen av hur valstöd bör genomföras.

intressenter och komplexa operationer. Valstödsexperter pekade på vikten av att ha tillräckligt med tid och möjligheter att bygga fungerande relationer i planering och genomförande av valstöds-insatser.

Inom givarländer kan det finnas olika och divergerande intressen som behöver förenas; valstöd kan handla om handelsintressen (ex. lönsamma kontrakt för val-utrustningar), utrikespolitiska motiv eller utvecklingsmål. Dessa intressen kan kollidera ifall det saknas mekanismer för samordning och för att nå en gemensam vision. På grund av konkurrens kan genomförare av valstöd låta bli att dela med sig av information eller låta bli att samarbeta, vilket kan leda till dubbelarbete, att saker faller mellan stolar och att situationen för nationella partners blir ohållbar.

Användbara redskap för att hantera sådana relationella hinder för effektiva valstödsprocesser omfattar dialog, konsensusbyggande, gemensamt arbete med att utforma insatser. Dessa redskap fokuserar också på att främja intressenters engagemang, medling och uppbyggnad av tillit. Regionala organisationer och initiativ kan spela en viktig roll genom att kringgå nationella stridslinjer och låsta positioner, och trots dessa främja långsiktiga relationer mellan olika aktörer.

Slutligen utgör *svåra och föränderliga miljöer* för genomförande av valprocesser det tredje stora hindret för att tillämpa det som är känt om effektiva valstödsinsatser. Även om utformning och genomförande av valstödsinsatser har utvecklats över åren, så sker avsevärda förändringar av förutsättningarna för valprocesser i nutid. Valstödet kämpar med att följa med i denna förändringsprocess, och de väletablerade valstödsprinciperna räcker i allt mindre grad till för att hantera följderna. De befintliga normerna, nätverken och kunskapsbaserna är otillräckliga för att hantera nya utmaningar. Som en respondent formulerade det:

"Inledningsvis handlade valstöds-insatser om att bygga demokrati underifrån och upp. Senare – när valstödsinsatser handlade om att konsolidera framstegen – insåg vi att de var sårbara. Nu rör vi oss in i en försvarande hållning. Demokratiska institutioner och processer är hotade, och vi behöver finna nya vägar att hantera detta."

Citatet visar på ett paradigmskifte på väg mot en situation där enbart agila och anpassningsbara insatser för valstöd klarar av att följa med. Tre kontext-anknutna frågor är viktiga att förstå. För det första påverkas integriteten i valprocesser av pågående demokratisk tillbakagång. Valstöds-principer behöver utvidgas, och balanseras om från att ha betonat "konsolidering av valprocesser" till att betona "värnande av valprocesser" från skrupellös och medveten skada.

För det andra innebär teknologisk förändring, demografiska förändringar, migration och folkhälsofrämjande insatser under Covid-19-pandemin att genomförande av val förändrats i grunden. Effekterna av felinformation spridd genom sociala medier och ifrågasättandet av varje steg i valprocessen visar hur den nödvändiga acceptansen av valresultat inte längre kan tas för given.

För det tredje blir valprocesser allt mer sårbara på grund av naturkatastrofer, väderförändringar, epidemier, felaktig information och global terrorism. I takt med att risker för snedvridna val ökar, så ökar också behovet av kapacitet hos valmyndigheter och andra institutioner att förhindra sådana hot och att hantera uppkomna kriser.

Att hantera sådana dramatiska förändringar är inte möjligt med hjälp av föråldrade och stelbenta valstöds-ramverk, som exempelvis oflexibel programmering, kronisk kortsiktighet i planeringen,

motvilja att ta risker eller handlingsförlamning i mötet med auktoritära politiska tendenser. Exempelvis saknar riktlinjerna från OECD-DAC från 2014 skrivningar och vägledning kring sådant som pengars roll i valprocesser och politik, teknologins påverkan på valprocesser, demokratisk tillbakagång, otillbörlig inblandning i valprocesser, åsidosättande av migranter och beredskap för att hantera oväntade händelser.

Slutsatser

Vad som fungerar och inte i valstödsprocesser är redan väl etablerat: kontextkunskap, att hantera demokratiska brister och svagheter, uppföljning och utvärdering är några av de saker som utgör de samlade valstöds-principerna. Men genomförandet av dem visat sig svårt i praktiken för samtliga inblandade aktörer. Ökad konkurrens om begränsade resurser, och senaste tidens utveckling i Afghanistan och Myanmar har lett till ifrågasättanden om demokratibistånd alls kan fungera. Trots det är frågan om hur valstöd kan fungera effektivt, och frågan om hur principerna kan bli tillämpade i praktiken, fortfarande framträdande.

Denna studie har funnit att diskrepansen mellan principer och praktik upprätthålls av bristande samarbete och kommunikation mellan aktörer. Viktigt kunskapsutbyte blir inte av och mer effektiva mål utformas därför inte. Vidare, fungerande kommunikations-kanaler blir, tillsammans med mer flexibla och anpassningsbara arbetssätt, allt viktigare på grund av de snabba förändringar som sker i de globala och nationella miljöer där val genomförs. Detta står i centrum för de rekommendationer studien mynnar ut i.

De dysfunktionella relationer som hindrat hanterandet av snabbt föränderliga val-situationer kan bara åtgärdas med ökat deltagande och samstämmig samverkan mellan samtliga inblandade parter.

Regionala och globala valstödsforum har spelat en viktig roll tidigare. Men likt ett åldrande bevattningssystem, håller det system som byggdes upp under tider av intensivt demokratistöd under 1990-talet och tidigt 00-tal på att slamma igen som följd av dåligt underhåll, brist på långsiktig planering och suboptimalt flöde av kunskap.

Slutsatsen för givare är att det finns behov att se över och förändra mekanismer för valstöd för att övervinna väl kända nutida och framtida hinder. Följden för utrikespolitiken är att en världsvid dialog om demokrati – bortom valstöd – är påkallad bortom utvecklingssamarbetets arena.

Det räcker inte med standardlösningar för valstöd. I lägen där auktoritära tendenser stärks eller redan är starka behöver demokratiskt sinnade tjänstemän och aktivister i civilsamhället stöd. De behöver kunna varsko omvärlden om att demokratiska institutioner undergrävs och de behöver kunskaper om internationella skyldigheter kring val för att kunna påverka. Där allmänhetens tillit till valprocesser har urvattnats kan det vara avgörande att stärka valmyndigheter. När korruption frodas kan reglering och sanktioner som avslöjar felaktigheter kurs-korrigera. I fall då grupper systematiskt utesluts från politiskt deltagande kan en blandning av forskning, engagemang, folkbildning och särskilda arrangemang kring röstprocedurer göra skillnad. En pandemi, naturkatastrof eller ett säkerhetshot kan leda till att valförberedelser går överstyr – vilket innebär att omedelbar handlingsberedskap och fungerande samarbete mellan organisationer blir centralt. Långsiktiga investeringar i valstöd kan undergrävas på kort tid vid plötsligt auktoritärt maktövertagande. Riskerna ser olika ut beroende på sammanhang, men behöver analyseras, förstås och realistiskt kalkyleras med när valstöd genomförs.

Behovet av anpassning till snabba förändringar gör att stelbent planering av valstöd blir svårt, varför flexibla och anpassningsbara ansatser bör ges företräde. Detta är dock bara möjligt om det finns anpassningsbara strukturer, mekanismer för kunskaps- och informationsutbyte och fungerande relationer och tillit mellan inblandade aktörer på plats. Organisationer och institutioner på regional nivå är väl lämpade, men underutnyttjade och för svagt resurssatta för att härbärgera sådana stödsystem för valprocesser över flera valperioder.

Slutsatserna i denna rapport visar också på gränser för vad valstöd kan uppnå. Valstöd kan inte överbrygga djupa samhällsklyftor, förändra kvinnors ställning i ett samhälle eller införa demokrati där den saknas. Däremot kan valstöd, om det utformas och genomförs klokt, tillhandahålla stödjande strukturer för alla de aktörer som är genuint engagerade för rättvisa och trovärdiga valprocesser. Detta bidrag är inte trivialt – förmågan hos inhemska aktörer och institutioner att genomföra väl genomförda val är en nyckel för att försäkra demokratiska övergångar eller för att upprätthålla demokratiskt styre över tid. Valprocesser är ofta långt från perfekta, men ju bättre förståelsen och acceptansen blir av vad ett rättvist och välskött val är, desto troligare blir det att efterfrågan på fria och rättvisa val blir i längden.

En förändringsteori som utgår från att kunskap och kompetens stärks underifrån utgör grunden för rapportens argument om att framtidens valstöds-insatser behöver omformuleras och förändras.

Rekommendationer

Rapportens tre rekommendationer syftar till att utveckla och stärka system och centrala processer för förbättrat kunskapsutbyte och nätverkande. Detta krävs för att möta såväl dagens som morgondagens utmaningar för valstöd.

1. **Återuppliva globala samtal kring principer och praktik för valstöd**

   Ska de utmaningar som valstödet star inför idag kunna hanteras krävs återkommande internationella forum och mekanismer för att vidareutveckla normer och policy, för att dela information och komma överens om prioriteringar. Detta bör ske på ett sätt som svarar mot pågående och framväxande demokratiska behov och utmaningar.

   Som ett första steg bör Sveriges regering återuppliva, initiera eller stödja ett globalt samtal, som inkluderar givarländer, forskare, genomförande organisationer, nationella partners, policy-skapare och ledande praktiker. Syftet bör vara att omdefiniera principer för effektivt stöd till valprocesser. Detta bör göras för att svara mot de behov och förväntningar som medborgare världen över har i relation till nya utmaningar, demokratins föränderliga landskap och pågående innovationer. Processen bör bygga på, ingjuta ny energi i och utvidga de principer som utvecklades under perioden 2000–2014. Nya mekanismer och fortsatta globala samtal bör möjliggöra återkommande revideringar av principerna, exempelvis genom forum som hålls varje eller vart annat år. Principerna kan sedan göras tillgängliga genom vägledningar och handböcker för handläggare och ingå i utbildningar för diplomater.

2. Stöd regionala (och globala) nätverk och initiativ för valstöd

Sveriges regering bör visa ledarskap genom att stödja nätverk och initiativ för valstöd på regional nivå. Detta är i dagsläget en underfinansierad och resurssvag del inom internationellt valstöd. Stöd till aktörer och insatser på sub-kontinental nivå öppnar för kunskap om lokala sammanhang och språk, ökad lokal relevans och ägarskap, effektivt spridande av kunskap och god praktik. Det möjliggör samtidigt erfarenhetsutbyte, samverkan och stöd mellan kollegor, samtidigt som regional standard och villkor kring valprocesser upprätthålls. Dessa faktorer bidrar till effektiva nationella val, samtidigt som varningstecken på demokratisk tillbakagång kan fångas upp tidigt. Globala nätverk och initiativ kan, i sin tur, stödja regionala aktörer genom att dela erfarenheter och goda exempel från andra delar av världen.

3. Ompröva mekanismer för utformning och genomförande av valstöd

Givarländer bör ompröva hur valstöd genomförs så att insatser blir mer ändamålsenliga och anpassade till ny kunskap. De ska bygga tillit, samsyn och fungerande relationer mellan intressenter och inblandade aktörer, möjliggöra flexibilitet, långsiktighet och politisk kontextförståelse. Stelbenta projektstrukturer, kortsiktig och ytlig projektplanering eller anlitande av externa och oerfarna utförare fungerar inte när det handlar om att hantera svåra valprocesser med höga politiska insatser, komplicerade legala och operationella arrangemang, risker för kriser, ett snabbt och kaotiskt informationsflöde eller auktoritära krafters undergrävande av valprocesser. Effektivt valstöd kräver uthålligt och strategiskt arbete och lärande Ett sådant omprövande bör åtföljas av ett globalt samtal om att uppgradera principerna för effektivt valstöd mer generellt.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Electoral assistance (EA) is meant to support democratic development by strengthening key institutions, supporting a viable environment for participation and ensuring the legitimacy of an incoming government. Ideally, this facilitates other development objectives such as health and economic progress, meets the democratic aspirations of citizens, and enables national and regional stability. For these reasons, electoral assistance has been an integral part of international development and foreign policy.

EA has changed significantly over the decades – and it continues to change. Initially, EA served as support to countries that transitioned from colonialism to independence, authoritarianism to democracy, from war to peace, or to overcome deep political crises and reach stability. While early EA design focused on election day operations, later EA expanded towards covering all aspects of the single or multiple electoral cycles. This electoral cycle approach expanded the EA remit to include a wide range of systems, processes and behaviours such as capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs), legal framework design, and inclusive participation.

The realities of strongman politics, corruption, lack of accountability and deep-rooted societal divisions have tempered any initial optimism of rapidly introduced democratic infrastructure and processes. Yet, despite sobering experiences, elections still matter. For long-term development work, viable institutions, laws and processes ensure that the mechanics of democracy run smoothly and that avenues for recovering from democratic slippage are accessible. For the shorter term, elections – their conduct and their outcome –

have a bearing on foreign policy and international relations. An accepted election result bestows a modicum of legitimacy – enough for an incoming government to "get on with" implementing the mandate conferred by citizens. A contested result may bring domestic instability and geopolitical uncertainty. These high stakes explain why today EA remains relevant on foreign policy agendas worldwide.

For Sweden, other motivations, beyond geopolitical imperatives, inform development and foreign policy. With its values-driven "Drive for Democracy" initiative (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2019), Sweden lays out a compelling agenda and commitment to actively investigate where civil space is closing and why. The human rights-based approach that underpins the agenda places democracy itself as a good to be safeguarded and nurtured. This citizen-anchored perspective puts genuine and meaningful participation to the forefront of examining EA effectiveness.

EA efforts thus far have delivered a mixed bag of results. In some countries, such as South Africa, Namibia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tunisia, EA contributed to the transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems or from war to peace. In other contexts, such as Libya, Myanmar, Cambodia, Yemen and Haiti, democratic achievements were short-lived. In many contexts, EA remains in a complex and contested middle ground between authoritarian mindsets and those aspiring to democratic governance. The Report poses and endeavours to answer several fundamental questions. What has already been learned about EA effectiveness? What are the main obstacles for EA to achieve successful and sustainable results? What modalities or approaches to providing electoral assistance would better support the attainment of democracy goals?

Research activities and findings

The empirical evidence on the effectiveness of EA is fragmented, with the most common documentation being evaluations of country projects that extend over one – or exceptionally – several electoral cycles. Also, scholarly work that approaches EA holistically is limited, reflecting a lack of systematic and reliable information on the effectiveness of electoral assistance (Judith 2012; Borzyskowski 2016; Lührmann 2016, 2019). Therefore, to systematically build the evidence base for drawing conclusions and recommendations, the research process was designed to engage practitioners active in the EA field.

Practice anchored literature review informed the scope and boundaries for the investigation, while practitioners' reflections, obtained through surveys and interviews, provided insights on the successes and changes in EA policies and practice over several decades. The Report conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the analysis of these open and in-depth discussions.

Participatory approaches are not uncommon in policy-oriented studies and evaluations and their merits have been recommended by several scholars. It has been argued, for example, that the involvement of stakeholders in an assessment can lead to "better data, a better understanding of the data, more appropriate recommendations, [and] better uptake of findings" (Guijt, 2014:2). Stakeholder involvement can also provide an evidence base on which to enhance the legitimacy and sensibility of policy interventions (Torrance 2011, Griggs and Howarth 2012) and enable a better understanding of "what is it about this … that works for whom [and] in what circumstances?" (Pawson et al. 2005).

At the same time, the authors realise that the study's approach, focused on capturing the perceptions of practitioners, gives rise to a risk that the Report's conclusions and lessons may mainly reflect their perspectives, given that the authors themselves are actors in the EA field. However, the choice of the composition of the research team was the consequence of a deliberate attempt at carrying out an actor-oriented analysis, grounded on rigorous and objective analytical categories drawn from qualitative research. This approach is further described and discussed in the methods section. The evidence presented in the Report is available in appendices, or supplementary documents on demand, and the authors' own judgements are identifiable in the text.

Codification of EA principles

The examination of 80 plus policy and practice documents consolidated insights into the realities, dynamics and difficulties of implementing EA. Academic literature proved useful in identifying problems, defining and applying suitable research methods, and situating the Report's findings in a wider development context.

During the period between 2000 and 2014, a series of lesson learning exercises were conducted to examine the sustainability failings and high costs of early EA interventions. From these efforts emerged several sets of codified principles, which identified obstacles to effective EA and proffered guidance on how to overcome them. Different sets of principles were codified by the European Union, The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), The Department for International Development (DFID) UK, the United Nations (UN), and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC).

The Report systematises these overlapping principle sets, by grouping them into 15 project and context-related principles as follows:

Project-related principles	Context-related principles
• Local ownership and empowerment	• Context-awareness
• Electoral cycle approach	• Coordination with diplomatic efforts
• Participation of women	• Harmonization and alignment
• Inclusion of marginalized groups	• Addressing democratic weaknesses
• Electoral risk management	• Role of regional organizations
• Multi-level action (national and sub-national)	• Responding to flawed elections
• Linkages with election observation	• Timing and sequencing of EA
• Monitoring and evaluation	

Summarised as 'EA Principles' for the purpose of this Report, this normative framework influenced guidance on EA amongst all major donors and implementers internationally. The codification entrenched within EA concepts of local ownership, empowerment and inclusion. As the Report confirm – these principles also hold today as factors for effective electoral assistance.

Importantly, the literature review revealed a stark disconnect between the EA principles and practices, which mirrors the distance between prevailing EA rhetoric and the actual behaviour of the actors engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of EA initiatives on the ground. This disconnect – or gap – justified the choice of an actor-oriented focus and became a key concern of subsequent research phases using the following logical flow: Are these agreed-upon principles still valid as a way of understanding EA

effectiveness? And if so, are they achieved or achievable? And if not, what are the obstacles? And, finally, what course of action can be taken to ensure that EA principles inform EA practice?

Between principles and practice

A survey served to unpack the EA principles-practices-obstacles conundrum by measuring practitioner perceptions on the interplay between the principles and the practice of EA.

Survey respondents confirmed the continued relevance of the principles, but diverged on their relative importance. For example, national stakeholders emphasized 'broad participation' as the most significant, while EA implementers ranked highly 'stable and trusted EMBs', and donors emphasized 'acceptance of election results'. Overall, the findings remind that implementing EA requires recognizing, including and managing different perspectives, interests and objectives.

Interviews and group discussions aimed to further explore the disconnect between principles and practice by tapping into practitioners' professional experiences and reflections on successes, enablers and challenges of EA. The purpose was not to evaluate the impact of the work of practitioners but rather to understand where the obstacles to implanting and nurturing EA principles lie, what seems to be working well, what doesn't, and what lessons can be learned.

The successes identified tended to be cumulative and 'big-picture' rather than project- or event-specific. EA has played a significant role in the progressive consolidation of democratic systems over the past four decades. Dividends come in the form of strengthened regulatory frameworks, capable EMBs, and civil society actors holding relevant institutions accountable. These focus areas of EA

were also cornerstones of the democratic governance component of broader peace- and state-building efforts. At the regional and global level, the dividends were visible in numerous knowledge products and practical tools for professional development in the management of elections, the forging of regional and global networks, and availing specialised advice that contributed to democratic transitions. Key obstacles identified included: competing motives and objectives for EA stakeholders, inadequate implementation methods, funding lines not fit for purpose and an unconducive environment due to lack of genuine political will for necessary reforms. Importantly, the timing of EA was a universal theme – confirming that obstacles related to timely funding, implementing delay and sustaining EA efforts persist.

Systematic challenges to implementation

A broader analysis points to main issues that require addressing for EA to be effective at the country, regional and global level.

As confirmed above, the principles for effective EA (listed above) remain relevant and important. There was much evidence on how the alignment of EA projects behind these principles led to successes, and when this was not the case, it resulted in sub-optimal delivery. Examples of this are displayed in the case study boxes interspersed through the Report.

What then determines a principles-practice alignment? Symptomatically, systemic approaches to embedding EA principles in programme design or implementation phases were largely missing. Also, the stakeholder groups consulted did not show firm recollection of sources of these principles, despite e.g. a global convening exercise as recently as 2014.

When looking into the mechanics of EA, , *three systemic challenges* were brought to the surface: Limited diffusion of knowledge and lessons learned; Dysfunctional relationships forged as part of EA; and Inability to respond to changing EA landscapes.

Regarding knowledge creation and sharing, evidence shows rich knowledge of "what EA should do" and "how to do EA". The main impediments to putting the 'EA Principles'[2] into practice include: high staff turnover among all EA stakeholders in which institutional memory and good habits are lost, failure to learn lessons through iteration (such as post-election review exercises), unconducive contexts (e.g. lack of political will), or when higher-order goals – such as peace-building – override EA principles.

Examples of these 'principle-to-practice' constraints could be found at all levels of the EA chain. On the donor side insufficient specialist expertise, weak institutional memory, gaps in training programmes together with short time-frames and high staff turnover result in inexperienced officers being tasked with complex and high-stakes programming and funding decisions. For national partners and EA implementors, inadequate modalities to connect context knowledge (what is happening in-country, in real-time) with election specific knowledge (what types of EA programming are available and feasible) were constraining. For national partners, stop-start programming disrupted orderly professional development and knowledge strengthening over time. Further, for high profile elections, long-term oriented EA principles are easily 'trumped' by higher priority foreign policy goals, such as migration, economic goals or peace-building. For this reason, relationships between competing interests emerged as a second major explanation of the principle-practice gap to effective EA.

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[2] Throughout the Report text we use the heuristic of *EA principles* to represent this codified joint or common understanding of 'how' EA should be done.

'Dysfunctional relationships' rose as a key theme because of weak trust and difficulties in upholding necessary communication channels for navigating in an environment of high stakes, multiple stakeholders and complex operations. EA experts pointed out the critical importance that relation-building – in all its forms – is built into EA design and implementation. This is not always the case.

Even within donor countries, there can be multiple and diverse interests to negotiate and reconcile; EA can be the object of trade interests (e.g. lucrative vendor contracts for election equipment), foreign policy goals or development objectives. These interests can collide when there is a lack of modalities to coordinate EA goals and programming and reach a shared vision. When competing, EA implementing agencies on the ground may refrain from sharing information or cooperating and the result can be duplication, gaps or awkward positions for national partners.

Useful modalities to address these relational hinders to effective EA included cooperation, dialogue and consensus-reaching mechanisms of all kinds, co-design habits, and soft skills-oriented programming focusing on stakeholder engagement, mediation, and trust-building. The findings showed that regional initiatives and organizations can play an important role by bypassing national-level faultlines and entrenched positions, and foster longer-term peer relationships.

Finally, difficult and changing implementing contexts are the third obstacle for applying what is already known to deliver effective EA. While EA has shifted, evolved and adapted over past decades, the present global conditions for democracy support are changing significantly. EA is struggling to keep pace with this rapid change, and even the well-established EA principles may no longer suffice to deal with ensuing implications. The existing norms (such as the EA principles), networks, and knowledge bases are insufficient to

address new challenges to be faced in the next decade of EA. As one Report interviewee formulated: *"Initially, the EA interventions were about building democracy, from the ground up. Later – when interventions became about consolidating the gains made – we realized that they were precarious. Now, we are moving into protection mode. Democratic institutions and processes are under threat, and we need new ways of doing things to deal with that."*

This quote points to a paradigm shift underway for which only agile and adaptive electoral assistance can keep pace.

Three context-related developments are important to understand this point. Firstly, democracy backsliding is affecting the integrity of elections, and EA principles require expanding, even recalibration, from an emphasis on "consolidating electoral processes" to one of "protecting elections" from unscrupulous, deliberate harm. Secondly, technological progress, demographic shifts, migration and health safeguarding measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic have profoundly affected how voting itself is offered to voters and conducted. The impact of misinformation spread through social media and the risk of contestation at every electoral step exemplify how the public trust necessary to accept election results as legitimate can no longer be taken for granted. Thirdly, electoral processes are becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards, such as weather calamities, and man-made ones, such as epidemics, misinformation and global terrorism. As risks to the integrity of electoral processes are diversifying, so increases the imperative for EA to support the capacity of electoral institutions to prevent threats from materializing, strengthen resilience and effectively respond to manage crises that arise.

Dealing with these dramatic shifts is not possible through outdated and unresponsive EA frameworks and approaches such as inflexible programming, chronic short-term thinking, risk adversity, or paralysis in the face of strongman politics. For instance, last updated

in 2014, the OECD-DAC EA principles currently lack normative guidance on challenges to elections such as money in politics, technology in elections, malicious interference, backsliding, the enfranchisement of migrants, and readiness to deal with unexpected events.

Conclusions

What works and what does not work in election assistance is already well established; Context awareness, addressing democratic weaknesses, monitoring and evaluation accompany a series of other well codified principles for which the heuristic 'EA Principles' were used in the Report. Their implementation in practice has proved difficult for all involved actors. With competing demands for scarcer funds and recent events in Afghanistan and Myanmar leading to a question of whether democracy assistance can work at all, how to make EA work effectively – that is, how to address this principles-practice disconnect – is salient.

The study found that the principles-practice gap was perpetuated when interaction and communication blockages between actors hinder important knowledge sharing or potential for more effective goal setting. And further, that these communication channels and adaptive modalities are, and will be ever more important, because of the rapid changes in global and national environments in which elections are managed and supported. This is at the heart of the Report's recommendations.

The dysfunctional relationships that hindered appropriate responses to fastmoving or complex electoral situations can only be addressed through more attention to participatory and harmonious collaboration between all stakeholders, such as regional and global EA forums. These played an important role in the past. However,

like in an aging irrigation system, the systems put in place during the intense democracy assistance efforts from the 1990's through the early 2000's are silting up from under-maintenance, lack of long-term planning, and sub-optimal (knowledge and skills) flow. The implication for donors is the need to review and retrofit EA modalities for overcoming long known, present and anticipated future obstacles. The implication for foreign policy is that global conversations about democracy – including EA – are imperative beyond the development arena.

A one-size-fits-all approach to EA will not suffice. Where authoritarian tendencies are looming or firmly in place – democratically oriented public officials or civil society activists may need peer support, the ability to alert the outside world when political institutions are undermined, and to have an understanding of international obligations on elections to advocate convincingly. Where public trust in elections has been eroded, reinforcing the credibility of the electoral management body, can be key. Where corruption is rife regulatory options that reinforce disclosure and enforcement mechanisms can expose wrong-doing and course-correct. Where one group is systemically absent from political participation, an optimum mix of research, engagement, civic education and special voting arrangements can make a real difference. A pandemic, natural disaster or security breach can suddenly divert electoral preparations from their due course – making rapid response routines and inter-agency cooperation into priority areas for investment. Long-term EA investments can also be quickly annihilated by sudden undemocratic transitions of power. Risks vary by context and need to be well anticipated, understood and calculated when investing in EA.

The imperative to adapt to rapid changes in local contexts makes rigid EA programming templates difficult, favouring instead flexible and responsive approaches. However, this is only possible if adaptive

frameworks, knowledge sharing modalities and functional relationships among actors are in place, well known, accessible and trusted . Regional-level organisations and initiatives are suited, but under-utilised and under-resourced for housing and nurturing such EA support systems one electoral cycle to the next.

The Report's conclusion also demarcates limits to what EA can achieve. EA cannot heal deep societal rifts, change the status of women in society, or bring democracy where it is absent. However, thoughtfully designed and implemented EA can create enabling support structures for all actors genuinely committed to fair and credible electoral processes. This contribution is not trivial – the capacity of domestic actors and institutions to ensure well-run elections is key to ensuring a democratic transition or maintaining democratic governance over time. While elections as events may be, and often are, imperfect processes – the more widespread an understanding and acceptance of what a fair and well-run election looks and feels like – the more difficult to avoid a demand and expectation of such events for the long haul.

This local-empowerment anchored theory of change underpins the Report's emphasis on rethinking of how future EA is determined, designed and delivered.

Recommendations

The Report's three recommendations focus on developing or strengthening key processes and infrastructures to enhance the knowledge networking required to meet existing and anticipate future EA challenges.

1. **Reinvigorate global conversations on EA principles and practice**

   Addressing global EA challenges requires regular international forums and modalities for norms and policy development, information sharing, and recalibrating of EA investment priorities in tandem with evolving electoral needs and global democratic trajectories.

   As a starting point, the Swedish government should reinvigorate, initiate or support a global debate – involving donors, academics, implementing organizations, national partners, policy-makers and leading practitioners – on redefining principles of effective electoral assistance. This ought to be done to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens around the world in the face of new and emerging issues, the evolving landscape of democracy building and the constant drive for innovation . The process should build on, revitalize and expand existing principles developed during 2000–2014. The process could include modalities for sustained global conversations and periodic revision of the principles, such as a yearly or bi-yearly forum. Avenues for disseminating EA principles could consist of guidelines and handbooks for desk officers and inclusion in training programmes for diplomats.

2. **Support regional (and global) EA networks and initiatives.**

   The Swedish government should maintain leadership in the support to regional level EA networks and initiatives, currently an underinvested and underdeveloped segment of the EA portfolio. Sub-continental support allows for context and language sensitivity, stronger local suitability and ownership, efficient diffusion of good practices and know-how, facilitating experience-sharing., fostering peer-to-peer cooperation and support, and upholding regional electoral obligations and standards. Each of these components contributes to effective

national-level change and early warning for indicators of democratic backsliding. Global networks and initiatives can, in turn, support regional efforts with good practice and tools from other parts of the world.

3. **Revisit modalities for EA design and implementation**

Donors should revisit EA modalities to ensure that they are fitter-for-purpose; checking for knowledge flow, trust and consensus building, functional relationships, agility, commitment to partnerships development, long-term orientation and political-contextual understanding in line with EA principles. Rigid project structures, short-term shallow projects or outsourcing to inexperienced actors will not suffice to deal with the difficult EA realities of high political stakes, complex legal and operational arrangements, potential for crisis, the rapid and chaotic flow of information, or the authoritarian undermining of electoral processes. Effective EA needs consistent and strategic investment in enhanced modalities that encourage and nurture stakeholder engagement, reflection, learning and design. This 'revisiting' should accompany the global conversation on upgrading EA principles more broadly.

Introduction

Swedish foreign policy commits to protecting democracy when under threat and supporting political institutions where weak. This Report focuses on one dimension of this undertaking – supporting the electoral process, which is critically important as a primary site of political contestation, for citizen engagement and as the enabler of legitimate and peaceful alternation of power. This Report shows that, while gains have been globally significant with elections held reasonably well, a rethink of the way in which these processes are supported is possible and necessary.

Simplistic or transactional interventions are not sufficient to help electoral management bodies (EMBs) deal with challenges that are politically fraught, technically complex (such as meeting a demand for new forms of voting or voter verification), and constantly evolving; nor to facilitate the regulatory frameworks necessary to curb ills and excesses of political gameplaying; nor to accommodate the full and active civic participation that make elections meaningful. Rather, this Report points to an imperative for thoughtful, flexible and long-term oriented modalities that support overall institutional resilience and societal conversations.

The thorough study of international electoral assistance (EA) policy and practice on which these claims are made are accounted for in a series of Report annexes. This main section of the Report highlights key aspects of the study; the methods, findings, analysis and conclusions, beginning with an overview of the EA field.

Context of Report

> "Genuine elections are a necessary and fundamental component of an environment that protects and promotes human rights." (United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner)

Over the past decades, international electoral assistance (EA) has expanded and evolved in scope and reach. Features of the early electoral assistance engagements in the 1980s, such as the provision of technical knowledge, financing of elections, and impartial scrutiny, continue to constitute building blocks of current electoral support efforts. Over time, however, EA has grown in geographical presence, the variety of challenges it addressed; length, breadth and continuity of engagement; and stakeholders involved. EA takes place both in democracies and non-democracies, which has policy and practice implications.

Lessons learned from early EA projects, the continuous progression of electoral management policies and practices, and insights from wider democracy and development conversations led to the incorporation of new programming dimensions that now feature prominently in EA. Capacity strengthening, context-awareness, the electoral cycle, gender sensitivity, strategic planning, electoral risk management and application of new technologies are examples of areas in which EA programming has expanded in scope, complexity and reach. For national partners, this development has meant intensified commitment and involvement; for electoral assistance providers, a wider range of technical expertise to grasp and increased expectations of adherence to management standards.

A conceptual shift towards alignment to national stakeholders' interests, priorities, roles, positions and needs – also on EA – accompanied a broader global conversation on development cooperation culminating in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action. The Paris Declaration core principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results and mutual accountability (OECD 2008) were emphatically and explicitly meant to guide all development cooperation. The normative influence of "Paris" is reflected in the EA principles. For donors, Paris-compliance demanded more intricate metrics to review and adhere to cost-effectiveness, risk management, local ownership and "do-no-harm" principles. Incorporating those development principles into an EA propelled by geo-strategic imperatives was an uneasy process at best.

The Report shows that nothing about EA as "transition and peacebuilding work" nor "EA as development work" has been easy¨. In area after area, implementation and impact have not easily met project expectations or wider peacebuilding, democracy, or development goals. Intrepid researchers have tried to understand the mechanics of why and how – but even this research has struck obstacles. Scholarly articles on the topic reveal an EA beset by challenges where efforts yield a mixed bag of results, challenges for which a research gap is waiting to be filled.

Lührmann (2018) looks into several academic papers on electoral assistance published over a decade and finds that: Ludwig (2004a, 2004b) "assessed the UN's role in electoral assistance but without much critical analysis of its longer-term impact"; that Borzyskowski (2016) "analysed the allocation but not the effectiveness of technical election assistance", and that Kelley (2012a:215) "rightly points out that "evidence is insufficient to settle the debate about the merits of international involvement in elections." Kelley (2012) explains that the separation of datasets and

research streams on international involvement in elections and democracy, limit the "understanding of different forms of engagement and possible interactions among them", confounding conclusions about the role of democratic structures in elections and vice versa. Lührmann (2019) stresses the importance of addressing these research gaps since "electoral assistance is the backbone of international democracy promotion activities."

Lührmann's study of the UN electoral assistance effort in Nigeria 2011 and Libya 2012 concludes that electoral assistance can contribute to improved election quality if regime elites have a "strategic interest in prioritizing electoral credibility" (Lührmann 2019). Boadi and Yakah (2014) also observe that the domestic environment, including commitment by the political elite to reforms and cooperation, are important determinants of external electoral assistance effectiveness. A panel regression run by Uberti and Jackson (2018) on 126 aid-receiving countries from 2002 to 2015 revealed that, while aid was statistically significantly associated with electoral integrity, this effect was small and short-lived in countries with adverse structural conditions. The Report on the Effects of Swedish and International Democracy Aid (Niño-Zarazúa et al. 2020:41) finds that aid is effective when it targets the building blocks of democracy, such as free and fair elections, but that "further consideration should be given to the possibility of increasing aid to monitor and scrutinize electoral cycles, and also strengthen the independence of electoral bodies that guarantee free and fair elections, which is an area that so far receives limited Swedish aid, vis-à-vis other activities."

Sweden's response to the global trends of democratic backsliding, shrinking and changing of democratic spaces and growing autocratisation are laid out in the Swedish Government "Drive for Democracy" initiative (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2019). With this drive, Sweden commits to stand up "for democratic

principles in all contexts, work to help strengthen democracy, and voice criticism against democratic deficits or risks of backsliding". This Report contributes to this endeavour by offering guidance to the Swedish government on electoral assistance policy and practice that align with Swedish strategic vision and democratic aspirations. The recommendations are designed for relevance also beyond Sweden, recognising that many like-minded donors are similarly rethinking how to most effectively contribute to elections that align with global democratic and development goals (rather than entrench authoritarian rule or deepen societal rifts).

Methodology

Study approach

Making informed and universally applicable recommendations about how to improve the effectiveness of EA is difficult for many reasons, not least because of the magnitude that global EA effort reached over the past decades and the diversity of individual projects, contexts and results. The challenges faced are two-fold.

Firstly, the existing empirical base is fragmented, with the most common documentation being evaluations of country projects that extended over one – or exceptionally – several electoral cycles. Evaluations that cover extended periods and multiple contexts are rare. Those that exist are focused on projects implemented by one organization – for example, the evaluation of DFID's "funding for electoral support" (ICAI 2012:2) provided to UNDP for electoral assistance in 83 countries between 1990 and 2011 (UNDP 2012) – or cover a specific dimension of a broader EA effort, e.g. how aid disbursement affected electoral integrity (Uberti and Jackson 2018). Global evaluations have been difficult to conduct because of the numerous limitations that evaluators face. The *Evaluation of the UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes* between 1990 and 2011 (UNDP 2012:x) explains as follows:

> "The main limitation to the evaluation stemmed from the enormous scope of support activities under review, programmatic and task-related complexities, and the vast range of contexts and conditions in which electoral assistance is provided. Equally important are the historical lack of consistency in classifying electoral projects…

and a general lack of institutional memory for completed projects at the country level, both of which made data collection and analysis difficult…"

Although not intended as an evaluation of past EA but rather to provide forward-looking and evidence-based recommendations, this study faced similar constraints.

Secondly, scholarly work that approaches EA holistically is limited in number, reflecting the difficulties academics have experienced in obtaining reliable and systematically-collected information on the effectiveness of electoral assistance. These challenges were articulated in 2012 by Kelley, who lamented that "although many organizations attempt to collect evaluation data on their electoral assistance, most organizations lack proficient internal assessment units and thus have little sense of the extent of their influence and effectiveness. Scholars know even less" (Kelley 2012:210). According to Lührmann, Kelley's assessment still held in 2016 stating that the absence of data meant that whilst "prior case studies and evaluation reports address specific experiences and methods of electoral assistance…a systematic empirical assessment of average effects of electoral assistance is lacking" (Lührmann 2016:3). Borzyskowski (2016:255) came to the same conclusion, finding that "despite some case reports and analyses, there is virtually no quantitative work on technical election assistance." In such a context, broad quantitative studies, such as that carried out by Uberti and Jackson (2018) on the impact of aid on electoral integrity, have been valuable to inform this study's findings.

The fragmentation in both grey and academic literature demanded some creativity. While academic literature was consulted for method design and to situate research findings and analysis in the broader academic debate, the Report's conclusions and recommendations

primarily draw on the findings obtained through a succession of research steps. Steps included an original review of empirical "grey" literature, such as policy and practice documents and primary data collected through surveys, interviews, and expert discussions. The key policy documents that formulate principles of effective electoral assistance, such as those devised by Sida, DFID, UN, OECD, proved to be of great value as they already consolidated and referenced essential academic work on this topic when they were devised. The description of principles in this Report is complemented by references to more recent scholarly articles that address the issues covered.

The selection of the practitioners and experts who participated in the study's surveys, interviews and expert discussions was guided by the authors' goal of hearing from a sufficiently diverse group of electoral stakeholders, including those from EMBs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), EA providers and donors. Career progression patterns in the EA field meant that in many instances, a single expert could speak to more than one stakeholder experience, having worked, for example, as both a national practitioner and then as an international EA practitioner.

While national EMBs are included as survey respondents, while many EA practitioners began their careers working on their national elections, and while one of the Expert Working Groups was dedicated to the topic of local ownership – nonetheless, this Report is not designed to give voice to local population/voters or political parties. The specialist nature of the topic demanded a different evidence base; in this case, convening those with the 'behind the scenes' insights from multiple EA initiatives to collectively discuss and interrogate when and why EA works well (when principles and practice are in alignment) and where the obstacles lie.

In line with the thinking of a cohort of public sector scholars, the practice-anchored approach adopted in the study is appropriate. These scholars emphasise the value of practitioner knowledge relating to "better data, a better understanding of the data, more appropriate recommendations, [and] better uptake of findings" (Guijt, 2014: 2); as the evidence base on which to enhance the legitimacy of policy interventions (Torrance 2011); to "intervene sensitively in particular contexts" (Griggs and Howarth 2012:170) to understand better "what is it about this … that works for whom in what circumstances?" (Pawson et al. 2005). Using the term para-ethnography, anthropologists Holmes and Marcus (2005, 2008) speak of the research value of in-depth professional knowledge and experience. As Flyvbjerg explains, practitioners "do not use rules but operate on the basis of detailed case experience. This is real expertise" (Flyvbjerg 2011: 312). Individual practitioners' knowledge and reflections are particularly helpful to compile an inventory of encountered "real-life" issues to be considered for policy review.

A series of small case studies inserted throughout the Report exemplify how EA principles can manifest in programming. In accordance with the "positive deviance" method endorsed by Duncan Green in his book 'How Change Happens' (Green, 2016: 24–26), the cases capture uncommon and successful strategies which have enabled some within the practitioner community to overcome the EA obstacles that this Report identifies. In so doing, these cases highlight tried and tested solutions that can be adopted in similar contexts.

The strengths of the practice-centred approach are relevance and understanding of the issues at hand and how they play out. The weaknesses are the risks of self-interest and blind spots. Self-interest, sometimes known as 'mission-creep', is the risk of authors and interlocuters seeking to perpetuate and expand their chosen occupations. Blind spots, obsessions or bias can occur because

practitioners' own experiences so profoundly shape the often strongly held views of such individuals, they may wrongly assume, e.g. for expediency, that if a solution worked well once in a given context, it would work equally well in another, different context. Because this is not necessarily the case, the study methodology combines individual and group-focused learning methods from practice.

Also, several methodological limitations exist. For one, as Torrance (2011) warns, the evidence-based method will limit the author's ability to obtain very clear answers to public policy and programming questions or to explain why something happened. This will further be limited by selection bias that may overstate or understate relationships, weak understanding of occurrence in a population of phenomena under study, and unknown or unclear statistical significance (Flyvbjerg 2011). Secondly, in line with Pawson et al. (2015), and given the complexity of electoral processes, specifics of context in which elections take place and uniqueness of EA project designs – that not only change from country to country, but also from election to election – there will be limitations in terms of how much the Report can cover in terms of "endless permutations", nature and the quality of information retrieved, and what can be delivered as a recommendation. Here, Pawson offers the guidance emphasizing that: "Hard and fast truths about what works must be discarded in favour of contextual advice in the general format: in circumstances such as A, try B, or when implementing C, watch out for D. Realist review delivers illumination rather than generalizable truths and contextual fine-tuning rather than standardization."

The Report's authors are professionally affiliated with international electoral assistance policy and practice work and hence their reflections, conclusions and examples are influenced by their professional experiences and biases. To mitigate against the perception and existence of any possible biases, the authors worked

closely with the EBA reference group which reviewed and provided advice on all steps of the study, playing the role of a sounding board whose contribution was critical from the research design to the validation of findings.

Moreover, most (but not all) of the study informants are EA practitioners and experts as well. As mentioned above, this is a consequence of a deliberate attempt at carrying out an actor-oriented analysis. It does however entail risks of interpreting processes and facts by standards inherent in the culture of EA practitioners. This may lead to confirmation bias where the authors interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms their beliefs or hypotheses while giving disproportionately less attention to information that contradicts it. Relying upon donor reports, as this study does, brings with it risk of projecting donor agendas. To manage these risks, the research distinguished clearly between the conceptualization of social facts from the point of view of the actors themselves (the so-called "emic" analysis in ethnographic research) and the objective and evidence-based systematization of social facts grounded on a sound combination of qualitative assessments and quantitative data (the "etic" analysis).

Research steps

The study combined several research steps, including literature review, surveys, interviews, expert discussion and validation workshops.

Research step 1 – Systematizing existing empirical knowledge on electoral assistance effectiveness

The literature review was undertaken to establish a comprehensive understanding of what is known about the effectiveness of EA by key electoral stakeholders (policy makers, donors, implementers and national partners).[3]

Over 80 documents were reviewed, including policy and practice guidelines (policy papers, strategies, declarations and other relevant documents produced by governments, international development and electoral assistance organizations to provide directions, highlight good and problematic practices, and identify EA gaps); and assessment and evaluations of electoral assistance (including global, regional and country projects). An empirical literature review can yield a taxonomy of classifications suited for theoretical model/framework and has integrative effects for providing new knowledge (Torraco 2005, 2016). A taxonomy was indeed yielded from this research step – summarised in the next section of the Report, with additional details in annexes and available on request.

Research step 2 – Collecting original data on stakeholders' perceptions and personal experiences of electoral assistance

A stakeholders' survey is "a way of gathering input from stakeholders who may be difficult to engage in an individual or group setting" (Preskil and Jones 2009). The survey's objective was to gauge insights of stakeholders' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, interests and experiences (Sadashiva n.d.) about the factors that determine the

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[3] The effort, therefore, involved semi-systematic research focused on empirical and policy documents that is appropriate because of its "ability to map a field of research, synthesize the state of knowledge, and create an agenda for further research or the ability to provide an historical overview or timeline of a specific topic" (Snyder 2019).

effectiveness of EA, their knowledge about and use of existing EA principles, and their views on what the future brings. This was important because, while the literature review pointed to many factors that determine the effectiveness of electoral assistance, it remained inconclusive if these are widely understood and equally endorsed by all stakeholders.

Over 200 EA practitioners representing perspectives on EA processes from national partners, implementers, donors, and electoral policymakers were invited to participate, of whom 90 responded.

Research step 3 – Obtaining electoral experts' personal experiences and reflections about the effectiveness of EA

The specific objective of interviews was to deepen understanding of effective electoral assistance by drawing on the experiences and reflections of a wide range of EA practitioners (Martin 2013); more specifically, by:

- Soliciting experts' views on the main trends that characterized electoral assistance over the past two decades,

- Collecting personal experiences of EA successes, sustainability and obstacles and drivers behind them,

- Collecting ideas on how to improve the long-term effectiveness of electoral assistance, and

- Determining key topics for expert discussion (see Step 4 below).

Over 20 senior EA experts representing national partners, implementers, donors and policymakers, were interviewed. A priority selection criterion was the length of experience across multiple regions, organisations or roles. Recognising that the field is

male-dominated, women's EA experiences were actively sought and included. [4] The insights and reflections on EA change and EA imperatives are woven into the narrative of this Report.

Research step 4 – Convening EA practitioners: Expert working groups and regional verification sessions

The study team organized two types of consultations designed to move from findings to conclusions and recommendations:

- Thematic expert discussions, and

- Regional validations.

The specific objective of expert discussions (Nyumba et al. 2018) was to engage a broader group of experts in reviewing the analysis of key findings, deriving conclusions from the research finding and analysis and crafting actionable recommendations for the Swedish government and other donors on how to support the long-term effectiveness of electoral assistance. This research step was to benefit from the group dynamics and interaction and intentionally brought together persons with various experiences of and perspectives on EA processes.

To ensure that expert discussions and recommendations benefited from prior research steps, the authors prepared a background document that summarized the study's findings from the literature review, surveys and interviews on specific themes. Four sessions were attended by 52 experts representing national partners, implementers, donors and policymakers.

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[4] A summary of interview findings accounted for in the Report, and transcripts and recordings are on file. The persistent obstacles identified by the interviewees served as the building blocks for the expert working group discussions, while the good practice examples highlighted by interviewees are included throughout the Report as case studies.

To challenge potential confirmation bias in the expert discussions, five Regional Validation Workshops were held as virtual and hybrid presence events anchored in Addis Ababa, Brussels, Canberra, New York and Tunis. The sessions were designed to test the robustness and relevance of the study's findings and the viability of its draft recommendations. Here, the focus was on feedback from institutional HQ representatives from regional and international institutions and donor agencies.

This design of the research allowed an understanding of the normative underpinnings of EA (codified in the Literature review) and, in subsequent research steps, to dig deeper to understand any differences between the normative "good" in the form of key EA principles and the reality on the ground as experienced by EA practitioners.

Terminological considerations

Delimiting EA and other forms of democracy assistance is difficult. This Report reflects a reality where the lines are blurry because practice and policy have changed over time and because different actors do things in different ways. The literature review revealed an expansion of EA scope and reach over time to increasingly include more actors, longer timeframes and more political environment-oriented programming such as dispute mechanisms and political campaign. Geographically, the habits and EA patterns of various donors and implementers are uneven. An EA implementer that is a national public institution (such as the Australian Electoral Commission) will design projects differently than a globally-oriented EA implementer like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) or a locally anchored civil society organization such as Perludem (Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi) in Indonesia. Political party strengthening, electoral justice and

international election observation are examples of programming areas that can fall within or outside EA budget lines, depending on the constellation of donors and implementers.

An influential constellation of donor-implementer in EA has been the EU as a donor and UNDP as an implementer. Harnessing their collective influence through a joint EU-UNDP task force (EC-UNDP Joint Taskforce on Electoral Assistance n.d.), they have carried the heavy lifting of defining and delimiting EA programming during the 2000s. For this reason, this Report aligns with their broad definition of *electoral/election assistance (EA)* (Commission of the European Communities 2000:4):

> "Election assistance may be defined as the technical or material support given to the electoral process. It may imply professional help to establish a legal framework for the elections. It may take the form of a general input to the National Election Commission, for example providing voting material and equipment, or helping in the registration of political parties and the registration of voters. It may also imply support to NGOs and civil society in areas such as voter and civic education or training of local observers as well as support to the media through media monitoring and training of journalists."

Further, the Report uses the following working definitions of key concepts:

- *The effectiveness of EA* is the extent to which it overcomes challenges, achieves success with optimal cost-efficiency, and maintains sustainability.

- *Challenges to EA* are situations and factors that hinder electoral assistance. These may be process and context-related.

- *The Success of EA* refers to the accomplishment of objectives. Electoral assistance projects may – and often do – have different objectives achieved to a varying degree of success.

- *Sustainability of EA* refers to the continuity of *successes* beyond the project cycle and without the continuation of external support.

EA principles and practice – literature review

The study literature review looked for evidence of effectiveness and sustainability in the EA policy and practice (so called "grey") literature (see Appendix 1). The findings showed that, while EA has grown and expanded in terms of scope, sophistication of thinking and methods applied, a disconnect between the normative and aspirational on the one hand, and the reality of implementation on the ground on the other exist.

Initially focused on supervising elections for decolonizing nations, early electoral assistance was a UN-led effort that, by 1990 shifted towards training domestic observers and providing technical assistance to foster domestic confidence in electoral processes (Ludwig 1995). The 1990s also featured the establishment of electoral units within existing global and regional intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), whose mandate was to "organize international electoral observation missions and, in some instances, to coordinate electoral assistance" (Leterme 2018). The international elections observation programs within these international or regional organisations functioned as "advocacy, think-tank, monitoring, and implementation agencies" that collaborated closely with domestic partners – especially election management bodies – to oversee elections (Norris 2017).

This section accounts for normative and empirical dynamics, using EA principles as a framing device. The principles – which form the headings of this section – can be seen as a taxonomy or framework (Snyder 2019; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2017) of what an EA intervention could or should contain in order to be more effective.

The literature review shows that, despite some criticism, most sources favoured the continuation and further strengthening of EA efforts. They acknowledged that when EA is successful and sustainable, it helps consolidate democracy, stability, and peace and offered practical guidance on increasing effectiveness. Lührmann (2016) found that elections that received electoral assistance from the UN were "on average better managed than elections without it" and domestic election management capacities were enhanced. Norris (2017:6) points out that EA efforts are proven to be most effective in countries where "the strengths and weaknesses of international agencies and programs match the domestic threats and opportunities". The review of empirical and policy literature yielded an extensive collection of lessons learned and guiding principles for overcoming obstacles, achieving successes, and sustaining them. There are many ways, although none is simple, to systematize and analyse this hefty body of findings. The *principles of effective electoral assistance*, however, transpired as a practical framework.

In the past two decades, such principles were developed by several prominent organizations, most notably EU (2000), Sida (2002), DFID (2010), UN (2012), OECD-DAC (2014), as well as a group of expert authors (Bargiacchi et al. 2011).

EA principles focus attention on problems and offer guidance on how to resolve them. As a general rule, they are anchored in past experiences/learnings, emerge through thoughtful deliberation and review of academic work, target broadly experienced challenges, and are often framed as actionable recommendations. Donors and policymakers sometimes develop EA principles primarily as internal guidance for their organizations. However, through their impacts on how EA is designed, funded, implemented and evaluated, they affect the work of all electoral stakeholders.

The full sets of EA principles in their original form, as developed by different organizations and authors, can be found in Appendix 2: The Compendium of EA Principles. Certain sets of principles were developed for and by individual donors (EU, DFID, Sida) to guide their own activities. The OECD-DAC principles from 2014 represent the most comprehensive attempt to convene the full EA community for input and consensus-building, and, importantly, to align the principles with the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness' goals. The OECD-DAC principles thereby carry a heavier normative weight for this study. The study compiled, clustered and synthesized EA principles across documents from multiple organizations, distinguishing those project- and context-related.

Project-related principles	Context-related principles
• Local ownership and local empowerment	• Context-awareness
• Electoral cycle approach	• Coordination with diplomatic efforts
• Participation of women	• Harmonization and alignment
• Inclusion of marginalized groups	• Addressing democratic weaknesses
• Electoral risk management	• Role of regional organizations
• Multi-level action (national and sub-national)	• Responding to flawed elections
• Linkages with election observation	• Timing and sequencing of EA
• Monitoring and evaluation	

The distinction has numerous practical implications, including ensuring that the scope and ambition of EA efforts are well matched. Namely, despite focus on technical aspects of electoral processes, EA projects implemented in difficult environments will need to balance context-related concerns. Clarity about it should be demonstrated in the project design and implementation.

Due to synergies between principles some overlaps are possible. For example, risk management ability is linked with the broader empowerment objective and the need to establish context-awareness. Election observation can be a part of a role that regional organizations play.

The dynamics between principles and practice are covered next, including summaries of each topic and references to key source documents.

Project-related EA principles and practice

Project-related principles refer to norms to follow in the design and implementation of EA projects. Notionally, these principles are within the mandate and reach of EA projects. The following systematic review of the grey literature relating to these principles presents a more problematic picture of the reality facing EA implementors.

Local ownership and local empowerment

Local ownership and local empowerment are an example of EA principles that serve to align EA with Paris principles and development-oriented goals. The principle presumes a thoroughness of effort, whereby any project moves at the pace and with the engagement of its partner institutions, where the goal is the attainment of sustainable capacity of the professional cohort, the buy-in of stakeholders and the lasting "robustness" of the institutions in question.

However, the EA implementers reality is radically different from this long-term oriented, Paris-aligned ideal. The geo-political stakes of elections lead to, time and again, international and domestic pressure to prioritise instead expeditious solutions for the delivery of a short-term oriented electoral event. This principle-practice disconnect around local ownership and long-term orientation serves as arguably *the* prime tension for understanding EA effectiveness and impact.

In one illustrative case, Barbara (2014) describes how the Paris discussion affected decisions around support to the Solomon Islands, showing how the "pressure to transition" exposed the limits of intervention and opened a conversation on changing the culture of development support in the Solomon Islands; moving it from an "interventionary" approach to a Paris-aligned partnership-based approach. "Partnership, it was argued, would provide a better basis for engaging with Solomon Islands' long-term development challenges, ensuring more effective aid" (Barbara 2014).

The effect of this shift on EA is described in DFAT 2017, which details how the programming importance of local empowerment in elections grew in relation to the imperative of holding events – although it acknowledged that there were many challenges to the achievement of empowerment goals (DFAT 2017). This mixed picture was broadly reflected in the reviewed literature. A lack of local ownership persisted as the weakest point in event-focused EA approaches, as manifested in the following phenomena: lack of political will, donor-driven agendas, short term modalities, compartmentalised roles for the various actors, delayed financing, difficulty of financing non-election focussed activities, and difficulties when "fly-in, fly-out", inexperienced or context unaware EA actors are unable to build trust (see for example: Carothers 1999; ICAI 2012; Ivantcheva 2018; Jenness 2010; UNDP 2007; and UNDP 2015).

In particular, documentation dating to early days of EA shows that emphasis on development orientation of EA was initially not present. The EA efforts that were implemented in post-authoritarian and post-conflict settings in 1980s and 1990s focused narrowly on supporting the technical administration and immediate delivery of a single electoral event, favouring expeditious solutions with less thought for sustainability in the long term. The advantage of this approach was that high-quality elections were held, often under very difficult conditions such as destroyed infrastructure or displaced populations. The disadvantage is that these achievements demanded the costly flying-in of personnel and equipment, with little opportunity to think through what had to happen next or what was left behind. Whether due to insufficient experience of national counterparts, limited technical capacities and domestic funding, or due to pressing political and operational timelines to deliver elections, international experts often assumed key implementation roles, failing to transfer crucial know-how to local counterparts. These international-centred interventions created a prolonged dependency and undermined the sustainability of elections following international experts and funding withdrawal (Carothers 1999). Financially, donors found themselves repeating similar interventions for subsequent elections.

For all the reasons listed above, the literature review confirms a shift in the 2000s whereby EA policies and programming design increasingly placed stronger emphasis on sovereignty, the development of national partners' institutional capacity, ownership, sustainability, citizens' understanding and engagement (DFID 2010; EU 2006; OECD-DAC 2014; UN 2012). The international involvement in Timor Leste showcases a deliberate and systematic attempt to build long-term oriented capacity development into the EA programming led by the United Nations, with strong donor support from Australia among others. A strong emphasis was placed

on twinning international with local staff – with the Timorese placed in the leading position and the international as a supportive "buddy". The carefully recruited cohort of Timorese electoral staff were trained through a curriculum that systematically incorporated cutting-edge knowledge on elections based on global knowledge at the time and taught by the highest level of professional facilitators. This investment to systematise global knowledge to rapidly empower local talent paid dividends – 20 years later the original cohort remained in leading roles in elections both in Timor Leste, but also as net providers of EA in other parts of the world (DFAT 2017). Similar experiences were replicated elsewhere. The strong emphasis on capacity development and training in Georgia has led to Georgians serving as election trainers and EA providers far beyond their borders. The strong inclusion and empowerment of staff in Bosnia has led to a net export of electoral knowledge and EA expertise.

This Timorese EA success story inspired some of the major EA implementers to jointly build and consolidate a curriculum and course delivery structure available for future EA interventions that came to be known as the BRIDGE project. Adopted by two of the largest EA implementors IFES and UNDP as a natural part of EA programme design, between 2001 and 2017, more than 15,000 persons were trained through 2036 workshops[5]. Similarly, a global Masters curriculum, known as 'MEPA', housed in the Italian University of Scuola Sant'Anna (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies), is supported and used in programming by the major

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[5] Hosted by the Australian Electoral Commission, the acronym BRIDGE stands for "Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections." BRIDGE (n.d.). Retrieved from www.bridge.project.org

European EA provider, ECES. [6] Also EMBs themselves are establishing permanent training centers whose mandate expanded beyond training EMB officials only. In some instances, programmes encompass other national electoral stakeholders and in some instances such as Mexico, India, South Korea; international peer-to-peer programming.

Evaluations have confirmed that EA that incorporates development and capacity-building considerations increases national ownership and contributes to more sustainable results (UNDP 2012; Coffey 2013). National capacity and ownership are broad categories. They extend beyond electoral management bodies (EMBs) and require robust governance structures that safeguard the integrity through legislative, political and financial arrangements; empowered civil society and media that can respond to democratic threats; (ICAI 2012; DFAT 2017; Sida evaluation Zambia 2019).

This mixed picture of capacity development gains on the one hand ("local empowerment") but persistent lagging on the local ownership side speak to a set of conclusions discussed later in the Report, namely the considerable gains in electoral skills and knowledge thanks to EA support and the sustainability dividends yielded by long-term oriented "soft" investments in capacity development, but also to a recommendation that advises renewed emphasis on long-term oriented programming for local ownership.

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[6] ECES, the European Centre for Electoral Support, is an independent, non-partisan and not for profit foundation, which promotes electoral and democratic strengthening through the provision of advisory services, operational support and project management. ECES (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.eces.eu/en/

Electoral cycle approach

If the "local ownership" EA principle discussed above is directly derived from the Paris Declaration, the principle of the "electoral cycle approach" is unique to the EA field. Developed by the EA community of practice itself, the traction of this principle has been remarkable – it is adopted and used in guidelines, handbooks, training programmes and programming documents worldwide.

The conceptual attractiveness of the Electoral Cycle is due to one of the factors that make elections unique: the pervasive scarcity of time, and the tyranny of the Electoral Calendar. The fixed date of an election – in combination with strict legal requirement, difficult logistics, and the imperative to reach each adult citizen – requires a meticulous planning regimen with each preparatory task done at the correct time – whether this be necessary legislation, appointment of electoral commissioners, voter registration, large procurement or recruitment. Any slippage impacts delivery of an election on election day, and a valid result thereafter. The visual of the electoral cycle (see figure 1) helps all involved – from donors to front-line workers to legislators – to understand the extent of all the tasks and stages in between election days, and the imperative of the timeliness of each of those stages.

Figure 1: The Electoral Cycle

Note: The figure is reproduced courtesy International IDEA.

Traditionally, donors showed little interest in supporting the early stages of the electoral process or the post-election period. As a consequence, funding was often offered in the late stages, when it was too late to compensate for delays, legal and technical gaps, political stalemates, lack of trust, or other challenges that could have been effectively addressed in the early phases. Also, in some contexts, preserving initial successes and reaching full effectiveness required protracted engagement over multiple election cycles. These problems did not go unnoticed, and that a conceptual shift was imminent: "elections are not one-day events" and "technical assistance is needed as early as possible and should continue between elections" (European Commission 2000A:6).

To support this conceptual shift, in 2005 a cross-organisational group of electoral experts devised the Electoral Cycle Approach, a visual tool that depicts the complexity and chronology of electoral processes and that advocates for electoral assistance to be viewed as continuous, rather than one-off and short-lived support to single election events (International IDEA 2008, Bargiacchi et al 2011). Its comprehensiveness, immediateness, and simplicity resulted in the approach being broadly endorsed by electoral assistance providers, donors, and election officials as a planning and programming tool (UNDP 2007).

The Electoral Cycle Approach was highlighted as an important principle of effective electoral assistance by the EU in 2009: "The EU support should take into account the full electoral cycle and not focus on ad hoc electoral support only" (Council of the European Union 2009: 4); by DFID in 2010: "Systematically adopt the electoral cycle approach" (DFID 2010: 22) and by the OECD-DAC in 2014: "Think and act across the electoral cycle (OECD 2014: 82). The USAID Electoral Assessment Framework uses the electoral cycle as one of three overarching analytical approaches woven throughout their programming framework (USAID 2021A). The Spanish government supported this electoral cycle approach via a dedicated UNDP project – see GPECS, Box 1.

Despite this policy endorsement, subsequent assessments of EA projects continue to reiterate the fact that more needs to be done by donors to ensure that the Electoral Cycle Approach is implemented in practice and not by simply extending the duration of EA interventions (International IDEA 2008; DFAT 2017; ICAI 2012). This disconnect between a widely endorsed principle and the difficulties of enacting it speaks to one of the recommendations of this Report: the importance of global conversations that align EA programming to peer accountability and

peer support mechanisms that reinforce, reinvigorate and – recognising its maturity – revise and renew the electoral cycle approach.

Box 1: GPECS Case Study[7]

In 2009, following a growing demand for electoral assistance based on the Electoral Cycle Approach – that is, assistance that addressed elections as a recurring process and engaged different actors and entry points throughout the cycle – UNDP initiated the Global Project on Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS), with the goal of aligning its electoral assistance programming with this new approach. To achieve this programmatic alignment, GPECS was designed to provide comprehensive and holistic UNDP electoral assistance that was separate from, but complementary to, its national electoral assistance projects (UNDP 2015B).

GPECS activities took place at the global, regional and national levels and were intended to help synergize and give coherence to UNDP EA at these levels. At the global level, its activities included the development and maintenance of global tools, an innovative policy agenda, policy knowledge products in cutting-edge areas, and the development of a global community of practice that included the UN, international and national partners. At the regional level, it focused on the exchange of good practices, peer networking and knowledge creation and dissemination. At the country level, GPECS sought to reinforce the capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and enhance the relationship between EMBs and key electoral stakeholders.

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[7] This is the first of a series of 'best case studies' interspersed throughout the Report. Each 'best practice' case study was suggested by one or more study participants as examples of EA interventions where EA principles were embodied and implemented in practice.

Emphasis on inclusive participation and women's empowerment was mainstreamed and programmed on all three levels (UNDP 2009).

The management of knowledge learned through EA practice was an integral aspect of GPECS and its mutually enforcing system of knowledge generation and dissemination was another of its innovative features. Under this system, best practices were drawn from national and regional programs, fed into global policy and then were integrated into the electoral assistance tools and knowledge products designed to strengthen electoral assistance programming.

According to internal UNDP assessments, by the time the first phase of GPECS drew to a close in 2013, it had achieved an impressive record: the number of UNDP Country Offices implementing the Electoral Cycle Approach in their programming had majorly increased; it had provided capacity strengthening of approximately 4000 EMB officials, civil society members and UNDP Country Office staff; it had contributed to the development and dissemination of six UN-system-wide electoral assistance policies; and it had mainstreamed gender in UNDP electoral programs (UNDP 2014). Despite the demonstrated gains of this approach, the ambitions for the project were dramatically reduced when the global financial crisis led to deep budget cuts by the biggest donor, Spain (UNDP 2016). The GPECS project's innovative methods with knowledge, gender, capacity and electoral cycle focus, but also its premature downscaling, demonstrate the potential, but also the fragility, of a strong donor-implementor relationship.

Participation of women

As with the local ownership principle discussed above, women's participation in elections as an explicit and integral part of EA work came with the infusion and influence of broader democracy and development thinking – that election must not be just a means to transfer of power, but can also be inclusive, representative and participatory. Through the literature review, a gender perspective is less obvious from EA beginnings in decolonisation and peacekeeping, but grows in importance alongside the notable gap in gender balance and women's equality and the relevance of gender work in development more broadly. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) process spotlight political participation as a human right. These gender perspectives were adopted by donors and other development actors. In 2002, SIDA wrote: "A gender perspective must be integrated into planning, implementation and the follow up of projects, and projects that promote women's participation, whether as voters or candidates, should be prioritized". By the 2010's, all examined EA policy documents included advocacy of enhanced EA support to women's political participation: DFID's 2010 principles specified "Support women's political participation", the UN (2012) asked for a "gender perspective" on EA, and the OECD-DAC (2014) simply said "Don't neglect gender". These admonitions translated into EA programming tools such as gender election observation checklists, EMB gender policy guidelines, and gender-impact statements.

However, whereas EA policies, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation all put emphasis on the importance of the gender dimension, assessment and evaluation reports continue to indicate mixed success. On the positive side, IDEA 2005 finds that "The last ten years have seen the wider acceptance of the principle

that representation of women involves representation by women. Pressure has grown for both electoral and political legislation that encourages the election of women through conducive electoral systems (such as List Proportional Representation) and quotas, and for action within political parties to encourage the nomination of more women candidates."[8] The GPECS case featured in this Report (see Box 1) exemplifies how gender is incorporated into programming; while the Regional Support for MENA case (see Box 6) shows the dividends that this approach can bring, and how advocacy and reform efforts at the regional level can be particularly important to advance gender equality.

UNDP 2009 reported that "despite international efforts to strengthen the conduct of free and fair elections throughout the world, insufficient attention and resources have been devoted to addressing the gap between male and female participation. Indeed, not enough is known about the gap in participation and how to adequately address it."[9]

The seminal guide for EMBs to promote gender equality and women's participation, published by UN Women and UNDP in 2015, highlights that EMBs have a "key role in promoting women's electoral and political participation", but points to "limited evidence or guidance for EMBs on how to ensure women's meaningful and equal participation in electoral administration, and how initiatives that have sought to empower women in electoral administration have not been well documented" (UNDP 2015:1). The guide provides step by step guidance to overcome this gap, and UN Women and UNDP adjusted their EA programmes to accommodate these recommendations, with Sweden as a key donor.

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[8] (International IDEA, Ten Years of Supporting Democracy Worldwide IDEA, 2005, p.108).
[9] (UNDP, Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support, 2009, p.33).

Even when EA providers are sensitive to gender issues and well resourced, problems may persist if the issue crosses paths with security situation or patriarchal traditions that makes it hard for women to participate. For example, the Praia 2012 Declaration recommends that EA efforts implemented in conflict-affected societies should "establish early warning mechanisms to monitor before, during, and after elections potential human right violations and enable a quick response with the participation of civil society, in particular women groups." The UNDP 2013 evaluation in Ghana found: "The Electoral Commission attributes the general under-representation of women among polling agents to the chronic absence of women in local political party leadership and misconceptions about the role of a polling agent leading to male-biased selection criteria (e.g. preference for "toughness"). This issue was described as a systemic and institutional misconception, beyond just election work." [10] USAID (2013:6) suggested that "donors should consider the 2013 Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) gender audit as one source in designing future electoral assistance. Presumably, findings from the MSI conflict evaluation would also be useful in informing future program design in this area. USAID should establish/update crosscutting results frameworks for women and youth where possible."[11] A more recent evaluation of Australia's electoral assistance to Papua New Guinea 2015–2017 found that "These results demonstrate the inherent challenges faced by many donor initiatives in translating plausible affirmative action strategies into sustainable outcomes for women in the face of entrenched societal and institutional beliefs and barriers". UN policy on support

[10] (UNDP, Final Evaluation Report: Evaluation of the Ghana Electoral Support Programme, 2013, p.22).

[11] Performance Evaluation of USAID Electoral Assistance to Kenya from January 2008–August 2013.

to situation rooms (2018:2) is: "… described as initiatives of civil society, sometimes in collaboration with other stakeholders (governments, private sector, etc.), to promote the peaceful conduct of elections – including promoting women's electoral participation and addressing violence against women."[12]

Inclusion of marginalized groups

Similar to the trajectory described above on the participation of women, the literature review shows movement and increased attention to not just the mechanics of elections but also the societal implications and the dynamics of political participation. The language to address these dynamics shifts over time and donor preferences; the literature review clustered references to access, participation, inclusion, empowerment, marginalisation, minority, and diversity concepts. Similarly, the target audiences, needs, and types of intervention evolve and develop. Central is recognising that political power and voice are distributed unevenly in societies and that different electoral choices affect communities differently.

As the framing shifts, so do the boundaries of who is and isn't a beneficiary for EA interventions, particularly whether the interventions are the same or different to those that target women's participation. The concept of marginalized groups is quite broad. In addition to marginalization due to gender, it may include other segments of the electorate based on their age, ethnicity and religion, race, physical disabilities, sexual orientation, ideology, location, and the intersectionality between these identities. EA literature fluctuates between clustering different beneficiaries into one category (such as 'marginalised groups'), allowing for programming crossover and

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[12] Addendum to Policy Directive FP/01/2012 on Principles and Types of UN Electoral Assistance 20 November 2018, pp2.

scaling up versus distinguishing particular groups to focus on the specificities that prevent particular groups from participating fully. An upcoming UNDP publication on ensuring and enabling the participation of LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections is an example of the latter.

The literature review shows that types of EA interventions to support the inclusion of marginalised groups can be broadly clustered as normative, procedural, educative, or empowering (authors' categories). The UN has been a leader on the normative side. A policy directive (UN 2012) to guide EA work summarises the normative imperative simply: "Promote inclusiveness, including the involvement of underrepresented or marginalized groups" explaining further that "In furtherance of its aim to facilitate and promote universal and equal suffrage UN electoral assistance seeks to promote the involvement of underrepresented or marginalized groups in electoral processes. These can include women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and other populations vulnerable due to poverty or illiteracy." Each listed category builds on UN mandates and international commitments that more broadly address the political rights of these societal groups. For this reason, some aspects of EA work address legal frameworks and compliance with international obligations to enshrine, protect and guarantee these rights. International norms on political inclusion were echoed in bilateral EA priorities, where donors sought specifically to understand the EA results outcomes from a marginalised perspective, with USAID (2014:4) Kenya recommending that "USAID should update its results framework to ensure that support to marginalised groups is adequately incorporated" [13] , or the

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[13] Performance Evaluation of USAID Electoral Assistance to Kenya from January 2008–August 2013.

Australian DFAT highlighting the inclusion of marginalised groups as a critical factor for understanding the effectiveness of its own EA interventions (DFAT 2017).

Understanding EA from rights-based standpoint shifts or extends the time perspective of EA initiatives, recognising that educative and empowerment work, often framed as awareness and capacity development, takes time. A UNDP report noted (2007:2) that "Electoral assistance that uses the Electoral Cycle's approach centres on longer-term support and provides a better opportunity to address in a much more sustainable manner issue of capacity development; institutional strengthening; participation of women, minorities, indigenous people and other disadvantaged groups; and the use of appropriate/cost-effective technology in electoral processes, among others."[14]

The literature review recorded significant progress, especially in access to polling – much of which is summarised and explained on the website electionaccess.com. USAID (2010:23) reported that a pilot project supporting enhanced polling accessibility for voters with disabilities was "acclaimed as a success by the majority of the people interviewed. Such an activity had never been attempted before. It reinforced the positive image of the Electoral Commission and motivated the organizations working on behalf of persons with disabilities which could result in long-term sustainability and probable expansion of the activity." [15] Election observation is another area where there is increasing sophistication on empowering CSOs to monitor compliance levels with the citizens' electoral rights for which they advocate. For example, USAID (2018:16) observed that "IRI achievements were particularly notable in providing information, resources and transfer of skills to women, young people

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[14] UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation guide, 2007, p.2.

[15] USAID, Honduras Post Electoral Assessment, 2010, p.23.

and PWD; all of this makes it more possible for these groups to engage in political processes. IRI (and NDI) were able to develop effective international election monitoring in Jordan, thus contributing to the transparency of elections." [16] However, a DFAT evaluation (2017:45) underscored that "The degree of attention to disability inclusion in electoral assistance has been driven more by individuals' motivation and relationships within DFAT, rather than by policy or technical imperatives."[17]

The difficulties of holding elections during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 put focus on a perennial problem that polling station voting may not be the best fit for certain, more vulnerable categories of voters – in this case, special risk groups such as the elderly. The implications for EA are the sharp rise in demand for knowledge and advice regarding introducing special voting arrangements (SVAs) – such as early voting and remote voting – to accommodate and service a wider spectrum of voters. This spectrum goes beyond Covid risk groups and covers many voters at risk of disenfranchisement, including those with disabilities, reduced mobility, homebound voters, voters in hospitals, prisons, voters on official duty, refugees, migrant workers and voters abroad. Legislators and EMBs have, in recent years, recognised that more needs to be done to reach marginalized voters. South Korea is an example of a country where courts have raised attention on the need to expand SVAs to broader groups at risk of disenfranchisement and political marginalisation.

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[16] USAID, Consortium for Elections and Political Processes Strengthening (CEPPS): Program Evaluation report, 2018, p.16.
[17] Australian Department Foreign Affairs and Trade, Making it count: Lessons from Australian Electoral Assistance, 2017, p.45.

The literature review confirmed the continued importance of skills transfer programming targeting young people, women and persons with disabilities and the imperative of updating EA results frameworks to ensure that support to marginalized groups is adequately incorporated (USAID 2014; USAID 2018).

Electoral risk management

As has already been discussed in relation to the electoral cycle approach, the emphasis that EA policy documents place on risk management is a consequence of lessons learned from early EA interventions.

Electoral processes face various risks reflecting long, complex and time-critical preparations, undue influence and fraud, political crises, social conflicts and violence. When risks materialize, they can undermine the integrity of electoral events and the reputation of EMBs and of the EA projects that support them. In conflict-affected societies, electoral risks extend to threats to electoral stakeholders and international missions (USAID 2000A; DFID 2010; DFID & FCO 2010). Evaluation of DFIDs EA via UNDP pointed out that "65% of electoral assistance projects have high-risk ratings" (ICAI 2012:13). Therefore, the importance of analysing and being alerted to risk factors, and prepared to address them, was accentuated in the EA principles developed by DFID (2010) and OECD DAC (2014).

Achieving comprehensive risk management capabilities is, for any EMB, a complex undertaking that requires commitment, methodological rigour, tools, and organisational mindset (International IDEA 2016; International IDEA 2021). Even when EA projects incorporate a risk management component, it is often narrowly focused on specific risks, such as preventing and mitigating election-related violence. However, risks to electoral processes can

come in many other shapes and forms, such as extreme weather events, technology malfunction, logistical shortfalls or attempts at fraud. The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent and stark example of an electoral risk that materialised, forcing EMBs and electoral stakeholders to take rapid and difficult decisions on whether to postpone or adjust elections (Asplund & James 2020). The EMBs that coped best were those with preparedness "habits" with rapid response and preparedness – whether through adaptive management, contingency funding, rapid procurement of needed materials, interagency co-operation, public communication, and the ability to rapidly introduce new health and security measures and special voting arrangements (International IDEA n.d.A).

The risks to elections are not decreasing. Wider global trends of democratic backsliding, political polarisation with its vitriolic discourse, misinformation, climate change and cyberterrorism are all going to destabilize electoral processes in ways EMBs or EA providers cannot easily foresee. These concerns from the literature review were echoed by the palpable concerns of EA practitioners consulted in later stages of the study. There were scathing accounts of rigid EA programming frameworks where the necessary adaptation and responsiveness to deal with unforeseen events was completely missing.

On a positive note, risk management is increasingly institutionalized by EMBs world-wide moving from informal to formal risk management processes. This development is accelerated by the fact that governments around the globe are increasingly imposing risk management as a compulsory process across all their agencies, including EMBs. Also, in the COVID-19 operating environment, there was an increased need for EMBs to conduct risk assessments, put risk management systems in place and utilize risk management as a framework for collaboration with other state and non-state actors (International IDEA & AEC 2021).

These findings foreshadow the Report recommendations to, firstly, ensure that EA programming is in itself adaptive and responsive to changes and shifts, and, secondly, to prioritise EA interventions that build the ability of beneficiaries to handle any future risks whatever it may be. As discussed in the Analysis section of this Report, knowledge production, gathering and sharing is essential to effective EA – and electoral risk management habits are one vehicle to organise key information to shape and guide preparedness and action. The Report also advocates for the global sharing of skills and tools, including on how best to predict, assess and mitigate the many risks challenging elections.

Multi-level action (national and sub-national)

Although local-level elections transpired in the literature review only sporadically, and in most instances in the context of being neglected, the OECD-DAC principle, "Add the local to the national" (OECD 2014:82), highlights the importance of local election for the overall effectiveness of electoral assistance.

The EU (European Commission 2000) notes that elections at all levels of governance are necessary for the consolidation democracy and that popular involvement and competition are often stronger in elections at the local level. Similarly, Sida (2002) emphasizes that more focus should be placed on support to local and regional elections, because they are often more flawed and of a lower quality than national level elections. Support to local level elections can be an important aspect of programmes supporting decentralization (UNDP 2004) and building national ownership (UNDP 2015). Including local elections in EA projects is also important because of the sustainability and effectiveness benefits that accrue from such bottom-up approaches (USAID 2010:28–29).

Linkages with election observation

The literature shows a shifting relationship between EA and electoral observation – initially conflated, they became increasingly distinct in roles and mandate, while remaining closely interconnected. The development of principles *about* election observation (UN 2005) and about supporting/linking with election observation (as discussed in this sub-section) came with the imperative to create order and address thorny issues of sovereignty, conflict of interest and competing development and diplomatic agendas. This is an area where progress has been made. The literature included examples of increased professionalism and sophistication of international and domestic observation groups in methodology, analysis and operations, supported by EA (UN (2005), OSCE (2010) and NDI (1995)).

This was not always the case. Initially, observation or "monitoring" was an early entry point for involvement in the elections of others – or to show goodwill by the international community (as in the 1989 elections in Namibia), to mitigate risks of violence (as in South Africa in 1994) and – more broadly – to promote participation while reducing legitimacy contestations from defeated political group. The idea being that the presence of impartial foreign observers "reassures political activists and electors about voting secrecy, personal security, and the legitimacy of the election" (Koenig-Archibugi 2007). Santa-Cruz (2005) notes that during Mexico's 1994 election "the international structure made the entrance of Mexican NGOs into monitoring activities possible", that is, it provided a framework for building the long-term domestic observation capacity that has long-since replaced the international component in Mexico.

Electoral observation entails gathering information about an electoral process by those who do not have the mandate to interfere, but where there is value in an external, informed assessment (International IDEA 1997). Electoral observation is often considered as a complement to electoral assistance (European Commission 2000) that is important for creating an atmosphere of openness, transparency and public confidence in the system and reinforces the capacity of EMBs to conduct elections neutrally and effectively (UNDP 2000). Election observation missions (EOMs) experience limitations when observers can only be present in a fraction of polling stations or when observers face political or security obstacles (International IDEA 2005; Dupont et al. 2010). Also, the importance for EOMs of establishing a long-term in-country presence to assess the electoral cycle holistically, and not only on voting day is emphasized in the literature (including in Carothers 2015).

EOMs reinforce overall EA efforts in several ways, including sharing information about findings that can inform EA projects' implementation in the current or future electoral cycles. One the most important outcomes of EOMs is to develop recommendations and help catalyse an agreed agenda for ensuing reform and EA. Arguably, international EOMs perform such functions more credibly and systematically than domestic observers because of the extensive international and comparative experience on which they draw. Related, the voice of EOMs (and their reports and findings) can help provide an outside perspective, separate from EA technical assistance groups, host governments and other national actors with special interests. The role of international EOM will be important in as one modality to counter the authoritarian wave and backsliding, and to support the legitimacy focused EA aims or activities and able to provide "heft and ballast" to the advocacy of domestic groups.

Accordingly, DFID principles encouraged "support to electoral observation" (DFID 2010) while OECD notes that "elections assistance and observation should be well co-ordinated, as observation plays a key role in effective electoral support" (OECD-DAC 2014:81). The literature review also points to the importance of domestic election observation efforts on EA's effectiveness. According to DFID (2010A:27), domestic observation can "add significant depth to an election observation effort by having many more observers than international groups, and their observers usually have a much greater knowledge of the local scene. On the other hand, they are more likely to be seen as having a political agenda or partisan 'blinders'.

Two initiatives to standardize and codify electoral monitoring include The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers (2005), and the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations (2010). These normative frameworks have been developed, sustained and strengthened through community of practice engagement in the form of yearly meetings and topic-specific methodology development working groups. More recently, the outbreak of COVID-19 has exposed limitations in international electoral observation methodology, but also prompted renewal and methodological and operational innovation.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical for understanding the extent to which past and present EA efforts – global, regional, and country-specific – are successful and effective. Donors emphasize that it is important to take stock of lessons learned and initiate necessary reforms to ensure the sustainability of results over the long term and

local ownership of the process (USAID 2014). A well-produced evaluation can ensure that good lessons are broadly promoted, while recognizing that each context is unique and that it is difficult to systematically apply lessons in other contexts (UNDP 2004, UNDP 2015). On this point, the study team noted that a bulk of EA evaluations owned by donors and implementing organizations remain off the "public accessibility" grid.

Methodological problems with evaluations include lack of clarity on results and indicators (Sida 2008), difficulty to demonstrate impact in high-risk areas, lessons that are continuously not taken onboard (ICAI 2012), lack of systematic approach to the evaluation of EA success (DFAT 2017). DFID argued that "a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be built into electoral support", stressing "that implementing partners are fully aware of the importance of sound M&E and devote sufficient resources during design and implementation". Further, DFID emphasizes the importance of early assessments involving national partners (DFID 2010B:20).

Context-related EA principles and practice

The principles categorised as "context-related" are those which provide guidance on challenges relating to the context of an EA intervention.

Context-awareness

The literature review showed that when implemented in challenging contexts, even well-funded and technically sound EA interventions and projects fell short of yielding the expected results. It also revealed that a principal cause of such underperformances was a

failure to take sufficient account of the context in which the EA was delivered. The design and implementation of these projects and interventions were not anchored on a thorough analysis of the political economy surrounding the elections.

To address the repeatedly identified one-size-fits-all (or "cookie cutter") EA problems, when identical project designs and approaches are used and re-used in quite diverse contexts, the literature identified mechanisms, such as diagnosing the nature of the problem in order to determine the financial or technical support to its solution (USAID 2000:7); conducting in-depth studies to inform decisions on electoral assistance (Sida 2002:21); or making efforts to genuinely understand history and politics (International IDEA 2005:30). To achieve sustainability, EA must be placed in the right context, alongside other institutional developments (EC 2006: 43). These arguments were reiterated in the principles of electoral assistance offered by various organizations and authors (DFID2010; UNOWA 2011; OECD 2014).

However, while context-awareness remains the problem undermining EA projects (DFAT 2017) there is very little practical guidance about how the existing assessment and analysis tools, such as conflict assessment frameworks (USAID 2012), political economy analysis (DFID 2009, USAID 2018B) power analysis (Sida 2013) can be practically utilized for assessing the conduciveness of the context to the organization and delivery of credible elections. USAID and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in the UK (FCO 2018) are seeking to rectify this with tools aimed at their own constituencies. Evaluations rarely refer to the accuracy of context assessments that have informed EA efforts, be it of donors or EA providers.

Coordination with diplomatic efforts

Diplomatic missions tend to be knowledgeable on historical context, local politics, and what is at stake for key actors involved in upcoming elections. This role – and value of this knowledge – explains the recurrence of recommending diplomats as natural allies for EA throughout the literature. In complex settings, the effectiveness of electoral assistance is often contingent on the extent to which there is coordination between diplomatic missions and technical assistance providers (EC 2006, USAID 2017, DFAT 2017).

Key EA policy documents include principles that advocate for integrating diplomatic efforts with financial and technical support (DFID 2010); grounding electoral assistance in complementary diplomatic policies (OECD-DAC 2014); and integration of EA with peacebuilding or special political missions (UN 2012).

However, OECD DAC also warns that "EA should only be used to promote free and fair elections, not to advance other donor policy goals, such as burnishing the legitimacy of favoured partner governments or building friendly relationships with governments" (OECD-DAC 2014:82).

Box 2: USAID EA Knowledge Dissemination Modalities

In the United States, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has established a multi-tiered structure of electoral expertise. This allows for comprehensive and responsive technical support to USAID Missions, as well as coordination with the U.S. Department of State and other interagency bodies at the global, regional, and country levels.

The Democratic Elections and Political Processes (DEPP) Team, housed within USAID's Washington, D.C.-based Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG Center),

provides electoral expertise at the global level. The DEPP Team, in collaboration with DRG Center and Regional Bureau staff, provides technical support and guidance to USAID Missions, Washington D.C. Bureaus, and other U.S. government entities, including interagency working groups, and the National Security Council's interagency process. The DEPP Team assists USAID Missions remotely and in person to conduct electoral assessments, develop electoral strategies (often in partnership with Embassies), and design, implement, and evaluate programs. The DEPP Team also provides policy support and access to flexible and rapid response implementing mechanisms and funding. The team regularly supports USAID's Regional Bureaus to brief Congressional staff, the international community, and others on election programs (USAID n.d.).

To build electoral expertise among USAID DRG staff, improve program design and evaluation, and advance the Agency's technical leadership, USAID's DEPP Team develops technical resources, interactive trainings, and analytical tools (USAID n.d.A). For example, USAID recently developed the Electoral Assessment Framework (USAID 2021A) and Companion Toolkit (USAID 2021), which assists USAID DRG staff, other US Government personnel, and implementing partners to systematically assess a country's political and electoral context and inform the design of strategies that promote democratic elections and political processes.

USAID's Regional Bureaus have Washington D.C.-based teams with DRG expertise, including electoral expertise. These experts provide region-specific technical guidance and policy support to USAID Missions, manage regional DRG-related programming and initiatives, and are key interlocutors with the Department of State on elections.

At the country level, the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Offices within USAID Missions house staff with electoral expertise. USAID Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) in these offices design and oversee electoral assistance programs carried out by implementing partners. They are also USAID's frontline interface on election-related issues with the U.S. Embassy Political Office, other diplomats, the donor community, and the host government, ensuring close coordination with stakeholders in the elections space.

Box 3: Team Sweden: integrated approach to development

The following extract from the main findings and recommendations of OECD DAC's 2019 peer review of Sweden's development systems and policies provides a valuable illustration of the dividends of an integrated approach to global development. Of particular note is the close coordination between diplomats and development experts.

Sweden is an adept, ambitious and influential actor on global sustainable development

Sweden actively engages at the international level to support global public goods, promote human rights and address global challenges. A Team Sweden approach enables the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Sida staff to jointly represent Sweden in global development processes, pooling their expertise and speaking with a unified voice. Working deliberately with other countries and stakeholders to build alliances, Sweden has shown leadership in its pursuit of peace and conflict prevention, gender equality through its Feminist Foreign Policy, and environmental sustainability and climate change.

Sweden is drawing on the expertise of the whole of its government and a broad set of actors across Swedish society to help to deliver on its ambitious goal to be a leader in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Its Delegation for the 2030 Agenda brings together representatives of Sweden's business and research communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), and municipal governments, and has helped the government to assess progress and promote awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. A National Action Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda has also been established, and Sweden is in the process of creating national indicators for all the targets and an integrated follow-up system to regularly monitor progress. In addition, Sweden has put in place cross-government action areas for delivering on key goals, including a report on global health. A renewed political commitment to policy coherence for sustainable development, as well as reformed organisational processes, have also enhanced Sweden's ability to identify and address synergies and trade-offs (OECD, 2019).

Harmonization and alignment

Alignment, twinned with ownership discussed earlier, is one of the principles at the heart of the Paris Declaration; it "requires donors to get substantially behind these objectives [developed through local ownership of process] and, where possible, use local systems in ways that reinforce the capability and legitimacy of the developing state" (Barbara 2014). This broader development principle was incorporated as an EA principle both by DFID and the OECD.

OECD DAC interpret alignment as integration of programming; that EA should be actively integrated into the wider domain of democracy support, especially assistance for political party

development, legislative strengthening, media assistance, and civic education programmes. The DFID interpretation is that EA alignment to national/ local structures and systems is important for national ownership and sustainability; but that this alignment with national structures and systems should not prevent the international community from speaking independently and maintaining firm political pressure when required. Further, the DFID guidelines highlight that understanding incentives can help efforts to harmonise and align supporting initiatives.

In a compelling case study of the Solomon Islands, Barbara (2014) shows how these development goals can be thwarted when regional security goals take precedence (Barbara 2014). This theme was echoed at every stage of the study by practitioners who situated their EA work, and its possible success, in a battleground between development and diplomatic or geo-strategic goals.

Certainly, the literature review showed that the inadequacy of formal coordination, engagement and consultation mechanisms among donors, implementers and national partners complicates and fragments EA efforts, limiting their effectiveness. There were repeated occurrences of multiple donors vying for visibility by leaving a unique mark and claiming credit for the successful outcome of supported elections. Effective donor co-ordination helps avoid redundancy and provides harmony and coherence to ensuing efforts (USAID 2000). EA principles emphasize the importance of harmonization, alignment and ownership, building on donor co-ordination and meaningful stakeholder engagement as equal partners – connecting these practices with donor accountability.

Joint pre-EA exploratory or assessment missions were identified as one-way information can be collected about needs, interested donors and conditions that the host government should fulfil (European Commission 2000; Sida 2002). Basket funds and consortia of

bilateral donors are alternative mechanisms for co-ordination and to avoid duplication of effort. Following UNDP (2015) recommendations for increased emphasis in EA projects in supporting political parties, CSOs, media or the judiciary, joint mapping of who is receiving support through coordination meetings is a third mechanism.

Donor coordination meetings now are a standard practice, as such mechanisms have been regularly implemented as an integral component of EA efforts in South Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Nepal. Still, co-ordination challenges and redundancies continued to be observed (Markiewicz et al. 2018).

Addressing democratic weaknesses

EA efforts often need to navigate through environments where democracy assistance is difficult, whether due to post-conflict residual societal rifts or the spectre of authoritarian tendencies, or limited local capacities. The literature review revealed many challenging scenarios for EA work, such as lack of democratic traditions, constraining political arrangements that do not favour free and fair elections, or lack of will by crucial stakeholders to endorse electoral reform or political pluralism. Heavy international presence and generous funding may produce instant relief for democracy champions, but gains are often lost quickly after international presence, contributions, and attention decrease or are withdrawn. Without the government's receptivity and ownership, well-designed capacity development projects and generous funding support will be insufficient or ineffective (Carothers 1999; USAID 2000).

In these cases "a paradigmatic shift in international electoral assistance, from top-down and supply-driven to bottom-up and demand-led approaches" was advised (Sida 2002:17). However, "the international community is often not in the position to maintain support for 'international norms of democracy and governance' against firm, if sometimes covert, opposition by significant local actors" (International IDEA 2005:102). Accordingly, DFID advised that EA should "recognize limitations of development partners' role in elections support" and "be clear when to advocate for and support elections – and when to hold back", whereas UN (2012:9–10) points to the mandates of the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) missions in creating conducive environments.

Nevertheless, in some instances, EA projects continue to meet dead ends by pursuing resolution of deeply political problems by introducing technologies, offering assistance to entities whose dedication to democracy is only rhetorical (USAID 2018). EA promotes expeditious solutions, often technology heavy, to what are technical problems more than political ones. Creating a context conducive to genuine democratic elections and implementing their citizens' right to political participation requires considering multiple factors as appropriate to national circumstances (UN 2017). Therefore, the effectiveness of EA efforts often requires deeper transformative processes in which structural challenges happen.

Role of regional organizations

In the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the United Nations played a central role in providing international electoral assistance. From the 1990s until present, various regional inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) have acquired and institutionalized electoral

expertise through the establishment of electoral units/positions.[18] Their mandate, initially limited to support and conduct international electoral observation efforts, successively expanded into supporting or implementing electoral assistance projects. Due to their local knowledge and shared ownership of regional normative mechanisms, regional organizations were well placed to contribute to effective EA normative and technical support (Bargiacchi et al. 2011; Norris, 2017).

The emergence of regional EMB networks also played a crucial role in strengthening the effectiveness of electoral assistance. Through regional networks, established EMBs were able to consolidate and promote regional electoral standards in the performance of their mandated functions, while less experienced EMBs could draw on support from well-established peer institutions to accelerate capacity development and learning, or share electoral practices and materials. Also, regional networks helped to promote EMBs as institutions of governance (UNDP 2000; International IDEA 2006). Because regional cooperation initiatives were seen as to raise the quality of electoral assistance, donors looked favourably at supporting them (Sida 2002). EA principles by OECD DAC (2014: 76) call to "recognize the role of regional organizations", while DFAT (2017) refers to the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators (PIANZEA) Network as to an effective electoral assistance mechanism for finding sustainable electoral solutions in the Pacific Islands; further, the UN General Assembly (2017:2) "affirms the effectiveness of and the need for coordination with intergovernmental organizations, including regional organizations having international electoral assistance experience".

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[18] For example AU, CoE, ECOWAS, EU, OAS, OSCE, SADC.

Despite the important role of regional level initiatives, findings showed that the default mechanism for EA support remains national level support. One notable and much appreciated exception is the Swedish government's support to ArabEMBs – the UNDP regional networking programme to support knowledge sharing among the EMBs in the Arab World (see Box 4). This long-term oriented project developed iteratively – responding to any openings in the environment to address "difficult" topics. A cohort of professionals – of which half were women – grew in confidence and expertise as they worked on knowledge products for the network members.

Box 4: Regional EA in the MENA and Central African Regions

The sustainability potential of regionally-oriented electoral assistance is amply illustrated by two Sida-funded programmes. The first, the UNDP-implemented "Regional Electoral Support Project for Middle East and North Africa," was created to improve accountability, participation and representation within the Arab States' electoral and political processes – deficiencies identified as causes of the poor governance and conflict afflicting the MENA region. The project promoted democratic institutions, raised awareness and knowledge of electoral processes and practices, and strengthened regional cooperation in these areas. To increase regional knowledge of elections, it supported the development of Arab-language knowledge products, including the first Arabic-English-French Lexicon of Electoral Terminology. It also promoted the establishment of a network of Arab-speaking electoral experts by delivering regionally-customized BRIDGE training modules. It also built regional knowledge through its partnership with the League of Arab States, by introducing institutional memory tools, a first forum of Arab EMBs, and a staff exchange programme. The Project played an instrumental role in establishing and

supporting the Organization of Arab Electoral Management Bodies (ArabEMBs), a network that aims to enhance cooperation and knowledge development amongst Arab electoral administrators. This support has included facilitating ArabEMB's assemblies and meetings, helping it to develop its online presence, and assisting its visitor programmes. The project also placed considerable emphasis on the promotion of the political and civic participation of women and youth, both of which represent major marginalized groups.

Worthy of attention too, is the electoral assistance provided to the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA. This support, provided through the presence of an EISA electoral expert embedded in the ECCAS Commission, allows for good collaboration between the organisations. One such initiative is the development, and soon to be, adoption of the "Principles for Democratic Elections in ECCAS". These principles were drafted by civil society actors, members of election management bodies from all member states and other regional stakeholders. EISA's technical expertise was used in the drafting, followed by ECCAS visits to member states to share, discuss and obtain additional input into the draft. EISA has also been successful in assisting ECCAS in building electoral capacity by facilitating capacity-building workshops for election observers from all ECCAS States and in contributing to enhancing the pre-election and election missions conducted by the Electoral Support Unit.

Responding to flawed elections

Whereas the proper approach to responding to flawed elections has been debated broadly, the OECD-DAC document (2014:82) articulated the need to "respond more consistently to flawed elections" as a stand-out principle for effective EA.

When confronted with a flawed election, DFID called for clarity about the democratic principles and international standards to which the international community is committed, particularly the importance of procedural fairness (DFID & FCO 2010). Similarly, UNDP reminds that all member states of the United Nations are committed to the principle of free elections through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that development partners should strive toward greater normative consistency in responding to flawed elections (UNDP 2015).

Despite these ideals, the literature points out that "Western" governments react inadequately to flawed elections, for example because of an interest to preserve friendly relationships with partner governments (Carothers 2015). DFID (2010:28) argues that "The practice of attempting to interpret the will of the people in the event of a flawed election process is identified as a cause for concern".

Timing and sequencing of elections

The review of the literature highlighted an important distinction between the timing and sequencing of elections and the timing and sequencing of electoral assistance, both factors significantly impacting EA's effectiveness. When the international community is involved in supporting elections that mark democratic or peace transitions, these two factors are strongly linked and interdependent.

The international community initially tended to favour quick elections in countries transitioning from authoritarian to democratic regimes, from war to peace, or from political crises to political stability. The main reason for moving hastily in supporting elections is the envisaged end-result: the legitimatization of the government, using positive momentum for change, or ensuring a quick exit strategy (Carothers 1999: International IDEA 2016). However, EA support to quick elections has often been unproductive and led to election administration shortcuts (Reilly 2003; UNDP, UNDPA & UNDPO 2012). Therefore, DFID emphasized that "post-conflict elections must not be rushed" (2010:13). UNDP argues that "it is critical to consider the sequencing of key events in the transition as a whole, rather than just the timing of a first post-conflict election." (UN 2015:11) International IDEA recommends that decisions about the timing and sequencing of any transitional election be made by considering the broader context of building sustainable electoral processes (International IDEA 2018:46).

Lack of a clear, agreed, designated exit strategy is a hinder to EA effectiveness.

Practitioners' perceptions and experiences

The literature review revealed several dynamics in an ever-expanding EA. As EA lessons were learned, key normative principles of effectiveness were identified and incorporated into EA policies. However, a methodical run-through those EA principles demonstrated a worrisome disconnect between the effectiveness of the ideals set, and how these played out in practice. The key question that emerges is what happens on the ground that makes living up to EA principles so difficult?

This question shifts the focus from "what is known" to "how knowledge is put into practice" which is explored through seeking deeper understanding of stakeholders' perceptions, practical experiences, and points of their consensus.

EA has several key stakeholders' groups. National stakeholders include government agencies, primarily electoral management bodies (EMBs) – and other non-governmental organizations that benefit from international electoral assistance (such as civil society organizations, political parties or media); hereafter referred to as *national partners*. Electoral assistance providers include international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations which have the expert capacity to support national partners in delivering credible elections; hereafter, *implementing organizations or implementers*. In some instances, EA implementers can include national stakeholders, such as CSOs. Development organizations avail funding for EA projects; hereafter, *donors*. It is often the availability of these funds that determine the scope and duration of EA. Finally, various International Government Organisations (IGO)

are developing policies for effective electoral assistance for their internal or external purposes. Such organizations and individuals (including researchers) who contribute to creating such policies and are hereinafter referred to as *policymakers*.

Stakeholders' perceptions – The survey findings

All stakeholders' groups were targeted by the original survey designed to measure their perceptions on a range of issues relating to the interplay between the principles and the practice of EA (see summary findings in Appendix 3).

The survey found that electoral stakeholders have a broad and shared understanding of the issues that impact EA. They all see EA as a complex undertaking affected by the interplay of multiple factors whose weight depends on the country and electoral contexts. Most respondents consistently validated and reiterated the importance of all principles identified during the literature review effort.

Overall, the survey respondents perceive EA as fairly effective, and that the primary benchmark of effectiveness is a stable and trusted EMB. This corresponds with prevailing perceptions that national partners are the most important stakeholders and that local empowerment and ownership must be the EA priority. A proper project planning and design of EA is critical for effective implementation.

Electoral assistance is strongly affected by different context-related factors. Among them, the government's commitment to democratic elections is crucial. Therefore, it is broadly held that EA project design and implementation should always be guided by context

assessment efforts. In terms of sustainability, trust in electoral processes and institutions is even more important than national funding or stakeholders' technical capacity to run elections.

Overall, electoral stakeholders hold that they are familiar with EA principles, although only a few were knowledgeable about sources. When the EA principles are disregarded, risks can and do materialize. Evaluations, although critical to understand the real impacts of EA and to harvest lessons learned, achieve it only partially.

Respondents' also shared views on the future of EA. These included: anticipation that old/present challenges will remain, while new will emerge; that EA will have less funding but require that more is delivered; pointing that EA efficiency can be advanced through frank and rigorous documentation, knowledge that is tailored to stakeholders' interests and needs, and improved collaboration.

EA experiences – Interview findings

The interviews focused on realities on the ground with to identify enablers of successful EA efforts and obstacles that hinder achieving and sustaining EA successes (see Appendix 4). Key findings are consolidated below.

Successes and enablers

The interviewees were asked to list successes of EA. The answers are listed here in order of frequency.

One of the most evident successes of EA was the *establishment of professional and independent electoral management bodies (EMBs) worldwide*. The EA effort was a critical catalyst for developing norms, policies, promotion and support in establishing EMBs and global understandings of electoral practice. EMBs, in return, remain key

pillars of democratic transition processes and protectors of democratic legacies. In some instances, these institutions themselves are net providers of electoral assistance to peers in need, and in many instances, their officers are pillars of the global electoral information production and sharing community.

Box 5: The BRIDGE programme in Timor Leste

In 2000, the Timorese people had just voted for independence from Indonesia in the 1999 referendum and were shortly due to return to the polls for their first elections under the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). This context gave rise to a pressing need to establish a cadre of local election officials and thereby presented fertile ground for testing a new capacity development tool, the "Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections" or BRIDGE training programme. BRIDGE is a modular professional development programme for election administrators and in its Timorese class of 2000, it had a cohort of engaged and idealistic participants, none of whom had prior experience in managing elections. Two decades later, alumni of this class have reached the highest echelons of Timor-Leste's two EMBS, where they have run some of the cleanest elections in Southeast Asia and have begun sharing their knowledge and skills as international electoral assistance providers. BRIDGE continues to play a role in supporting Timor-Leste's election officials, with approximately 40 workshops run in the country since the first one in 2000.

Whilst BRIDGE is just one part of the capacity development success story in Timor-Leste, its contributions have been significant. Firstly, it has helped the country's electoral institutions develop and retain talent. It has not only imparted technical skills to its students but also leveraged their idealism to build vital

ethical competence and a commitment to election management whose impact resulted in many remaining within the field. BRIDGE has also helped build enduring relationships between course implementers and their Timorese students, which in some cases have continued to yield valuable guidance for alumni long into their electoral careers. The peer relationships that young Timorese election officers have formed with their national and international colleagues through the BRIDGE workshops are also of considerable value; helping to energize less regular networking initiatives.

Secondly, *EA delivered numerous knowledge products and practical tools* that enabled both EA implementers and national partners to make a real change. Some tools, such as the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and the BRIDGE Project, are developed through partnerships that involved international implementers and national EMBs. Others, such as the Master in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA), the Global Commission on Electoral Integrity, or the Electoral Integrity Project (a research network on elections)– are cooperative projects between the EA community and academia. Individual organisations have left their mark on specialized fields of the EA sector, such as the Strategic Planning methodology developed in 2011 by IFES and the Gender and Inclusion guidelines by UNDP and UN-Women. These programmes, resources and tools provided a wealth of comparative knowledge, capacity development opportunities, exposure to innovative approaches in electoral management and practical abilities for assessment and analysis. Many of these programmes, resources and tools promote civic education on democratic values. More specifically, some of them aim to ensure gender awareness, or empower women and youth to participate in democratic processes. Others are designed to promote and facilitate participatory and collaborative processes involving different state and non-state actors with a mandate or interest to support credible

elections (such as security sector agencies, CSOs, media etc.). EA evaluations, lessons-learned exercises, and international election observation mission (EOMs) reports constitute essential learning, planning and assessment tools for EA implementers. In many instances, EA is an engine behind knowledge production, management and sharing.

Thirdly, *EA was behind the forging of critical regional and global networks,* through which EMBs and CSOs that specialize in electoral programmes could come together to share experiences with and learn from peers, engage in discussions with EA implementers, donors and policymakers, youth organizations, among others. Such networks include ArabEMBs, the Association of the European Election Officials (ACEEEO) in Europe, the Global Electoral Organization Conference (GEO Conference), the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand network (PIANZEA), and the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM) which has more than 250 member organizations across 89 countries (GNDEM n.d.).

Fourthly, *EA was critical for developing and availing specialized competences on electoral processes globally.* Namely, these competencies not only serve transitional contexts, but they also guide and inform practices in matured democracies. Many EA implementing organizations and experts have consolidated a wealth of experience by working in different contexts, projects and interventions. Sensitivity to different technical and political issues (national and international) surrounding elections and the ability to build relations (good political will) and programmes are precious skills that holistically enable them to navigate complex circumstances in providing effective electoral support.

"As in any other human relationship, credibility with local stakeholders is key to building their confidence in you as an electoral assistance provider. You have to be part of the local environment … It has not been an easy 10 years, there have been many ups and downs, but I think even our critics in the country realize we are credible and that most local stakeholders have confidence in what we do and how we work." – Interviewee.

Box 6: The Democratic Awakening Toolkit

The Democratic Awakening Toolkit (DAT) is a Tunisia-based initiative developed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) alongside the country's EMB, the Tunisian High Independent Authority for Elections (ISIE), and its Ministry of Education (MoE). Its aim is to "transform the civic education in … schools by providing teachers with pedagogical resources and reusable voting simulation materials to teach basic information about democracy and elections and organize student-led voting simulations in the classroom." The impact assessment of a 2018 pilot program indicated considerable effectiveness, with every participating teacher reporting that it had increased their students' interest in civic education. Following these findings, the DAT was extended to all primary, secondary and high schools. By March 2019, 1,500 toolkits had been distributed to schools across all 24 of Tunisia's governorates (IFES 2019).

The success of DAT however was not always apparent. The initiative had to overcome a local wariness towards international electoral assistance actors and negotiate the complex political dynamics within Tunisia's educational sector. That the challenges

were overcome is largely due to the relationships of mutual trust and confidence that IFES built with its partners.

The key elements that underpinned the development of these relationships were: (1) local ownership and (2) international implementer credibility. To IFES, local ownership meant respecting the expertise of their Tunisian partners and true co-ownership, from the design phase through to the impact assessment. The development of the toolkit was shaped by a broad range of interlocutors from the MoE and the ISIE. For instance, the expertise of pedagogues and teachers was critical in making the toolkits effective in Tunisian classrooms. The impact assessment included the teachers, students and the inspectors who had trained the teachers in the use of the toolkit. By entrusting its local partners with shared responsibility for DAT, IFES found that the partners developed a level of ownership and pride over the initiative that motivated them to carry it over significant internal obstacles that might otherwise have derailed it.

Achieving ISIE and MoE co-ownership of DAT also required IFES to demonstrate that they were a credible partner. For this IFES had to engage for the long-term, show patience, perseverance and effectiveness, and that build relationships with a broad range of local stakeholders, who in time could vouch for its credibility. The fact that IFES has had a continuous presence in Tunisia since 2011 meant that when it initiated DAT in August 2015, many of these requirements had partially been met. This notwithstanding, local buy-in was slow and it wasn't until February 2017 that work on DAT began in earnest. During the intervening period, IFES worked with ISIE and MoE personnel to move beyond the initial doubts.

Obstacles to the long-term effectiveness of EA

The interviewees were asked for insights into obstacles that may explain the disconnect between the EA principles and their fulfilment in practice, as found in earlier stages of the study. Summary of key obstacles and their examples, reflecting points raised by many interviewees include:

– *Competing motives for EA and stakeholders' diverging priorities*

Interviewees specifically mentioned cases when the international community provides EA to produce a legitimate counterpart or focuses on stability rather than fostering democracy. Also, the objectives of EA may not be equally shared between national stakeholders or between national stakeholders and the international community. Perilous are EA efforts that favor specific outcomes. In some instances, EA is seen as a way to promote foreign support ("branding of EA by placing stockers and flags").

– *Inadequate design and/or implementation method*

Interviewees were particularly critical towards old-fashioned "one-size fits all", "cookie-cutter", "checking boxes" approaches. In some instances, proper pre-election needs assessment did not exist, which prevented a full understanding of local dynamics that may impact EA. EA sometimes comes too late and may lack a clear definition of duration or benchmarks/indicators about when EA effort should end and how to achieve sustainable capacity development. Therefore, some EA entrenches donor dependency, which is more focused on maintaining projects and presence instead of addressing existing needs. This is particularly the case when EA provides monetary incentives to stakeholders or vendors (e.g. procurement of ICTs).

A systematic flaw in implementation may also include a focus on the capital city while disregarding country regions and short-term programming that does not allow for relation-building. Concerning the latter, EA is often as good as people who implement it. Also, internal procedures often limit the agility or block implementers. As result, EA fails to adjust and adapt from one electoral cycle to another or remains rigid to risk-taking which is sometimes needed.

Finally, recuring challenges in project design and implementation is lack of exchange and learning. When EA implementers don't share information and experiences, it can result in competition and duplication. Also, evaluation efforts are often lacking, are not systematic or even genuine.

- *Funding lines not fit for purpose*

According to interviewees, unfit funding modalities of EA can also undermine its efficiency. For example, donors can be hesitant to engage with EA projects because donors seldom want to be the first to put in/commit their funding. Sometimes, donors have different or competing agendas, or in case of IGOs, member states may have different interests (leading to clashes and EA in the middle).

Donors often forget that electoral assistance is not about the outcome of a single election, but rather about supporting a process in the long term. Short attention span and lack of patience lead donors to withdraw only when preconditions for effectiveness and long-term sustainability are created. Moreover, concerned that projects can fail, they lack or have low risk-appetite which affects ability of all EA stakeholders to experiment, innovate and be creative. This prevents adaptability to game-changing circumstances or force majeure events, such as COVID-19.

– *Unconducive environment exists*

Domestic political will often does not exist (a reluctance to meaningfully engage with political stakeholders as well as an EMB) because genuine interest for democracy is lacking or because of fear of regime change. EA may happen in contexts where national stakeholders are suspicious or reluctant towards EA but keen to receive foreign expertise and funds coming with it. Also, civil society and people supported by EA may be in the process for wrong reasons, e.g., money and attention.

Governments can sometimes be dysfunctional. For example, the delay in approval of electoral budgets can cause disruption to EA. With high and frequent turnover of EMB staff, capacity developed may be lost and there could be a need to rebuild it from scratch. If professional know-how and capacity is not passed over to national stakeholders, then local empowerment successes may soon be lost. In other instances, EMBs reach higher level of professional competence but, with it, also an emerging assumption that they "know it all", hence need not learn more.

Another hurdle for EA can be low trust between stakeholders, and hate-speech that continues to polarize societies. EMBs sometimes engage in 'playing' the assistance providers by not adhering to deadlines, 'filibustering', playing them against each other. Of concern are situations where the international community does not condemn undemocratic behaviour, as well as situations where foreign actor interventions intend to manipulate or undermine elections. As the interviewees articulated, clearly there are complex and understandable reasons for the difficulties commonly encountered when implementing EA and in ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability. These lie in the highly politicized nature of the exercise – with political manoeuvring for influence taking place not only within the institutions of the country itself and among national

actors, but also within the international community. These political and relational dynamics complicate and interfere with the EA principles of local ownership, and even more so when they are clearly not aligned to determination, design and delivery of EA. Operationally, delay is a recurring theme, appearing throughout the obstacles to effective EA listed by interviewees: the rigidly time-bound legal and operational nature of elections, in combination with funding and procurement delays experienced by many of the interviewees, explained a number of the EA "disasters".

> "[Electoral assistance] is not effective when it's too late. The political imperative that says, 'we are not going to be the first to put the funding in' or 'we are not going to put the funding in until there is some firm agreement about the electoral process', has always tended to, and still tends to mean that the money doesn't turn up until it's too late to do serious long-term capacity building work in advance." – Interviewee.

> "I was shocked when I arrived in the country… I had the impression that some of the internationals were behaving like they were in Iraq. It seemed as if they thought they were going to run the elections and save the day…. They were not listening to [stakeholders in] the country and were not trying to find the real issues." – Interviewee.

Understanding EA sustainability

A longer-term perspective of EA, initially explored in the interviews phase, was focus of subsequent expert group discussions. The reflections of this practice community, with experts' EA-related experience ranging between 10–50 years, were critical for examining EA's long-term impact. To understand why, it can be helpful to consider the professional trajectory and motivations of community members.

A professional assignment to a country with a euphoric first election is formative, but also, often, opens to a lifelong interest in the democratic and political developments of the country in question. If that experience is then followed by democratic regression, whether through apathy or mismanagement or coups, this will "gnaw" at the EA practitioners for the rest of their career. It is for this reason that the question of long-term sustainability was especially salient for the interviewees. As two examples of interview quotes below show, this long-term oriented mindset required attending more to the robustness and resilience of institutions and professionalism of officers than to events or technologies:

> "Securing lasting results of electoral reform requires more than the enactment of legislation. It requires strong, independent institutions that have the capacity to enforce the new regulations. I think one of the lessons learned from the project was that electoral assistance providers must push for these institutions to be put in place as soon as reforms are passed and with as much permanence as possible. If this does not happen, a change in the political winds risks the enforcement institutions being defanged and backsliding occurring." – Interviewee.

"Put people in a professional environment, treat them like professionals, and involve them with their peers through networking, and slowly but surely you reinforce a sense of professional ethics." – Interviewee.

The interviewers framed EA long-term sustainability as interventions that yielded results lasting long after completion of any given EA project; the question asked what investments and prerequisites supported such long-lasting outcomes. The composite responses build a series of pillars which can serve as foundational to long-term oriented EA design:

- *Strong electoral institutions and civil society* (in terms of accountability, credibility, independence, mandates) that own and fiercely protect the process and its values, cooperate and show solidarity;

- *Capable, ethical, and skilled national electoral officials* (that inhabit such institutions at all levels, state and regional) with incentives for professional growth inside the institution and a clear career path in electoral processes, for young people in particular ("before you can do professional development, you have to develop a profession");

- *Availability of relevant knowledge resources* (policy-focused and evidence-based) and practical tools (that back those officials in their work);

- *Sufficient and sustainable funds and human resources* (national);

- *Engagement by high-level stakeholders/elites*, as – if the feel as equal partners in the provision of EA – they are less likely to work against it;

- *Broad inclusion, trust, and goodwill of stakeholders* in the system developed; and

- Specific *safeguards against backsliding* (to resist pressures) exist.

The expert working groups discussions allowed for further thoughtful exploration of a potential long-term oriented pivot for EA (see appendices 5 and 6). Their guidance, on which the Report conclusions are based, point to a series of implications and prerequisites for such an EA pivot.

Firstly, a recognition that the international community itself was part of the sustainability problem. The community of practice had experienced all too often international actors working, advocating and influencing at cross purposes. Only a broad consensus of the international community – beyond the electoral – would allow for sustainable impact. Processes and deliberations for building a sense of shared purpose were worthy of time and investment. In line with the EA principle of "coordination with diplomatic efforts", of ensuring ownership and alignment, these consensus-building processes fit into longer-term regional stability and development goals. Any EA funding or design decisions should align with these broader goals, and, in turn, these EA projects should be supported by the wider community as part of such a broader effort.

Secondly, this long-term oriented EA can only be achieved with flexible programming anchored in local demand, alignment and like-mindedness on the goals; that is determined, designed and delivered with a holistic, inclusive and long-term framing; and where professionalism and institutionalized learning are in focus.

Thirdly, because the challenges to elections are ever-evolving, the sustainability of EA efforts at the national level is contingent on guidance, inspiration and development opportunities on a continuous basis via regional or global communities of practice that include and actively engage national level actors. Regional initiatives and organizations can play a role in this respect.

These characteristics of long-term oriented EA have time implications, demand deep capabilities, sensitivity to the local context and understandings from the EA provider, and require flexibility and willingness to adapt from EA donors. Changes work best when they are incremental and well anchored, building on habits of reflection, learning and consultation (Green 2016).

Tackling thorny issues – Expert working groups

The interviewees and surveyed practitioners expressed key problematic issues with great clarity – less obvious was 'what to do about it'. A key theme for the four convened expert working groups (EWG) was the issue of lasting EA impact (sustainability) accounted for in the section above. Additional thorny EA principle-practice gap, drawn from the 'identified hinders' of the interviews, tackled the issues that kept coming up of 'political will', the problem of anchoring change processes domestically, and the fact that polling is changing so dramatically. Altogether, the four EWG headings were:

- EWG#1 – Supporting Elections for the Long Haul: What works, where next? (held Feb 15, 2021)

- EWG #2 – The Political Dimension of Electoral Work. (Feb 19)

- EWG #3 – Polling 2030: Investments needed now to support elections of the future. (Feb 22)

- EWG #4 – Design, Reform and Renewal: How to support locally-owned electoral processes. (Feb 24)

Each session convened 20–30 practitioners and was followed by the co-development of a consensus document to inform the Report recommendations. The four co-created documents are attached in the annexes to this Report. Each session was designed to tackle a

cluster of the 'thorny' issues repeatedly identified in the Study's survey and interview phases. EWG 1 focused on the oft-mentioned difficulty of moving from short-term to long-term programming, despite years of recommendations to this effect. EWG 2 explored the impossibility (per many of the interviewees) of conducting purely 'technical' programming in what is – in reality – an arena crackling with political tension. EWG 3 addressed the point that many interviewees made: that elections in the future will not look the same and that EA has to adapt accordingly. Finally, EWG 4 dealt with the cluster of strong opinions expressed on the importance of design that suits the context and processes that bring stakeholders onside.

Emerging EA storyboard – Regional consultations

The expert working group deliberations led to an EA conclusion and recommendation storyboard that – in summary – had the following key points (see appendices 5 and 6, full transcripts on file), subsequently tested and rearranged in a series of five hybrid and virtual regional stakeholder consultation sessions (New York, Addis Ababa, Tunis, Canberra and Brussels).

1. EA is a significant part of global democracy story
2. EA has limits that need to be recognized
3. EA work is both technical and political in nature
4. Traditional EA challenges remain while new challenges emerge
5. Sustainable EA seen in norms, networks, skills and knowledge
6. Regionally oriented EA shows potential for effective results
7. EA principles broadly hold – but need updating
8. Effective EA is context sensitive, responsive, and long-term oriented
9. Effective EA is cooperative, reflective, and learning oriented

As the list above demonstrates, one finding from these group processes is that the points of consensus from the expert groups and regional consultations align remarkably well with the EA principles identified earlier in the study. That is, the diagnosis of what EA works well is reasonably consistent across the decades and remains relevant – the Principles-Practice ideal type holds. This leads to the correlative finding on the Principles-Practice gap.

An examination of the frustrations expressed by practitioners shows that the difficulties in EA require a conversation beyond the practitioner community. The EA obstacles – such as competing objectives between foreign policy goals, domestic political goals, and development goals – are beyond the EA practitioner community to solve, although they can contribute.

Rather, the discussions allowed for a collective delineation of the issues at hand and to identify who needs to be at the table in the next phases of conversation. What is missing is the connective tissue, the modalities for cooperation, the tools for enabling adaptive and context-relevant programming adapted to rapidly changing contexts. For this reason, rather than reiterating the EA principles, the analysis section that follows focusses on blockages in knowledge and relational networks identified by the participants in the study, and the challenges of adapting these to ever more challenging contexts.

Analysis: Understanding EA effectiveness – and its hinders

The study utilised various methods during distinct research steps. Given the mix of research approaches and characteristics of data collected, this analysis section integrates findings into a single analytical storyline that points to main issues that require addressing for EA to be effective at the country, regional and global level.

EA principles as factors of effectiveness

The late 1990s saw louder calls for learning lessons and developing policy and practice resources to enhance the effectiveness of EA. It resulted in the creation of a large body of knowledge, practice and policy guidelines and the establishment of regional and sub-regional EMB networks through which peer exchange and knowledge sharing was expedited. The backdrop was that EA during long had encountered various hinders. Complex logistics, volatility of contexts in which EA has to be implemented, authoritarian pushback, dealignment of stakeholders' interests, perspectives and needs, and lack of consistent and long-term donor commitment continued to challenge its effectiveness at the country level (see, for example, UNDPA & UNDP 2015; International IDEA 2008; International IDEA 2009; ICAI 2012; DFAT 2017; International IDEA 2006; Jessup et al. 2008; UNDP, UNDPA & UNDPKO 2012).

Recurrent cases of EA efforts that failed to deliver legitimate democratic outcomes, and the inability to maintain, over ensuing cycles, the integrity of first-time elections, and to sustain nascent institutions in the face of emerging challenges, led to several

initiatives for learning lessons and developing strong normative guidelines for EA. The codification and ratification of principles for effective EA meant to serve as an evidence-based and forward-looking doctrine to inspire and guide future international EA efforts. Several prominent donors and EA implementing organizations engaged in large-scale evaluations, studies, and consultative discussions since the early 2000s; the effort peaking during 2010–2014. One of the most noticeable processes[19] was led by OECD-DAC, which, following broad and lengthy consultations, delivered a set of principles in 2014 (OECD 2014); for details see appendices 1 and 2.

Together, these principles offered comprehensive and sophisticated thinking about overcoming obstacles that impede or limit the success and sustainability of EA efforts. The synthesis of EA principles represents an important milestone of this Report. On the one hand, principles form the comprehensive normative framework for EA (aspirational ideals, project guidelines and benchmarks for measuring effectiveness). On the other hand, principles can be viewed as factors providing for effective EA. The guiding idea behind convening, codifying and advocating for these norms was that – when principles are comprehensively programmed – EA would de-facto be more effective and, thus, elections globally would be better delivered.

In this respect, worth mentioning are efforts of the EC and UN's Joint Task Force which, during the period of 2007 to 2011, trained more than 600 persons representing EA stakeholders (national partners, donors and implementers) "on the institutional aspects of electoral assistance projects managed by UNDP with EC and other

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[19] Before the OECD-DAC initiative, the EU, Sida, DFID, UN coined EA principles to serve as internal or public global good guidelines for EA (European Commission 2000; Sida 2002; DFID 2010; UN 2012; UNOWA 2012, see also Appendix 2).

development partners' contributions". The EC and UN's strategy for effective electoral assistance "adhered to the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action"[20] (Joint EC-UNDP Task Force on Electoral Assistance, 2011:8,14)

However, there is not much evidence that either set of principles were systematically used as programming frameworks by EA implementers and national partners. Instead, references are sporadic at best.[21] At the same time, examples of shortcomings, as well as successes of living to these principles by EA implementers and national partners, are already accounted for in the literature review section. What the literature largely omits instead, is the evidence on how donor funding mechanisms have kept pace with EA principles.

The hinders identified through interviews and expert discussions speak, among other, of instances in which long term oriented and locally anchored programming was not possible because donor modalities were not conducive. Examples include rigid, large-scale projects not designed to be responsive and adaptive, resulting in missed opportunities to make a real impact; situations where local embassies handled small EA sums through inexperienced officers leading to shallow, one-off programming; donors pressing their own national vendors of electoral equipment, materials or machines into

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[20] These principles focused on ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability.

[21] For example, references to DFID principles are found in DFID and FCO's "How To Note" Guide (DFID and FCO 2010) and the evaluation of DFAT Australia electoral assistance (DFAT 2017). The OECD DAC principles are referenced in the UNDP's evaluation of Romanian ODA electoral assistance (UNDP 2015A). Both DFID and OECD DAC principles are used as references by the Terms of Reference for ICAI's evaluation of DFID's work on electoral support through UNDP (ICAI 2011).

the equation leading to unsustainable or inappropriate investments. To paraphrase the interviewee: "The problem is not one of *not knowing what to do*, but rather one of *not being able to do it how you know it should be done*."

In terms of data triangulation, this study does not have many yardsticks to compare findings. Therefore, a comprehensive effort by Uberti and Jackson (2018) to study the effectiveness of promoting electoral integrity through aid was an asset for the authors. It found that electoral integrity gains achieved through EA are not long sustained. This suggest that more attention be paid to informal power dynamics and relations between politicians and voters. This may be done by structuring traditional political analysis and risk assessment tools "more consistently around the notion of informal norms, institutions, and the overall distribution of power". This reinforces the value of some principles - such as those relating to context awareness - but more importantly, of having principles in the first place.

Along these lines, two major questions crystalise. The *first* relates to the extent to which EA stakeholders know, abide by and live these principles. Stakeholders might have conflicting interests, perspectives, or cultures; hence, their priorities regarding which principles EA should, or should not, prioritize may vary significantly or even diverge. The *second* question is whether EA principles are ageing in the face of new and constantly evolving challenges in electoral management, including the impact of social media on the integrity of elections, fake news, democratic backsliding, epidemics, among others. Answers to these fundamental questions were sought through the stakeholders' perception survey, expert interviews and expert working groups' sessions.

Principles to practice: Three Systematic hinders

When offered to indicate relevance and assign importance to factors conducive to effective EA - constructed around fifteen areas covered by the principles – survey respondents reflected on all of them. Only occasionally, they suggested additional options. At the same time, most respondents could not recall the existence or sources of well-established EA principles. While this finding confirmed the normative value of EA principles, it also exposed limits in the diffusion of related knowledge and lessons learned, suggesting the existence of the first systemic problem.

The second systemic problem transpired when comparing perceptions between different EA stakeholder groups, namely national partners, implementers, donors and policymakers.[22] The ideal EA paradigm is that of a 'well-versed choir' of *national partners* with undivided commitment to conduct democratic elections, consensus and shared understanding of what EA needs to prioritise; *implementing organizations* that can deliver EA projects of the highest standards; well-resourced *donors* committed to supporting the development of sustainable democratic institutions; and *policymakers* that provide relevant guidance and act as enablers.

However, it turns out that, while different EA stakeholders share a broad understanding of the key EA concepts, there are some critical areas in which their perceptions appear to differ significantly or even diverge. Such differences concern for example the extent to which EA is effective, assessment benchmarks, major project design or context-related matters. The initial finding of limited knowledge diffusion is important because when stakeholders do not share the

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[22] The survey was limited to 90 responses, and although answers should be taken with some reservations, they align with findings of the subsequent study steps. Authors suggest further study on this topic.

understanding of EA's objectives, norms, and values, they may and do develop mistrust, dysfunctional, conflictual or clientelist relationships instead of effective partnerships.

The third systemic challenge is the inability of EA and its actors to cope with, and adapt to, the changing environment. Namely, the electoral landscape is a moving target. At the country level, the context in which elections take place can change quickly and dramatically, posing new challenges. When EA is projectivized and unable to show degree of flexibility to realign itself to the new reality, then the risk of falling short is real.

In sum, the *three systemic hinders to the effectiveness of EA* diagnosed in this chapter are: 1) limits in the diffusion and adoption of knowledge and lessons learned, 2) inability of forging functional relationships as part of EA, and 3) failure responding to changing EA landscape. All three are complex issues that require deeper analysis towards making conclusions and recommendations for addressing them.

Knowledge and learning as part of EA

How lessons are learned and shared in the form of new knowledge are all important features of a functioning community of practice that can deliver (Wenger 1998; Wenger 2002; Wenger 2010; Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner B. 2015). This section triangulates findings from different research steps to examine the extent to which knowledge codification, production and diffusion – the *first systemic hinder* identified – delivers within EA.

The EA knowledge creation paradigm

For this analysis, the creation of knowledge on EA is differentiated into two categories. One is the extensive body of knowledge resources on "what EA should do". The second is a more modest body of knowledge on "how to do EA".

"What EA should do" has seen significant changes over past decades. Following the Second World War, the main objective of EA was to support the decolonization processes, and the election day was in focus. Over time, EA expanded to supporting countries transitioning from authoritarian regimes to democratic governance, from war to peace, and from deep political crises to political stability. In parallel, the EA focus expanded (but never shifted) from ad-hoc interventions and voting period activities to longer-term consolidation of electoral institutions, systems and processes. More recently, in the face of global democratic backsliding, the focus is on protecting the progress achieved through EA in the past).

As EA grew in scope and reach (attaining its peak in the mid-2000s), the number of international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations that offer EA support globally and regionally also expanded. Crucially, faced with the knowledge gap, these organizations have been particularly interested in closing it. EA implementers were uniquely positioned to create spaces that bring together national practitioners, seasoned EA experts, and academics to co-create knowledge resources to bridge the gap between democratic theory, academic research and practice. The generation and sharing of knowledge was seen as the most outstanding EA achievement by many experts interviewed as part of this study. The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, established by several international EA providers and national EMBs, was mentioned by experts as an exemplary model in the generation and sharing of knowledge.

The second major category of knowledge resources – which is particularly relevant for the effectiveness of EA – relates to "how EA is done". Namely, early electoral assistance was implemented by international experts who, by and large, in the words of one interviewee: "aimed to replicate what they have at home". This approach was often detached from an understanding of the broader contexts in which EA had to be implemented and sustained over multiple election cycles. With the expanding scope and reach of EA, its objectives, knowledge base, design and delivery methods have also become more diverse and complex.

To promote good practices, two types of resources emerged. One was methodological guides covering technical guidelines. For example, many guides developed specifically to cover methods of EA were identified during the literature review phase (DFID 2010; DFID and FCO 2010; European Commission 2006; European Commission and UNDP 2013; European Commission, UN and International IDEA 2011; International IDEA 2006; UNDP 2003; UNDP 2007 and USAID 2000). Another body of knowledge related to EA principles, aiming to deliver normative guidance for effective EA (for example, Sida 2002 and OECD 2014). The Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance, formed to coordinate and harmonise EA work between the European Commission and UNDP, actively ensured that EA principles were shared, known and absorbed through courses aimed at EA providers and beneficiaries (UNDP/EC 2012). During the brief period of activity, these courses provided an important place for discussion, reflection and learning.

More recently, EA is increasingly shifting towards the development of methodological resources for national partners than solely for implementers, which is a valuable development. For example, a number of practice resources, including guides, assessment and analysis tools, are produced to strengthen the capacity of national stakeholders to mediate disputes, foster political will and political

consensus, conduct strategic planning, institutionalize risk management, or align electoral legal frameworks with international standards (International IDEA n.d.; European Union 2012; The Carter Center Election Obligations and Standards Database n.d.).

As per above, EA is not short of knowledge resources, and the literature review offered much evidence on the effectiveness of EA knowledge production. Therefore, it can be deduced that any emerging phenomena of relevance to supporting electoral processes will be quickly covered and made available to those needing to address them. For example, EA stakeholders' promptness and level of mobilisation and innovation in developing and sharing knowledge resources related to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the management of elections are illustrative of this interest and capacity (for example, see Birch et al. 2020 or International IDEA n.d.).

Diffusion and implementation of knowledge and lessons learned

However, there is obviously a gap between EA knowledge production and application. The community of practice relies greatly on cross-fertilization through availing knowledge resources and capacity-strengthening projects, as well as on the ingenuity of the "people" involved in EA. And indeed, that worked well in many places. But the ingenuity of people has its limits, and organizations and sectors that cannot systematise good practices display random effectiveness.

Therefore, in many instances, EA stakeholders have displayed the "capability trap" described by Andrews et al. (2017) as situations in which organizations fail to perform tasks and fail to learn, making things only worse. For the community of practice, the knowledge

management gap prevents it to "become to know", described by Jakubik (2011) as the process beyond knowledge creation, a space in which knowledge is a skill that enables practice.

Our findings confirmed and reiterated some critical aspects of *knowledge limitations* resulting from human resource constraints, institutional shortcomings, unclear objectives, and exogenous constraints.

The *first knowledge limitation* relates to human resource constraints. EA is a dynamic field, and there is a high turnover of staff engaged in EA projects and interventions worldwide. When electoral experts are only deployed to short term assignments, many of them will never have the opportunity to gain the necessary exposure and build relevant experience on critical concepts that ensure and reinforce EA effectiveness.

In recent years, many experts who pioneered EA retired. Some of them were interviewed, and they pointed to a gap in the handover of "know-how". In numerous instances, a literature review found that the high turnover of officials who held EA portfolios in diplomatic missions affected the long-term impact and effectiveness of EA at the country level. Ways to address these shortfalls include systematic and continuous training at national and international levels. Also, there are calls by seasoned experts and academia for the development of the electoral profession through formal education and specialization opportunities.

The *second knowledge limitation* reflects institutional shortcomings to learn through iteration. Ideally, institutional memory should compensate for the gaps opened when knowledgeable experts leave the practice. This, however, is not always the case, especially in periods of financial volatility and downsizing that EA implementing organizations often face.

External and internal evaluations are important methods for institutional learning. External evaluations are the "golden standard" requirement for donor-funded EA projects. Increasingly, national and international partners adopt practices of internal evaluations of EA projects to determine their value. However, the literature review pointed to some challenges when implementing large scale global evaluations, such as differing scopes, range contexts, consistency in classifying EA projects, institutional memory etc. (UNDP 2012:x).

Survey respondents and interviewees also indicated that country and project-level evaluations were of limited utility. Specifically, interviewees pointed to the fact that the evaluations were often insufficiently critical of the evaluated party, which many attributed to the fact that, generally, the evaluees were also the commissioners of the evaluation. The impact of poor evaluations is depriving EA of the opportunity to learn difficult lessons. Another criticism that study participants levelled at monitoring and evaluation efforts was that they are often driven by the opinions of senior officials rather than by data.

Reports from international election observation missions (EOMs) are increasingly becoming the standard for, and the link between EA learning from one electoral cycle and its application on the planning for the next.

The *third knowledge limitation* to implementing "what is known" relates to the conduciveness of contexts. Ideally, EA efforts are implemented in an environment favourable or at least open to democratic elections (i.e. political pluralism and democratic culture flourish, the government is committed to implementing legal and institutional reforms needed, EMB is keen for collaboration etc.). Even when the situation on the ground is not ideal, capable EA implementers can often navigate obstacles and nourish incremental changes, which makes EA valuable. There are,

nevertheless, situations in which contextual barriers can be overwhelming and insurmountable. This may happen, for example, when national political stakeholders, often incumbents, take EA as means to provide a façade of legitimacy to their power consolidation while committing electoral manipulation to secure such an advantage. Also, when security deteriorates or sharp democratic backsliding are recorded, EA can quickly lose ground or even be used as the reason to justify the backsliding.

The *fourth knowledge limitation* limiting the application of EA knowledge and methods concerns instances in which EA is part of broader peace- or state-building efforts. When seen as higher-order goals, these efforts may override the objectives of EA. For example, when peace or reconciliation is prioritized, EA implementers and national partners can be rushed by the international community to quickly deliver good-enough elections against the advice of electoral experts who can foresee and signal credibility or sustainability issues. This also happens when elections are used as an exit strategy for the international community.

Relationship-building as part of EA

The *second systemic hinder to effective EA* is the quality of relationships formed as part of EA. As the scope of EA grows, so does the number of organizations involved. Consequently, the relationships between stakeholders become more complex. Our research data reveals that the quality of these relationships is shaped by a number of factors, including the extent to which stakeholders' priorities and objective are aligned; the degree of trust between stakeholders, both national and international; and the intensity of stakeholder coordination.

Positive relationships are developed through EA efforts to strengthen local ownership that recognize national actors as equal partners and ensuring alignment of support with their priorities and goals. This was evidenced in the establishment of professional and independent electoral management bodies (EMBs) worldwide. In many instances, these institutions themselves became net providers of electoral assistance to peers in need, and their officers are pillars of the global electoral knowledge production and sharing community.

Box 7: The New Zealand Electoral Commission Co-creation

As this Report highlights, successful EA programming requires the development of relationships of mutual trust and confidence between donors, implementers and national partners. It demands that these stakeholders work in partnership to ensure ownership, and a shared understanding of a programme's goals as aligned with their respective interests and expectations. The co-creation of a recent EA programme by the Electoral Commission (NZEC), the New Zealand Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and their partner EMBs in the Pacific demonstrates how this important shift in the provision of EA can be achieved.

The NZEC EA programme consists of a five-year capacity development initiative involving the provision of support to select EMBs in the Pacific. In line with their policy of promoting local ownership, NZEC and MFAT decided to engage, as equal partners in the design of the EA, the Commissioners of the partner EMBs from the very inception of the project. The Commissioners were flown to New Zealand for three days for design talks, during which every aspect of the programme was discussed and agreed, including needs and priorities, objectives,

delivery approach, timeframes, budget, measuring results, and managing risks.

In establishing a dynamic of co-creation, the engagement of the partner EMBs helped place their needs and priorities at the core of the programme design process and ensure that the resulting project was closely aligned to those needs. A good illustration of this partnership-based approach was the programme's reporting elements, which were created to harmonize with the EMBs' other reporting responsibilities to reduce the resources they would have to dedicate to this activity. The fact that the Commissioners were immersed in the programme design helped to align stakeholder expectations and enhanced EMB buy-in and ownership. The nature of this approach helped forge understanding, a shared vision and trust between partners that were essential to attaining good institutional relationships between the NZEC, MFAT and their partner EMBs. Perhaps the greatest benefit of NZEC and MFAT's inclusive approach was the respect, dignity and recognition as equal partners that such approach bestowed upon the programme's beneficiaries. By involving the Commissioners from the beginning, by recognizing and taking into full account their expertise, acknowledging the support needs of their respective countries, and by involving them in meaningful decision-making, the design process continually reinforced their role as equal programme partners.

However, there are opposite examples. EA implementers pointed to numerous instances in which relations developed in a dysfunctional manner, whereby each actor's role remains heavily compartmentalized.

Stakeholders' diverging objectives and priorities

When national stakeholders, implementers, and donors do not share EA objectives and priorities, diverging views can develop, resulting in situations where they start pulling in different directions or collide.

For example, some interviewees referred to situations in which donor priorities became obsolete and lost their initial relevance due to the turn of political events. Yet donors insisted that implementers and national partners follow the original plans. Other interviewees referred to instances in which both implementers and national stakeholders found themselves between conflicting agendas of different international actors who provide funds (donors) or have the political leverage in the process (diplomatic missions). While the need to establish fluent communication and coordination between the various actors engaged in EA in a country context has long been considered a standard, the fact that misalignments continue to happen, highlights areas still needing improvement.

The instances in which national stakeholders can be undermined include lack of engagement in designing EA projects; relationships in which they are not considered as equal partners; non-alignment of support activities with their interests, expectations and priorities; inadequate assessment of the electoral political economy by donors and/or implementers.

Dysfunctional relationships tend to develop in environments where *the lack of trust cannot be overcome*. We find evidence of instances in which EA donors and implementers perceived a lack of genuine commitment and alignment to the project's goals by national political stakeholders. This was one of the major obstacles to EA effectiveness. The survey revealed that all EA stakeholders perceive national partners as the most important EA actors and acknowledge that their commitment is crucial for EA effectiveness. However, formal requests for EA by national governments can

result from a genuine interest in reforming political institutions and processes or an effort to legitimize its power internationally. The former is an ideal scenario for donors and implementers in which strong relationships can be forged from the very inception of EA project. In the latter case, however, an EMB trustworthiness – based on independence and demonstrated impartiality – will be the critical factor for incremental and two-directional trust-building.

Soft skills are often an ingredient required for navigating complex electoral tasks that are legal, administrative, procedural, operational, political and security-sensitive. The examples in the study show that doing effective EA often demands a recognition that EA is both technical and political. The technical aspects require handling complex logistics to enfranchise whole populations under tight deadlines. The political dimensions mean that this is done under close stakeholder scrutiny and political pressures in which even the smallest operational failures can lead to questioning the credibility of elections. While study respondents saw evolving EA programme design as well adapted to technical work – it was less adapted and responsive to the political realities of working in high-stakes environments. In this respect, experts outlined a need for EA to do more political economy analysis and incorporate skillsets for working in and navigating through complex political environments.

The study also finds strong traces of the positive catalytic effect of technical aspects of EA on the broader prospects for democratisation, which is often not recognized, but the study by Uberti and Jackson (2018) study confirmed it. When democratic institutions are undermined, and civic and political space is shrinking, a "technical" project or intervention can be a non-threatening modality for on-the-ground presence on which to incrementally build a conversation on electoral reform and principles and incrementally accompany, and support, national actors in their role of advocating for, and nurturing, democracy in the longer-term.

Relations at the national level

Consideration should also be given to the *dysfunctional relationship that may come to exist between national partners*. It is prevalent that EA efforts implemented in a single country can support various state and non-state organizations that have responsibility for (mainly state agencies such as EMBs, security sector agencies, anti-corruption offices, etc.) or interest in (mainly civil society organizations, political parties, media outlets etc.) different aspects of electoral processes. When EA efforts are designed to develop and nourish a partnership-based collaboration between all responsible and interested national actors, through soft skills' programming, trust-building, or mediation, functional relationships between them develop and harmonious support ensues.

This approach has proved critical in defending the credibility of electoral processes and the results they yield in many countries. Specifically, when elections are organized by competent and trustworthy EMB, when the credibility of the process is confirmed by domestic observation groups and media reports fairly and accurately, it will be difficult for parties who lose elections to undermine results and destabilize the political situation. When relationships between EMBs, CSOs, media and other electoral actors are dysfunctional, electoral credibility could be for a grab.

Role of global and regional relationships

Finally, developing and nurturing functional relationships has also been a critical aspect of establishing *regional and global networks*. Until today, *regional and global networks* remain forums through which EA implementers, national partners, donors and policymakers EMBs and CSOs come together to share experiences, learn from peers and partners, and engage in discussions. Such networks include

the ArabEMBs, the Association of the European Election Officials (ACEEEO) network in Europe, the Global Electoral Organization Conference (GEO Conference), the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand network (PIANZEA), to mention a few. Regional networks and EA projects are increasingly recognized by regional actors as well-positioned to ensure that global standards are implemented while regional and local sensitivities are appreciated. These networks have played a vital role in the development of EA community of practice that can ensure accessibility of EA and standardization of good practices and sustainable EA dividends are particularly notable in the implementation of interventions at the regional level.

Global and regional linking of EA stakeholders begins abruptly and grows rapidly from the early '90s, gradually consolidating in the following decade with some signs of stagnation more recently. The networking, norms and policies development, as well as the knowledge sharing displayed during this regional and international community-building surge, stood in sharp contrast to the introverted and isolated electoral administration silos that preceded. Before the EA-financed expansion, EMBs were expected to relate to domestic public administration traditions – which were not subject to any type of internal or external scrutiny – rather than look externally for inspiration, sustenance, or accountability. The need to suddenly and urgently address the electoral conundrums facing "new democracies" brought energy and thoughtfulness to older democracies to rethink their electoral assumptions and traditions.

From Southern Africa to Europe, Southeast Asia to Latin America, the work to develop regional electoral standards has resulted in important conversations ("what should our elections look like?"), as well as in commitments and accountability mechanisms. Because of this important work and community-building, if the credibility of the elections delivered by a single country temporarily would be

regressing, it is a fact that will not go unnoticed. Whether through incumbent-favourable legislation, contested elections or authoritarian curtailing of electoral independence, a vigilant, closely affiliated peer group can "call out" bad behaviour or provide professional and moral support to democratic actors, giving them the courage to work from within and stay the course.

Over time, certain donors understood these indirect benefits as worthy of investment, such as Spain's support for the Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support (GPECs) highlighted in this Report (see Box 1). Just as the ambitious project gained momentum, it was cut due to the impact of the global financial crisis on the Spanish development budget. A similar growth and demise affect the lapsed Global Electoral Organization Conference (GEO Conference) mechanism which played – and potentially could continue to play – an important role in regularly feeding regional conversations and exchanges at the global level.

The study has come across encouraging results of regionally oriented support to EMB networks, through which diffusion of good practices and know-how, fostering of peer-to-peer cooperation and support, and upholding regional electoral obligations and standards, all serve as gentle but effective drivers of national-level change. Sweden's steadfast support to the establishment and development of the ArabEMBs Network through UNDP – discussed in the case study (see Box 6) – and that from Australia to the PIANZEA Network, through the Australian Electoral Commission, are examples of this form of long-term oriented EA. This iterative development of a cross-national (so-called South-South) professional corps cannot be attributed to any single EA intervention. Rather, this has occurred because well designed and delivered EA initiatives have provided opportunities for activists and civil servants to learn, practice, network and grow with an eye to strengthening their capacity beyond the electoral event at hand.

The Report found that the skillsets of these individuals have long outlasted the specific election for which the EA intervention was initially designed to support, establishing a foundation to uphold subsequent elections, with or without further EA support. The case of EA provided to Timor-Leste (see Box 5) is a well-known example.

Despite these positive experiences, their impact and still unexpressed potential, regionally oriented support remains an underinvested and underdeveloped area in the EA portfolio. EA would benefit from electoral assistance that recognizes the unique capacity of regional initiatives and regionally anchored organizations to understand their own contexts, act jointly and sensitively, and attain and sustain enduring impacts in their respective regions. Specifically, this would mean support to regionally anchored coordination and consultation mechanisms and initiatives; support organizations that engage with electoral assistance at the regional level to establish and maintain high-quality knowledge production platforms and professional networks supporting and inspiring their members by sharing and applying such knowledge.

However, even when successful, the hard- and long-built positive relationships may be torn apart by the changing local, regional, or global environments. Therefore, the shifting of EA landscape is the final area of analysis part.

The changing context of EA practice

The *third systemic hinder to effective EA* is the ever-changing landscape in which elections take place. Therefore, even when the knowledge production and diffusion are aligned, and functional relationships between EA stakeholders exist, new realities can upset such constellations.

Although the EA paradigm has been altered over past decades, the research finds that the present demands resulting from everchanging democratic landscape are rather significant and that EA is struggling to keep pace. This section, therefore, also answers the second question posed in the introduction of this chapter, namely: "Whether EA principles are ageing in the face of new and constantly evolving challenges in electoral management, including the impact of social media on the integrity of elections, fake news, democratic backsliding, epidemics, among others?"

The three key drivers of the present change emerge in this Report as most important: democratic backsliding, technological advances and exposure to crises. They are elaborated in the sections below.

Democracy backsliding and unclean elections

The Report finds that practitioners feel under increasing pressure to deliver in increasingly less conducive contexts to EA projects. For many, the EA paradigm from previous decades focusing on "promoting credible elections" is rapidly shifting to "protecting credible elections".

One interviewee framed this trajectory as follows, saying: "*Initially, the EA interventions were about building democracy, from the ground up. Later – when interventions became about consolidating the gains made – we realised that they were precarious. Now, we are moving into protection mode. Democratic institutions and processes are under threat, and we need new ways of doing things to deal with that.*"

This reflects a broader trend of democratic backsliding within which the integrity of elections has deteriorated worldwide in recent years (IDEA GSoD 2019, forthcoming 2021, V-Dem 2021). Namely, autocrats are becoming bolder and more aggressive in undermining

democratic institutions and processes to the point in which elections become so vulnerable that even the best-planned EA effort will face irreconcilable credibility gaps.

Another essential aspect for EA in this paradigm shift is that even well-established democracies increasingly struggle with protecting the credibility of their electoral processes. Whereas this is a negative trend, the positive side is that knowledge and relationship-building lessons learned through EA are increasingly relevant and used by well-established democracies.

Technological progress makes EA more complex

In elections, the impact of new technologies and digitalization, including cost and opaqueness of technology, has been increasingly debated among EA stakeholders in the past decade. Reforming voter registration, synergies with civic registration, internet voting, artificial intelligence are some of the future-oriented technologies expected to gain even further importance.

Opportunities for utilising technologies as ways of improving the integrity of electoral processes, e.g. for creating reliable voter registers, broader voter information outreach, solidifying processes of voting, counting and transmission of results, remain high on the agenda of EA. However, in parallel to ICT optimism is the acknowledgement that malicious use of technologies represents one of the most significant risks to the integrity of electoral processes. Specific risks draw from experiences of domestic and foreign disinformation, misinformation, cyber-attacks. Use and abuse of social media will increasingly confuse voters about the legitimacy of elections; non-acceptance of results will likely increase.

Responding to emerging challenges related to new technologies means that providers will need to acquire new skills and expertise to work with different regulatory authorities (e.g. data protection bodies) and civil society organizations (such as fact-checkers). Also, EA providers will need to adapt to digitalization/informatization trends in project delivery and increase technology use to support national partners.

Crises spilling over into electoral processes

Crisis situations experienced locally, regionally, and globally are increasingly challenging the capacity of electoral stakeholders to organize elections and EA donors and implementors to engage effectively.

The most recent case is the global health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic that triggered the postponement and cancellation of elections worldwide. As many societies came to a halt, the EA efforts faced delays that were not accounted for by donors or implementers. When elections proceeded according to the plan, EA stakeholders encountered new realities requiring alterations to implement the process. In many instances, measures to curb pandemic led to the deterioration of human rights – and political freedoms in particular – resulting in electoral controversies.

EA remains particularly vulnerable to crises resulting from security challenges – such as the terrorism and effects of armed conflicts – and climate calamities that both can cause large-scale migrations. Beyond hurdles that relate to technical modalities and huge resources needed to cater for the voting rights of internally displaced persons, refugees, and migrant workers, there is often a spectrum of unique political sensitivities linked both to their voting and non-voting.

Climate changes are expected to impact future elections increasingly, and EA needs to be prepared to step in. Also, hurricanes, droughts, or floods are making election operations more costly and unpredictable. These events can exacerbate social pressures and conflicts, making an environment less conducive to democratic processes.

As risks to electoral processes are diversifying, the capacity of EA to prevent risks from materializing, to strengthen resilience and manage the crisis becomes increasingly important.

The analysis part provided essential insights into systemic obstacles that impact the effectiveness of electoral assistance. The ability to derive norms and embed them in EA policies and practice guides is necessary but insufficient to ensure effective EA. It is how this knowledge is put into practice that matters. For this to happen, better learning and knowledge diffusion are needed, as well as functional relationships between all EA stakeholders. The Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach proposed by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (Andrews et al. 2016) points to limitations of building capacity through pre-planned efforts or applying knowledge from another context, and instead encourage active iteration, experimentation, and learning within the change context. However, this calls for a long-term vision and commitment that anticipates democracy-promotion work, and EA within it, will continue to evolve to respond to changing contexts.

Conclusions

The main challenge for the Report became less to understand what works and what does not work – this, we discovered, was already well established and had been codified in the EA Principles. As this report has shown, while the principles remain relevant for understanding what effective EA could and should be, implementation in practice has proved difficult for all involved actors. With competing demands for scarcer funds and recent events in Afghanistan and Myanmar leading to a question of whether democracy assistance can work at all, how to make EA work effectively – that is, how to address this principles-practice gap – is salient.

Aided by a generous cohort of veteran practitioners through multiple research steps, the Report found that the principles-practice gap was perpetuated when blockages between actors hinder their effectual interaction, important knowledge sharing or potential for mutually agreed, hence more effective, goal setting. And further, that these communication channels and adaptive modalities will be ever more important because of the rapid changes in the global and national environments in which the elections are held.

Robust and regular communication channels between multiple layers of EA stakeholders (donors, implementers, national partners) and related state and non-state actors (such as security and other state agencies, diplomats, human rights activists or journalists) are at the heart of this Report's recommendations. The dysfunctional relationships that hindered appropriate responses to fastmoving or complex electoral situations can only be addressed through more attention to built-in mechanisms and modalities that facilitate and expect collaboration between all stakeholders, such as regional and global EA forums. These played an important role in the past to

make sense of and develop strategies for the challenges of that moment. Like in an aging irrigation system, the systems put in place during the intense democracy assistance efforts from the 1990's through the early 2000's are silting up from under-maintenance, lack of long-term planning, and changing environment resulting in sub-optimal (knowledge and skills) flow. The implication for donors is the need to review and retrofit EA modalities for overcoming long known, present and anticipated future obstacles. The implication for foreign policy is that global conversations about democracy – including EA – are imperative beyond the development arena.

A one-size-fits-all approach to EA will not suffice. Where authoritarian tendencies are looming or in place – democratically oriented public officials or civil society activists may need peer support, the ability to alert the outside world when political institutions are undermined, and an understanding of international obligations on elections and best practices to advocate convincingly. Where public trust in elections has been damaged, reinforcing the electoral management body as an institution, through recruitment, capacity development, and public communication can be key to ensuring that one credible institution rises above. Where corruption is rife – regulatory options that reinforce disclosure and enforcement mechanisms can expose wrong-doing and course-correct. Where one group is systemically absent from political participation, an optimum mix of research, engagement, civic education, special voting arrangements, and voter registration drives can make a real difference. A pandemic, natural disaster or security breach can suddenly knock electoral preparations off course – making rapid response routines and inter-agency cooperation into areas of priority for investment. As recent events in Myanmar, Afghanistan and Guinea have demonstrated long-term EA investments can also be annihilated by sudden undemocratic transitions of power. These

events can never be fully excluded in many EA contexts. Risks vary by context and need to be well understood and calculated when investing in EA.

The imperative to adapt to rapid changes in local realities makes rigid programming templates difficult, favouring flexible and responsive approaches. However, rapid response support is only possible if adaptive frameworks, networks and knowledge sharing modalities are in place and if those structures are well known, accessible and trusted by the individuals at the democratic frontlines. Regional-level organisations and initiatives are suited, but under-utilised and under-resourced for housing and nurturing such EA support systems one electoral cycle to the next.

The Report's conclusion also demarcates limits to what EA can achieve. EA cannot heal deep societal rifts, change the status of women in society, or bring democracy where it is absent. However, thoughtfully designed and implemented EA can create enabling support structures for all actors genuinely committed to fair and credible electoral processes. This contribution is not trivial – the capacity of domestic actors and institutions to ensure well-run elections is key to ensuring a democratic transition or maintaining democratic governance over time and against recurrent threats. While elections as events may be, and often are, imperfect processes – the more widespread an understanding and acceptance of what a fair and well-run election looks and feels like – the more difficult to avoid a demand and expectation of such events for the long haul.

This local-empowerment anchored theory of change underpins the Report's emphasis on 360-degree rethinking of how future EA is determined, designed and delivered – founded on the value of programming designed to foster trust and to support local actors to independently navigate difficult dynamics effectively and inclusively through mediation, communication, education and engagement.

Recommendations

The three recommendations focus on developing or strengthening key processes and infrastructures to enhance the knowledge networking required to meet existing and future EA challenges.

1. **Reinvigorate global conversations on EA principles and practice**

    Addressing global EA challenges requires regular international forums and modalities for norms and policy development, information sharing, goals aligning, and recalibrating of EA investment priorities in tandem with evolving electoral needs and global democratic trajectories.

    As a starting point, the Swedish government should reinvigorate, initiate or support a global debate - involving donors, academics, implementing organizations, national partners, policy-makers and leading practitioners – on redefining principles of effective electoral assistance in the face of new and emerging issues, the evolving landscape of democracy building and the constant drive for innovation in order to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens around the world. The process should build on existing principles developed during 2000-2014, revitalize and expand them to cope with contemporary and prospective challenges to electoral processes. The process could include modalities for sustained global conversations and periodic revision of the principles, such as a yearly or bi-yearly forum. Avenues for disseminating EA principles could consist of guidelines and handbooks for desk officers and inclusion in training programmes for diplomats.

2. **Support regional (and global) EA networks and initiatives.**

The Swedish government should maintain leadership in the active support to regional level EA networks and initiatives, currently an underinvested and underdeveloped segment of the EA portfolio. Sub-continental support allows for context and language sensitivity, stronger local suitability and ownership, efficient diffusion of good practices and know-how, facilitating experience-sharing, fostering peer-to-peer cooperation and support, and upholding regional electoral obligations and standards. Each of these components contributes to effective drivers of national-level change and early warning for indicators of democratic backsliding. Global networks and initiatives can, in turn, support regional efforts with good practice and tools from other parts of the world.

3. **Revisit modalities for EA design and implementation**

Donors should revisit EA modalities to ensure that they are fitter-for-purpose; checking for knowledge flow, trust and consensus building, functional relationships, agility, commitment to partnerships development, long-term orientation and political-contextual understanding in line with EA principles. Rigid project structures, short-term shallow projects or outsourcing to inexperienced actors will not suffice to deal with the difficult EA realities of high political stakes, complex legal and operational arrangements, potential for crisis, the rapid and chaotic flow of information, or the authoritarian undermining of electoral processes. Effective EA needs consistent and strategic investment in enhanced modalities that encourage and nurture stakeholder engagement, reflection, learning and design. This 'revisiting' should accompany the global conversation on upgrading EA principles more broadly.

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Appendices

Appendixes are published in a separate volume, which is available online at www.eba.se

Appendix 1   Literature review – evidence

Appendix 2   Compendium of principles of effective electoral assistance

Appendix 3   Survey summary

Appendix 4   Interview findings

Appendix 5   Background document for expert group meetings

Appendix 6   Expert Group Discussions – findings

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Electoral Assistance cannot bring democracy where it is absent. But thoughtfully designed and implemented it is a necessary, albeit not sufficient condition for democracy and an essential support for those who strive to introduce it. This report describe how electoral assistance ought to change to deal with current challenges.

Stöd till valprocesser skapar inte demokrati där den saknas. Men väl utformat och genomfört är det trots det en nödvändig, om inte tillräcklig, förutsättning för demokrati och ett avgörande stöd för demokratins förkämpar. Denna rapport beskriver hur stödet till valprocesser bör förändras för att hantera dagens utmaningar.