

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT
Electoral Support Project: Institutional Strengthening & Professional
Development Support for the Election Commission of Nepal
January to December 2011

**Institutional Strengthening & Professional Development Support for the Election
Commission of Nepal**

**Implementing Partner: United Nations Development Programme(UNDP) and
Election Commission of Nepal (ECN)**

**Donors: Denmark, Department For International Development (DFID),
Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), Japan International
Cooperation Agency (JICA), Norway and the United Nations Development
Programme(UNDP)**

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Project Information

Project Title: Electoral Support Project: Institutional Strengthening & Professional
Development Support for the Election Commission of Nepal

Award ID: 00049636

Implementing Partner: Election Commission of Nepal

Expected Project Outputs:

- Output 1: Strengthened capacity of the ECN to function as a permanent, independent, credible and professional institution of governance;
- Output 2: Enhanced professional capacities of the ECN officials at headquarters and at the ECN subsidiary offices at the local level; and
- Output 3: Expanded democratic participation in the next cycle of elections, particularly for under-represented and disadvantaged segments of the Nepali society.

Project Duration: August 2008 to December 2012

Total Budget in 2011: **USD 2,395,282**

Allocated Resources:

UNDP	USD 300,000
DFID	USD 628,765
Denmark	USD 557,029
AusAID	USD 764,942
JICA	USD 15,017
Norway	USD 129,529

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the country's historic elections in 2008, UNDP recognized the need to continue its support to the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) in its efforts towards electoral reform and strengthening its institutional capacity to prepare for and conduct credible and professional elections. A three year initiative entitled the 'Electoral Support Project (ESP)' was initiated in August 2008 aiming at institutional strengthening and professional development of ECN.

Over the period from 2008 to 2011, significant progress has been made towards achieving the project's outputs, including enhancement of the capacity of ECN staff to plan for elections, to identify gaps and weaknesses in existing processes, and to review and revise policies where needed.

This was evident in ECN's own needs assessment and the identification of new areas of focus, areas not previously envisioned, including the introduction of an entirely new voter registration program. To ensure the project's alignment with the needs of ECN and in line with the findings of the project's mid-term evaluation, a revision to the ESP project was made in August 2011 incorporating additional support for voter registration and extending ESP to December 2012.

In 2011, the projects major areas of focus included support to the ongoing voter registration program, the construction of a multi-functional Electoral Education and Information Centre (EEIC), enhancing capacity of ECN and other key electoral stakeholders through Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) trainings, gender mainstreaming and support to ECN's Geographical Information System (GIS) initiative.

The key achievements of 2011 include:

- The registration of an additional 8.5 million citizens in 2011 through ECN's ongoing voter registration program. Launched in 2010, the voter registration drive continued to reach eligible citizens 16+ years of age at all district, municipality and VDCs. To reach an increased population, ECN continued to register citizens at the District Administration Offices and Area Administration Offices. In addition to the ongoing registration, ECN continued to develop its technical capacity to establish a robust and sustainable voter registration system through establishment of central data centre and identification of additional required IT positions.
- The strengthened professional capacity of ECN officials and electoral stakeholders including civil society organizations and political parties. Through the BRIDGE trainings on Voter Information and Electoral Management, Gender and Elections among others, a total of 301 persons were trained (193 male and 109 female). These trainings were conducted in joint collaboration with International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) and UNDP Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS) and the ECN..
- The completion of more than 70% of construction of the Electoral Education and Information Center (EEIC). In addition to the construction of the building itself, ECN

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developed an organogram for the Center and appointed a number of staff to key positions. The new staff appointed to work in the EEIC underwent trainings on how to effectively engage with the public.

- Through a stronger focus on gender mainstreaming, the project was able to raise awareness within ECN on gender issues and encourage it to take a number of positive steps towards mainstreaming gender in electoral processes as well as in the management of the ECN. ECN, with UNDP support, conducted a gender mapping exercise and prepared a report that has been widely circulated and which has brought international recognition to the commission for its efforts in gender mainstreaming. This recognition and positive attention has led to increased motivation of ECN to continue to champion for gender inclusion in elections as evidenced by the appointment of a gender focal point, establishing gender unit at ECN and initiating the formulation of a gender policy.
- The project also supported the establishment of Geographic Information System (GIS) at the Headquarter of ECN in Kathmandu. A total of 130 ECN officials from district offices and headquarter were trained on GIS and use of GPS in electoral cycle with emphasis on electoral mapping. Utilizing its new GIS capacity and with the aid of GPS technology, ECN has initiated, in preparation for elections, the mapping of polling stations in 35 districts.

Also in 2011, ESP invited an electoral mission to Nepal to assess the conditions for the conduct of elections and the capacity of the Election Commission to conduct such elections successfully, and to make recommendations on the parameters of potential support to post-constitution elections. The mission recommended continued UN support to ECN and ESP's extension to support the post-constitution elections. As a result of these findings and also based on the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation of ECN's strategic plan, the ESP project document is being revised to incorporate these findings and extend the project till 2016. Consultations are ongoing with key stakeholders in the finalization of the revised project document.

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1. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Despite rigorous efforts put forward by the Constituent Assembly (CA) and political parties to promulgate the new constitution by 2011 (4th extension), there were many critical issues, specifically on electoral system, judicial reform, forms of governance and state restructuring \federalism where consensus was not reached. One of the primary contending issues is the type of electoral system to be adopted for future federal and provisional elections. Similarly, securing inclusive representation through electoral quotas is another vital issue that remains undecided in the CA. The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) has put forward its suggestions to the CA stating that the type of electoral system to be determined for future elections should be democratic and ensure representation and participation of citizens from all strata of the society including sex, caste, ethnicity and regions. There are growing demands for the Government to call for local level elections in 2012, as positions have remained vacant since 2002. Moreover, after the promulgation of the new constitution, various electoral events will take place. Therefore, ECN is rigorously involved in planning and preparing for the upcoming local and national elections to be held in the coming years.

The future federal structure will also have implications on the structure of ECN, particularly on human resources, budgetary requirements, ECN structure at different levels, electoral laws and regulations.

Project Overview

The Electoral Support Project is a technical assistance initiative for the ECN with a focus on addressing their long-term priority needs through specified advisory services, technical assistance and operational support in the following three main strategic areas:

- a. **Institutional Strengthening:** Enhancing the institutional and management capacity of the ECN through the improvement of the electoral administration as a whole. The major supports are in the areas of strategic planning, voter registration, electoral mapping system, regional networking and electoral dispute resolution.
- b. **Professional Development:** Enhancing the professional capabilities of ECN officials at national and local levels that could be retained and easily deployed in future elections. It also includes enhancing capacity of electoral stakeholders to create an opportunity for a creation of a pool of experts that can support ECN. The major support extended by ESP in enduring long term profession development of ECN officials and electoral stakeholders through customized BRIDGE courses.
- c. **Democratic Participation:** Increasing awareness of electorates on governance and electoral processes, especially of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (women and ethnic minorities) so they could meaningfully participate prior as well as during elections. The major support is in the areas of establishing Electoral Education and Information Center (EEIC) for public information and public outreach activities.

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In 2011, the project invited United Nations (UN) Electoral Mission to Nepal with an objective to assess the conditions for the conduct of elections and the capacity of ECN to conduct elections successfully, and provide recommendations on the parameters of UN technical assistance leading to post-constitution elections. The mission recommended continued UNDP's support to ECN and ESP's extension to support the post-constitution elections. This was reinforced by recommendations made during the mid-term evaluation of ECN's five year strategic plan (2009-2013). Therefore, in joint collaboration with ECN, UNDP-ESP made a substantive revision in the current project document with the addition of direct support to election operations for the entire cycle of elections. The revision extends project's duration till 2016. Several consultations were also made with the development partners and other key stakeholders in seeking their inputs in finalizing the document.

2. RESULTS

The progress of the project and achievements are presented according to the activities results set out in the 2011 Annual Work Plan:

Activity Result 1: Strategic Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Gender Inclusion

Strategic plan implementation and monitoring:

Formulated with the assistance of UNDP-ESP and with the aim of building ECN capacity to strengthen itself as an independent institution able to deliver profession and credible elections, the five year strategic plan (2009-2013) has been gradually implemented by ECN with the support of UNDP-ESP. To ensure the strategic plan continues to be a living document and is in line with the current needs and aspirations of ECN, the project also supported its review by ECN through a participatory national level workshop in March 2011. An independent evaluation of the strategic plan and its implementation was also undertaken in November 2011. The evaluation findings suggest that, while much work remains, ECN has made significant progress since inception of the strategic plan, particularly highlighting the following achievements:

- Introduction of new electronic voter registration system
- Submission of recommendations to the Constituent Assembly on an electoral system and ECN's organizational structure
- Drafting legislations on electoral dispute resolution and electoral campaign financing
- Preparation of framework for future consolidated electoral legislation
- Ongoing construction of Election Education and Information Center (EEIC)
- Conduction of BRIDGE trainings for over 600 participants from ECN, other governmental organizations, civil society and political party representatives
- Feasibility study on GIS application in electoral planning and management
- Feasibility study on mobile polling centers and voting in brail scripts
- Considerable work towards achievement of 29 other target areas

The ECN, in line with recommendations of the review, is in discussions on updating the strategic plan to ensure it guides the activities of ECN beyond 2013.

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Gender Inclusion:

The project also made significant achievements in sensitizing and raising awareness of ECN officials on the importance of inclusion of women and other minority groups in the electoral processes. In 2011, the project supported ECN in conducting a gender mapping exercise in the area of elections and preparing a report titled: "Gender Mapping in the Field of Elections." The report has been widely circulated and it has brought international recognition to the Commission for its efforts in gender mainstreaming. This is evident in GPECS decision to hold BRIDGE 'Gender and Elections' pilot training in Nepal as Nepal was the only country identified from the region to carry out this exercise. This recognition and positive attention has led to increased motivation of ECN to continue to champion for gender inclusion in elections. This is evidenced by the appointment of a gender focal point, initiating the creation of a gender unit within ECN and developing a 'Gender policy' to institutionalize gender equality at the institutional level as well mainstream gender in the electoral cycle.

Activity 2: Long-Term Professional Development and Staff Retention

Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections- A Course in Electoral Processes:

In order to develop sustainable and enduring institutional and professional capacities within ECN, the project continued organizing trainings and workshops on customized BRIDGE modules for ECN officials. A total of 302 people were trained (193 male and 109 women) through 12 trainings\ workshops, including a 10-day 'Train the Facilitators' course. The participants were mainly the ECN officials, other government officials, representatives from political parties, civil society and media. Additional 8 national facilitators were fully accredited this year, out of which 5 were female.

The topics and contents of the trainings\ workshops were developed in consultation with ECN officials to identify areas where the Commission recognized needs to strengthen the capacity of its staff members for individual professional growth as well as for institutional benefits. All the training materials were translated into Nepali for wider dissemination.

S.No	Topic for Training\workshop\tutorial	No. of Training Events	No. of Participants		Total
			Male	Female	
1	Voter Information & Electoral Management Tutorial	2	60	22	82
2	Training on Political Parties and Elections	1	10	8	18
3	Train the Facilitator	1	4	16	20
5	Electoral Administration and Management	1	23	0	23
6	Train the Facilitator	0	2	0	2
7	Gender and Elections - Pilot	1	7	17	24
8	Gender and Elections Regional level trainings	6	87	46	133
Total		14	193	109	302

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ECN officials have also expressed that BRIDGE trainings have helped in enhancing their knowledge on democracy and elections as well as built confidence in planning and facilitating electoral administration. In addition, it has also contributed in keeping ECN engaged with its electoral stakeholders during inter- elections period, broadening the parameter for understanding local needs and issues so it could be incorporated in designing electoral programs, laws and policies that would ultimately improve the quality of election management and administration.

Staff Retention:

In order to assist ECN in addressing the critical issue of staff turnover, a study was conducted and report on developing staff retention strategies was produced¹.The report provides different alternatives for staff retention, which are as follows:

- Formation of an Election Management Group (EMG) under the existing Administrative Service.
- Creation of a pool of specialized professions on elections currently working in the ECN or other governmental agencies
- Retention through regulation: An effective option would be to retain the employees through a legislative mechanism. This option can be implemented by adding a provision into the civil service regulation which would guarantee that nobody would be transferred to and from the ECN unless and until a formal approval from the ECN is made
- Implementation of the Management and Operational plans defined in the ECN's Strategic Plan

The report has been submitted to ECN for implementation. The project will be working closely with ECN in 2012 in implementing recommendations made in the report.

Activity 3: Voter Registration Programme with Photographs

The ESP continued to strengthen capacity of ECN to reach out and register eligible citizens on the voters list. The ECN's voter registration programme, which saw the inclusion of 8.5 million additional citizens in 2011, brought the total number of registered to 9.8 million. The project's focus has been on strengthening ECN's technical capacities to manage the voter registration in 75 districts



Figure 1: Voter Registration Programme in Nuwakot District of Mid-Western Development Region

¹Report on Developing Staff Retention Strategies for the Election Commission, April 2011

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and evolve towards a continuous voter registration process through the preparation of plans and procedures. The registration centre has been set-up in all 75 District Election Offices (DEOs) for continuous voter registration, special registration centres are established in 24 Districts Administration Offices and 17 Area Administration Offices where the citizenship certificate are issued.

In addition to technical and advisory services of three international experts and six national IT specialists at the national and regional levels, the project has also focused on supporting the establishment of ECN's central database in efforts to sustain and build on the achievements made thus far. The project has started planning, designing and commencing construction of a warehouse at the premises of ECN for the storage of electronic\VR equipment, electronic kits and relevant materials throughout the electoral cycle.



Figure 2: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Department at ECN Headquarter in Kathmandu

Activity 4: Geographic Information System (GIS) and Electoral Mapping System

The in-house GIS facility has been established at the ECN's secretariat and is fully functional. Thematic maps related to elections were produced and professional trainings and workshops on GIS were provided to the ECN officials at Headquarter and district offices. These capacity enhancement programs were useful in educating ECN officials on the importance and use of GIS in electoral cycle with emphasis on electoral mapping. A total of 130 ECN officials, District Electoral Officers (DEOs) and headquarter staff, participated in these trainings.

A regional training was also held for 40 DEOs and computer operators on use of Global Positioning System (GPS) for polling station mapping. As a result, ECN initiated polling locations mapping using GPS across the country and seeks to establish GIS in all 75 district election offices.

The in-house GIS facilities aims at developing digital mapping of the country including all administrative and electoral boundaries with population and voting statistics. The development of GIS will be useful in planning and management of electoral processes and monitoring and observation of future elections.

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Activity 5: Regional Technical Cooperation and Professional Exchanges Assistance

The ECN continued to strengthen its networks with its counterparts in the region and beyond. The project supported the Commission not only in building new and strengthening existing relationships through exchanges but it also supported the exchange of knowledge from Nepal to other countries and vice-versa. The Commission has been recognized at various events for its initiatives on gender as a result of the Gender Mapping report which was widely circulated and presented by ECN internationally. Similarly, the Voter Registration Modernization program and the Electoral Education and Information Centre (EEIC) are prime examples of best practice models from Bangladesh and Australia, respectively.

Some of the specific exchange visits included the participation of 2 ECN officials in BRIDGE Training of Trainers (ToT) program on 'Gender and Elections' in South Africa; participation of Chief Election Commissioner in a conference in Ghana on the 'Formal Launch of the ACCRA Principles for Electoral Justice,' and an exposure visit to Australian Education Centre in Canberra by ECN Joint Secretary and ESP EEIC Coordinator.

A total of 27 participants from ECN, ESP and civil society visited 11 countries in 2011. These learning visits provided participants opportunities to understand how the electoral system and processes work in other countries. It has contributed to ECN in making policy decisions, technical implementation of activities, sharing best practices and learning and strengthening networking with regional and global election management bodies.

Activity 6: Electoral Education and Information Centre (EEIC)

Significant progress was made in 2011 towards the completion of the construction of the EEIC building which is designed to enable ECN to reach out and educate citizens on the electoral process and their political rights as citizens of Nepal. Achievements in 2011 include completion of more than 70% of the civil works, drafting and finalization of the interior designs and procurement of major equipment for the EEIC. The building is expected to open in April 2012. The number of key posts has already been filled including the Director of the center, IT Officer and Supervisor – an additional eight staff of ECN have been identified for transfer to EEIC when the building is operational.

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Figure 3: Electoral Education and Information Centre under Construction

3. KEY IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Staff Retention

Staff retention has remained as one of the major challenges in the implementation of the project. Continuous changes in staffing affected project implementation and retention of knowledge at the institutional level. The major focus of UNDP-ESP in 2011 was on capacity enhancement through trainings, exposure visits, and on-site technical assistance. But due to frequent transfer of civil servants, ECN has not been able to utilize the knowledge and learning of staff for institutional strengthening. Neither ECN has an established mechanism in place for knowledge transfer and staff retention.

Sustainability

Sustainability of ECN's activities in project supported technical areas, particularly on GIS, EEIC and VR is a challenge for the Project. The ECN should benchmark budget from the government to give continuity to these activities and also develop strategies to retain technical staff particularly on ICT.

Gender Equality and Inclusion

Lack of internalization on the importance of gender equality due to social and cultural factors have resulted in low level of gender representation in the ECN organizational structure and ECN's activities. Though significant improvements have been made on mainstreaming gender at the organizational level as well as project activities, but it has remained a challenge to institutionalize this practice and change the perception/mind-set of ECN staff and electoral stakeholders on

Citizenship and VR

Discussions continue, among some political leaders, on the court ruling establishing the citizenship certificate as the only valid document for voter registration. Those that do not hold citizenship certificate are not able to register and this remains a concern for ECN and the project.

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The participation of political leaders in VR discussions is imperative for the success of voter registration.

Procurement

ECN capacity to carry out large scale procurement remains limited, resulting in extensive assistance of ESP in the procurement of goods and services to carry out electoral activities.

Electoral Calendar

Uncertainty in the Electoral calendar is a challenge that has affected 2012 planning. As a commission moves closer to an election date, associated technical assistance parameters change. With no foreseen election date the delivery of timely technical assistance will be negatively impacted.

4. FINANCIAL STATUS (in USD)

Fund Provider - Donors	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure	Balance
Denmark	617,711.93	511,382.28	106,329.65
DFID	637,764.00	24,604.83	24,604.83
AusAid	133,515.90	6,040.58	6,040.58
JICA	15,016.00	15,0736	1.85
Norway	764,941.00	163,974.00	163,974.80
TOTAL FUND in USD	2,325,282.94	2,024,331.23	300,951.71

5. PRIORITIES FOR 2012

- UNDP-ESP will continue providing support to the implementation and monitoring of the ECN's Strategic Plan (2009-13), including revision of the Plan itself as recommended in the Mid-term evaluation report. The mid-term evaluation of strategic plan of the ECN (2009-13) was conducted by an independent consultant and submitted to the ECN for implementation. Technical assistance will also be extended in implementing recommendations made on a report on developing staff retention strategies for the ECN.
- Continued support to the ECN's implementation of nation-wide Voter Registration will remain at the core of UNDP-ESP assistance in 2012. The prime focus of ESP this year will be on software development for centre data server for voters' de-duplication, printing of voters' lists and to create linkages with the Ministry of Home Affairs for National ID. It involves procurement of essential hardware and software. After the final voters' lists are produced, UNDP will support ECN to conduct a survey to assess the quality of the voters' lists. It will benefit ECN in order to take any necessary measures to improve upon the existing system. UNDP continue providing services of voter registration experts (national and international) at headquarters and regional levels for technical support.

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- After the promulgation of a new constitution, there will be various electoral events including national, federal and local levels elections in coming years. Therefore, UNDP-ESP's focus in 2012 emphasizes on providing technical support in planning and preparing for series of upcoming elections. If the election is announced for 2012, the project will also deliver operational support to ECN in organizing elections. Assistance will also be extended in procurement of materials and equipment for elections.
- Support will continue in strengthening ICT capacity of ECN, establishing and operationalizing EEIC and polling station mapping across the country using GIS application.
- One of the critical priorities identified by ECN for 2012 is to institutionalize gender inclusion into electoral management. UNDP will provide technical assistance to ECN in finalizing and implementing Gender Policy, strengthening gender unit, institutionalizing gender budgeting and raising awareness on gender mainstreaming on electoral processes and system. The strategic plan of ECN 2009- 2013 will be reviewed to include special measures to encourage women, minority and other excluded groups' participation in electoral processes as well as in the new voter registration.
- UNDP in joint collaboration with the ECN and the development partners will revise the existing project document of ESP- Phase II of the ESP. The revised project document will be developed to respond to the needs of ECN and be able to extend a more comprehensive operational support for the upcoming series of elections. Therefore, resource mobilization will be one of the top priorities of the UNDP\ESP in 2012. An independent review of PHASE I of the ESP will be also be carried out in early 2012 by DFID. The recommendations made in the review will be incorporated in the revised project document.
- Continued support will be extended in strengthening professional capacity of ECN officials and electoral stakeholders through BRIDGE course at central and regional levels. In parallel to the BRIDGE course, the project will also offer some general management programmes and courses to enhance financial management and procurement capacity of ECN. The project will also provide opportunities for ECN officials to conduct professional exchange visits to electoral management bodies (EMBs) in other countries within the region or in similar contexts globally, and learn about the organization and planning of elections elsewhere with a commitment to transfer the knowledge through reports, sharing sessions , facilitating trainings to transfer knowledge etc .
- Support will be provided to ECN in amending and drafting new regulations and guidelines based on the new legal framework. Emphasis will be given to support an inclusive process which involves engaging stakeholders in the drafting process. In order to address the issue of electoral security, UNDP will assist ECN in conducting electoral conflict assessment followed by the formulation of electoral conflict mitigation strategy.

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6. CONCLUSION

Despite some of the challenges encountered by the project during the process of implementation, the planned activities were carried out smoothly during the reporting period. The support and cooperation received from the Election Commission of Nepal and development partners have contributed to the effective implementation of the project.

The UNDP-ESP will continue providing technical and operation support to the ECN on Voter Registration, Revision and implementation of Strategic Plan of ECN, EEIC, GIS, Gender and Inclusion and BRIDGE in 2012. After an endorsement of the PHASE II of ESP by the Project Executive Board, assistance will also be extended in implementing series of additional activities planned to support ECN in electoral preparation. Emphasis will also be on strengthening procurement and financial capacities of ECN for sustainability. The project will also work closely with ECN in developing electoral violence mitigation strategy. Therefore, for the successful continuation of the support extended to ECN, the project looks forward to receiving continual support and cooperation from all the implementing partners.