

Election Cycle Support to ECP

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B0424 - Pakistan - Islamabad

REPORTING PERIOD 2012- 2024

Narrative

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1. Executive Summary

2. Background

3. Key Results Achieved

- **Level of Reporting:**

Output level results

Project Outputs:

ECP's institutional capacity and mandate to organize free, fair, and transparent elections strengthened through capacity develop of ECP staff, improved effectiveness, operationalization of ECP's subsidiary bodies, and instl. adoption of comms & outreach m

Contributing Outcomes:

Outcome 1 By 2027, the people in Pakistan, especially women, children, the most vulnerable and marginalized, have increased access to fundamental rights, gender equality and fundamental freedom through inclusive, accountable, effective and evidence-driven governance systems and rule-of-law institutions at all levels of government, contributing to good governance and stability

Contributing Outputs:

PAK_OUTPUT_1.1 Open, agile, accountable and future-ready governance institutions and systems in place to co-create and deliver solutions to accelerate transparent and equitable service delivery and SDG achievement

Progress Note:

UNDP support for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) this year led to significant capacity-building initiatives, enhancing electoral governance, transparency, and institutional efficiency. UNDP built capacities of 348 individuals including 262 ECP officers, 26 parliamentarians, 8 other electoral stakeholders (142 women, 205 men and 1 transgender person) through various training workshops, as mentioned below. a) The Social Media Communication training workshop improved digital communication, misinformation mitigation, and political advertisement monitoring skills for 17 ECP officers (11 women, six men). Post-training assessments showed a 6.95% knowledge increase, strengthening participants' abilities in content verification and public

engagement. b) BRIDGE Training workshops engaged 149 participants, including 91 ECP officers and 58 CSO, media, and political representatives, covering gender equality, media regulations, disability inclusion, electoral dispute resolution, electoral administration and strategic planning. The training resulted in a 26.32% knowledge improvement and contributed to practical tools like the PWD Accessibility Action Plan and the Gender Policy Brief, reinforcing Pakistan's electoral framework. c) A ten-day Oracle Apex training equipped 10 senior ECP officers with essential skills in electoral data management and transparency enhancement. d) The Leadership & Management Course at LUMS advanced the leadership capacity of 25 senior ECP officers, including two women, by providing practical skills and strategic insights to drive improvements in electoral administration. This initiative contributed to long-term leadership development, ensuring officers are well-prepared for evolving electoral challenges. e) Workplace Harassment Prevention training benefited 121 ECP staff (46 women, 75 men) across provinces and the Secretariat. Based on post-training recommendations and advocacy efforts by UNDP/SELP, the ECP reconstituted Harassment Inquiry Committees across all Provincial Election Commissioner offices, a significant step in implementing the Prevention of Workplace Harassment Act 2010 and building a safer workplace. f) Nine instructional videos in six languages were produced and distributed to election officials, broadcasted on various digital and social media platforms, reaching over 173,500 views, significantly enhancing election preparedness. g) The Communication and Public Outreach Strategy, developed in collaboration with the ECP and finalized in August 2024, is expected to enhance transparent communication and public participation. h) A Thought Leadership Workshop enabled 26 women parliamentarians to collaboratively develop a Strategic Capacity Development Plan, strengthening the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC)'s role in legislative reforms and promoting gender equality in governance.

- **Level of Reporting:**

Output level results

Project Outputs:

Accountability of elected representatives and parliamentary oversight enhanced through strengthening of Parliamentary institutions, communications and engagement of stakeholders.

Contributing Outcomes:

Outcome 1 By 2027, the people in Pakistan, especially women, children, the most vulnerable and marginalized, have increased access to fundamental rights, gender equality and fundamental freedom through inclusive, accountable, effective and evidence-driven governance systems and rule-of-law institutions at all levels of government, contributing to good governance and stability

Contributing Outputs:

PAK_OUTPUT_1.1 Open, agile, accountable and future-ready governance institutions and systems in place to co-create and deliver solutions to accelerate transparent and equitable service delivery and SDG achievement

Progress Note:

This output remained non-funded during 2024.

- **Level of Reporting:**

Output level results

Project Outputs:

Peaceful and transparent elections are facilitated through electoral reform dialogues, peaceful access to electoral processes, capacity development of electoral stakeholder and institutionalization of comprehensive M&E framework.

Contributing Outcomes:

Outcome 1 By 2027, the people in Pakistan, especially women, children, the most vulnerable and marginalized, have increased access to fundamental rights, gender equality and fundamental freedom through inclusive, accountable, effective and evidence-driven governance systems and rule-of-law institutions at all levels of government, contributing to good governance and stability

Contributing Outputs:

PAK_OUTPUT_1.1 Open, agile, accountable and future-ready governance institutions and systems in place to co-create and deliver solutions to accelerate transparent and equitable service delivery and SDG achievement

Progress Note:

UNDP support this year led to: a) Electoral Reforms & Democratic Governance: UNDP facilitated five high-level electoral roundtables and engaged 116 stakeholders (86 men, 30 women) from political parties, civil society, academia, and media. These dialogues led to key policy recommendations to enhance transparency, inclusivity, and electoral accountability, including digital voter verification, campaign finance reforms, and improved election dispute resolution mechanisms. b) Advancing Electoral Technology: Three consultations on electoral technologies engaged 77 stakeholders, exploring the integration of Biometric Voter Verification (BVV), Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and Results Management Systems (RMS). Recommendations included pilot testing, cybersecurity measures, and stakeholder engagement for trust-building. Findings were presented to the ECP for consideration in future electoral modernization efforts. c) Countering Misinformation & Hate Speech: Through iVerify Pakistan, UNDP supported the fact-checking of 232 stories, identifying 180 false, 43 misleading, and only 8 true reports. The project's exclusive MoU with DAWN Media amplified the reach of fact-checked information. Additionally, the eMonitor system analyzed 105 key social media narratives, tracking politically and religiously motivated extremism and gender-based violence, leading to policy recommendations for addressing digital polarization. d) Strengthening Digital Literacy: UNDP trained 699 university students (242 women and 457) on critical thinking, fact-checking, and responsible online engagement, with a 7.3% improvement in digital literacy. e) A total of 196 government

officials including 34 women, and a total of 29 ECP's beat reporters and desk editors were trained on fact-checking and combating digital threats through Digital Governance Workshops, enhancing their capacity to counter disinformation. Additionally, 83 parliamentarians were also trained on digital leadership. f) Influencer Engagement & Digital Campaigns: The #SochPhirPost and Digital Harmony campaigns reached 260 million people, with 549,000 interactions and 13.13 million video views across TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. The Unboxing Pakistan podcast series reached 1.3 million people, with 900,000 views, tackling misinformation, online harassment, and digital safety. g) Policy Research & Legislative Advocacy: UNDP developed policy briefs on social media regulation, electoral finance, misinformation, and transnational extremist ideologies, offering actionable reforms for policymakers. Key engagements with parliamentarians, government ministries, and regulatory bodies resulted in collaborative efforts to strengthen digital rights, counter online extremism, and promote fact-based political discourse. h) Multi-Stakeholder Engagement & Government Collaboration: Inter-ministerial working groups were established with MOIB, MoIT, MoLJ, and other entities to develop coordinated strategies for digital safety and misinformation countermeasures. Key meetings with PTA, PEMRA, and NACTA led to agreements on digital capacity-building, policy reforms, and collaborative governance initiatives.

- **Level of Reporting:**

Output level results

Project Outputs:

Inclusive participation of vulnerable and underrepresented groups incl. women, transgender persons, PWDs, religious minorities and youth in electoral processes enhanced through civic/voter education and public outreach campaigns, and institutional reforms

Contributing Outcomes:

Outcome 4 By 2027, more women and girls at greatest risk of being left behind are able to benefit from and contribute to an environment in which they are empowered to exercise their fundamental rights, agency and decision-making power over all aspects, towards lives free from all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices.

Contributing Outputs:

PAK_OUTPUT_4.1 Empowerment of women, girls, transgender persons and vulnerable and institutional leadership is promoted through gender responsive policies, programmes, strategies and instruments through the provision of public and private financing and institutional development and strengthening.

Progress Note:

a) UNDP support this year resulted in the development and securing parliamentary endorsement of harassment and hate speech prevention guidelines, ensuring a safer, gender-inclusive parliamentary environment. b) Legislative recommendations for

transgender inclusion in electoral processes were drafted, leading to consultations with policymakers for legal reforms. c) Electoral participation expanded through 15,073 NIC registrations for women and marginalized groups in flood-affected areas. d) A targeted media campaign reached 27.56 million people, driving increased NIC registrations and voter awareness. e) Engaging 339 university students (71% women), through targeted youth sessions across nine universities nationwide including flood affected areas. The discussions yielded recommendations for awareness campaigns, curriculum integration, advocacy for student unions, and improved polling station environments, to encourage active youth participation in politics and foster trust in the electoral system. f) Voter awareness and turnout in the 2024 General Elections significantly increased through a nationwide civic and voter education campaign (CVE), reaching 85.54 million citizens via TV, radio, social media, and print materials. An election jingle engaged 30.99 million women, boosting awareness and participation. Animated videos and radio messages in regional languages targeted women, youth, and marginalized groups, while three national radio talk shows facilitated public discourse on electoral participation. g) Five provincial and national consultations on improving accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), secured commitments from stakeholders to enforce the Accessibility Code of Pakistan (2006) for polling stations and public buildings. Government action was also prompted to simplify NIC registration and enhance PWD electoral participation. h) Produced a research paper on women’s electoral participation, informing legislative advocacy for gender-inclusive governance. i) Documented transgender candidates’ political journeys, leading to high-level policy discussions on electoral inclusion. j) Successfully advocated for disability-inclusive language in the 2023 Population Census, ensuring accurate representation of PWDs in official data. k) Conducted high-impact policy consultations with women parliamentarians, shaping strategic reforms to expand women’s political leadership. l) Organized International Women’s Day 2024, engaging key stakeholders on digital security and women’s political empowerment.

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4. Key Challenges Encountered

- **Level of Reporting:**

Project level results

Contributing Outcomes:

Contributing Outputs:

Progress Note:

1. The ECP's five-year Strategic Plan (2024-2028) was delayed due to the postponement of the mandatory post-election review (PER) involving stakeholders that was pre-requisite for developing the strategic plan. Instead, after postponing multiple times, the ECP opted for an internal review, affecting the plan's timeline, which is now contingent on completing the internal PER. UNDP/SELP organized a three-day BRIDGE training for the ECP's Strategic Planning Committee, resulting in a draft work plan for the ECP's fourth five-year Strategic Plan. On 13 December, SELP offered further technical support, which the ECP's Training Wing acknowledged. SELP will actively follow up to ensure timely progress and the plan's finalization.

2. SELP planned five BRIDGE events, of which three include CSOs, media, and political parties along with ECP officers. SELP requested the ECP to nominate participants and trainers for these training sessions. SELP also organized eight electoral and legal reforms consultations with the key electoral and political stakeholders and requested ECP to attend the forums. The ECP, concerned about potential confrontation from media and political parties regarding election transparency, hesitated to confirm participation. To mitigate this, SELP held in person meetings with Special Secretary ECP and also wrote a letters requesting ECP for nominations. Following discussions, the ECP agreed to join the sessions with CSOs only, which took place from 26-28 June. However, for remaining workshops, and consultations forums on electoral reforms ECP did not confirm their participation. SELP will continue to encourage ECP to attend future events as their participation will enhance coordination and improve stakeholder relations.

3. The delay in forming the Women Parliamentary Caucus and statutory committees considerably impacted project implementation, as a number of activities required engagement with relevant committees. The WPC and statutory committees were eventually established by the end of June 2024; however, due to their engagements with the parliament sessions, their availability for the planned project interventions remained a challenge. SELP coordinated with the Directorate of Parliamentary Forums on SELP remained successful in engagement with the WPC and statutory committees for the national level sessions. However, due to their availability issues, provincial level activities are rescheduled for the next quarter to ensure the desired results.

4. Government-imposed restrictions on internet services, including the national firewall, social media bans, and internet slowdowns, may disrupt key project activities and communication channels, especially during critical moments. These disruptions, while often temporary, can also affect engagement with government partners and the implementation of digital initiatives. To mitigate this risk, the HSDP team is closely monitoring developments in internet policies and adjusting its outreach strategy accordingly. The project is implementing dedicated bandwidth solutions to ensure continuity of operations, minimizing the impact of service disruptions on project activities.

5. While there is an appetite for the digital democracy workshops amongst parliamentarians, it has been difficult in finalizing dates at the federal and provincial levels for conducting these workshops. This has resulted in postponement and rescheduling of some of the scheduled workshops several times. This is due to frequent rescheduling of the assembly sessions at the federal and provincial level, and the ongoing delay in a decision on the reserved seats issue.

6. The ongoing political uncertainty has resulted in delays in engaging with ministries and other government bodies and conducting scheduled training for government officials and interministerial meetings.

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5. Project Risks and Issues

1. The Federal Government's potential introduction of new legislation, including the defamation bill and amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), poses a risk to the project's objective of protecting vulnerable groups. These changes, such as the establishment of the Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA) and expanded definitions of "fake news" and "unlawful content," could stifle dissent, curtail digital rights, and undermine freedom of expression, particularly with vague legal definitions and heavy penalties for online speech. To mitigate this, UNDP is closely monitoring legislative developments, engaging with government bodies to advocate for policies aligned with the project's goals, and conducting political economy analysis. The project Advisory Council is also involved in providing input and devising mitigation strategies.

2. Post-election narratives labeled as 'fake news' may conflict with the project's free speech objectives, especially as the government opposes certain viewpoints, labeling them as 'anti-state'. This poses a risk to interventions targeting government bodies and could lead to a counterproductive focus on regulation that restricts free expression, which falls outside the project's mandate. To mitigate this risk, project maintains a neutral focus on through education, sensitization, and capacity-building initiatives. The project's work with various Ministries has facilitated the creation of an interministerial coordination group, ensuring a collaborative, autonomous approach while minimizing governmental influence over project deliverables.

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4. Limited stakeholder engagement, digital accessibility barriers, and concerns about data privacy may contribute to low participation in surveys, affecting data quality and the ability to measure program impact effectively. Cultural and societal sensitivities also play a role in respondents' hesitation to engage with survey tools. This reduces the program's capacity to gather representative insights into digital behaviors and attitudes. To mitigate this risk, the project conducted multiple rounds of engagement with educational institutions, piloted the survey with university students, and refined the methodology to enhance accessibility and participation. The survey tools were updated to improve user experience, and targeted outreach strategies—such as awareness sessions, reminders via SMS/email, and social media engagement—were implemented.

5. Political transitions, shifting government priorities, and scheduling conflicts with key officials led to delays in policy discussions and decision-making engagements, impacting the timely implementation of planned activities. The evolving political landscape posed a challenge in securing participation from relevant stakeholders, slowing down progress on policy advocacy and institutional coordination. To mitigate this risk, project adopted a proactive engagement strategy, ensuring regular interaction with relevant ministries and leveraging key stakeholders

to facilitate access to policymakers. The project aligned its efforts with government priorities, making engagements more relevant and increasing the likelihood of participation.

6. Lessons Learned

- ECP’s decision to exclude its officers from BRIDGE trainings with stakeholders such as media, CSOs, and political parties, likely due to election sensitivities, was a missed opportunity to enhance dialogue and build trust. This absence may have been perceived as a lack of transparency, potentially increasing mistrust. SELP remains committed to encouraging ECP participation in such initiatives, as their active involvement is critical to improving collaboration and addressing trust deficits effectively.
- In engaging with lawmakers, SELP has found that addressing less contentious issues first can pave the way for tackling more sensitive topics like disinformation and hate speech. This strategic approach encourages constructive dialogue and increases lawmakers' willingness to engage in more challenging discussions, enhancing the project's overall impact.
- Limited English proficiency among participants restricted their ability to actively engage in interactive activities during trainings led by international facilitators, particularly in group discussions that required communication in a foreign language. SELP found that involving national facilitators to lead such activities significantly improved participant engagement and inclusivity. Additionally, translating training materials into Urdu and conducting discussions in local languages are essential strategies for enhancing communication, ensuring full participation, and creating a more effective learning environment.
- Accredited BRIDGE trainers, including women, require continuous mentorship to refine their facilitation skills and maximize their impact. Prioritizing capacity-building and ensuring equal opportunities for female trainers can enhance program diversity, strengthen leadership, and broaden its reach.
- Proactive planning and coordination with stakeholders are vital to minimize scheduling conflicts and ensure the timely execution of key activities, especially in politically unstable environments.
- Maintaining a neutral and collaborative approach with government bodies enhances the effectiveness of advocacy efforts while safeguarding the project’s objectives and autonomy.
- Frequent follow up and consistency in reaching out to the target stakeholders is necessary to ensure political commitment towards common objectives.
- Flexibility and adaptability in project management is critically important in complex and dynamic environments, such as those involving political transitions and negotiations with multiple stakeholders, unforeseen delays and complications are almost inevitable.
- Traditional Media restrictions drive users to social media for alternative narratives, intensifying polarization by exposing some groups to opposing views while insulating others, highlighting the need for balanced media representation and digital literacy initiatives.
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7. Conclusions and Way Forward

In conclusion, UNDP/SELP support to the ECP and electoral stakeholders in the year has yielded significant achievements and contributed to the UNSDCF/CPD outcome. The following is an analysis of the key results achieved in each case: Strengthening Electoral Governance & Institutional Capacity: UNDP contributed to strengthening Pakistan's electoral governance by training 348 individuals (262 ECP officers, 26 parliamentarians, 58 stakeholders, (142 women and 1 transgender person) in social media, BRIDGE, data management, leadership, and workplace harassment prevention. Significant milestones were the reconstitution of Harassment Inquiry Committees across ECP provincial offices and finalizing a Communication Strategy. UNDP's civic and voter education campaign (CVE) reached 85.54 million citizens, driving 27.56 million targeted engagements and increasing NIC registrations for 15,073 women and marginalized groups in flood-affected areas. Election preparedness was further strengthened through the production of nine multilingual instructional videos, which accumulated over 173,500 views. Promoting Electoral Reforms & Inclusive Political Participation: UNDP organized five electoral roundtables and three technology consultations with 193 stakeholders, producing policy recommendations on digital voting, campaign finance, dispute resolution, and PWD accessibility. Five dedicated consultations reinforced commitments to implement Pakistan's 2006 Accessibility Code. The initiative advanced transgender political participation through legislative proposals and policy dialogues. Additionally, a research paper on women's electoral participation informed strategic reforms to expand women's political leadership. The Thought Leadership Workshop empowered 26 women parliamentarians to develop a Strategic Capacity Development Plan for the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. Countering Misinformation, Strengthening Digital Literacy & Electoral Integrity: UNDP's iVerify initiative exposed 180 false and 43 misleading election claims among 232 stories fact-checked, with six verified articles published in DAWN. The eMonitor system analyzed 105 social media narratives, identifying harmful trends and informing anti-polarization policies. Digital literacy programs trained 1,399 students (50% women), improving skills by 7.3%. Additionally, 196 officials and 29 ECP journalists gained fact-checking and cybersecurity expertise. Fifty-seven parliamentarians completed Digital Democracy Workshops, enhancing their capacity to combat misinformation and lead informed electoral discussions. Expanding Public Engagement & Digital Advocacy: UNDP's #SochPhirPost and Digital Harmony campaigns reached 260 million people with 549,000 interactions and 13.13 million video views, while the Unboxing Pakistan podcast engaged 1.3 million listeners on digital rights and misinformation. Strategic partnerships with Google, Meta, and TikTok supported discussions on content integrity. UNDP also established inter-ministerial working groups with MOIB, MoIT, and MoLJ, and secured agreements with PTA, PEMRA, and NACTA on digital capacity-building, fact-checking collaboration, and coordinated digital governance.

8. Other Reporting Requirements

- **Reporting Requirements**

Gender-related reporting requirements

In 2024, UNDP/SELP made significant strides in gender equality and women’s empowerment. Workshops for 121 ECP staff, with 57% women participants, raised awareness of the Protection Against Workplace Harassment Act, leading to the reconstitution of Harassment Inquiry Committees at provincial level. Through formalized partnerships and well-planned approaches, approximately 67,000 new voters, primarily women as well as individuals from marginalized groups, from the flood-affected districts of Sindh and Balochistan were added to the electoral roll for 2024 elections, contributing to reducing the gender gap in citizen registration. Despite challenges with NADRA’s revised documentation requirements complicating the process, additional 5,728 individuals were registered by September 2024, empowering marginalized women to access civic services. UNDP/SELP also conducted digital literacy workshops for 380 students (123 young women), promoting safe digital practices. Promoting political inclusion for transgender individuals through the documentary Changing Tides and focus group discussions with the persons with disabilities addressed electoral accessibility for them. A well-designed multi-media awareness campaign cumulatively reached approximately 85.54 million people by election day including about 30.994 million women, emphasizing their political and electoral participation. Effective partnerships, media campaigns, gender sensitization, adaptability, and legal compliance contributed to these achievements. Continued advocacy and expanded successful interventions are essential to continue these results.

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