**Report on evaluation of the**

**Kyrgyz Election Support Project (KESP II)**

**(Swiss Government Funded Activities)**

**2015 – 2018**

**UNDP**

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**Project information**

Title: Kyrgyz Election Support Project II (KESP II)

Donors: UNDP, Denmark, Switzerland.

Counterparts: Central Commission on Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic, State Registration Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Non-Governmental/Civil Society Organizations

Timeline: 2015-2018

Location: throughout the country

Expected Output(s): Component 1: Advancement of ICT introduction into electoral management process;

Component 2: Institutional communication, Civic and voter education campaigns

Component 3: Electoral dispute resolution and electoral security training

**Acronyms**

ABB – automatic ballot box

CEC – Central Commission on Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic

CPAP – Country Program Action Plan

CSO – civil society organization

EMB – electoral management body

EVID – electronic voter identification

IFES – International Foundation for Electoral Systems

IRI – International Republican Institute

KESP – Kyrgyz Electoral Support Project

NDI – National Democratic Institute

ODIHR – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (of OSCE)

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

SRS – State Registry Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

UVRIMS – Unified Voter Registration Information Management System

# Executive summary

The Kyrgyz Election Support Project II has been working in a tense and risky environment, amidst preparations for and undertaking of major electoral reforms. Evaluation of the project aimed at assessing achievement of intended outcomes with more focus done on activities related to the Swiss fund support.

In overall the project achieved its targets. CEC’s capacity and resources were helped to be brought to the level which enabled the electoral management body to administer elections at higher standards than it was before. On those elements of the electoral process which were the focus of the project virtually all international and local observers noted compliance with international standards. Another target was improvement of the Unified Voter Registration Information Management System and Result Management Information System which also happened quite effectively.

Establishment of institutional communication and provision of support to civil society and political parties on electoral observation was also by and large took place. This target was aiming at building public confidence to elections. Though it is difficult to expect significant improvements in this area, by the project was essential to mitigate apprehensions about introduction of biometric registration and using IT for electoral processes. Reaching out to most of the critics of these innovations helped to clarify pending issue, and this not only mitigated fears, but also helped developers of IT system to cross-check against possible risks. A number of issues were considered consequently by the CEC’s working groups and later (disputed ones) by courts.

In many regards it was observed that UNDP has played a role beyond a mere implementation of the project, but was an agency coordinating and facilitating interaction among various stakeholders. This helped to facilitate support to various elements of electoral processes, and inadvertently helped the project as well. Commitment and ability to quickly and flexibly respond to the needs of local partners were viewed as the main positive features of UNDP’s engagement.

Some of the lessons learned came in regard to role of various individuals in different organizations whose concerted efforts had led to successful (in many regards) administering of elections in 2015. This should be taken into account as a factor which is often hard to replicate in other circumstances. Also, it is noted that an international organization should stay engaged continuously (as the electoral cycle approach employed in the KESP II suggested) engaged in electoral reforms to remain a relevant actor. Additionally, capacity of administering elections in overall seems to be an objective which has been sustainably achieved in many regards, and while it may remain the objective for further support, the emphasis for assistance should be moved to other issues of electoral process.

# Background

In electoral systems introduction of ICT tools creates vast new possibilities to make elections fair and transparent, but also create challenges regarding efficient implementation of reforms and engagement of key stakeholders from civil society and getting support of population.

The period preceding the start of the project was an uneasy one because of high expectations about standards of elections which emerged after the 2010 popular revolt. The tumultuous period of 2010 has ended with parliamentary elections of 2010 and presidential elections of 2011. The weakness of the government in 2010 enabled for the first time for an oppositional party (Ata Djurt) to get more seats than any other party. In the presidential elections of 2011 there was no clear prior assurance that it could have ended in one round. For the first time the winning candidate received just slightly more than 60 percent of votes. The politics in the country became more competitive and this translated into the building of an electoral system which should reflect experience of elections of 2010 and 2011 and public expectations that electorate and its votes should matter.

Elections in the previous electoral cycle (2010-2012) were considered by OSCE/ODIHR electoral observation mission (2010) as, on one side, ensuring further consolidation of democratic process which were characterized by political pluralism, energetic electoral campaign and trust to the CEC, by, on the other side, stating that there is a need for a deep reform of electoral legislation. The following deficiencies were noted in the final ODIHR’s report on observation of the parliamentary elections of 2010 – quality and precision of lists of voters, the use of administrative resources and coercing votes, the lack of analytic and neutral information in media about electoral campaign. Also it was noted that there were unwillingness to file official complaints, CEC was not consistent in its decisions related to complaints, and the lack of timely written decisions led to inability for plaintiffs to address issues to courts. Very much similar conclusions were made by the local independent observers.

As it is noted one of the main perennial issues for elections in the post-soviet Kyrgyzstan was the lack of comprehensive and accurate list of voters. That was enabling numerous manipulations at the electoral precincts and was generating mistrust to electoral results. There were a lot of deceased, duplicate and non-existent voters. The process of verification and update of lists of voters involved CEC working closely with local government authorities. However it was not possible to cross check the list of voters for duplication and other deficiencies and that made this issue one of the major threats to integrity of elections in Kyrgyzstan. In the 2011 presidential elections the election observation report by Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society also noted the issue of the voter lists, and that despite information campaigns for voters to verify their names in the lists the issue remained largely unresolved.

While the previous cycle of elections (2010 parliamentary, 2011 presidential and 2012 local) were somewhat more competitive than before there were a lot of issues which the government of Kyrgyzstan and the electoral body management faced in terms of preparations for the upcoming electoral cycle which was to start with the 2015 parliamentary elections. Yet there was sufficient time to get started with planning and undertaking needed changes in the electoral processes as soon as the 2011 presidential elections ended, which were considered as the end of the transition period which followed the 2010 political changes. On 22 May of 2013 President Atambayev issued the decree “On Measures on the Improvement of the Electoral System of the Kyrgyz Republic” and this decree was followed by creation of a working group to address the National Council of Sustainable Development with suggestion to work on legislative changes for the upcoming 2015 parliamentary elections with an idea that a two year window would be sufficient for some major improvement. There were specific expectations in regard to the legal framework on political parties and introduction of modern technologies into the electoral process – and specifically this regard to address issues of voter registration, the voting process itself and counting of ballots. This decree established 1 November 2013 as the deadline for proposal to improve voter identification, transparency and counting of votes.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It should be noted that KESP II followed a previous electoral support project KESP I which aimed to support to the constitutional referendum (2010), parliamentary elections (2010) and presidential elections (2011) and the project was extended until the 2012 based on the request by the CEC to provide support to local elections in 2012 as well as to the development of phase II of voter registration software and the capacity building activities. KESP I focused on three specific outputs: 1) strengthening national electoral institutions and processes; 2) increased and inclusive participation in electoral process; and 3) enabling a peaceful and secure environment for elections – which were chosen after consultation with the CEC. As was mentioned earlier in many regards elections of 2010 and 2011 were recognized by independent observers as meeting largely standards of electoral processes though some deficiencies required to be addressed in further elections. Experience of engagement in electoral support in 2010-2011 positioned UNDP well to engage in supporting processes in the next electoral cycle.

Besides UNDP there were other international organizations which also engaged in electoral support. In December 2013, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) facilitated a public dialogue entitled “Strengthening the electoral system of the Kyrgyz Republic”. The event was also supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and the National Council for Sustainable Development. USAID supported the IFES electoral assistance project. The IFES project focuses on training and capacity building of the election commissions of all levels, voter and civic education, outreach to grassroots organizations and support to national observers. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) carried out programs supporting the development of democratic institutions including the parliament, civil society and political parties (NDI) and democratic governance, political party development and civic engagement (IRI).

# Project goals and outputs

The KESP II project started in December 2014 and was envisioned to last for three years and was built around the following 3 components:

Component 1: Advancement of ICT introduction into electoral management process;

Component 2: Institutional communication, Civic and voter education campaigns

Component 3: Electoral dispute resolution and electoral security training

There were the following targets and indicators for each of project components’ outputs:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Targets** | **Indicators** |
| Component 1 | The capacity and resource of CEC strengthened to organize elections in conformity with national and international standards; | Procured and operational server and other IT-equipment for data bases storage  Procured ID card Machine Readable Zones (MRZ) combo readers for SRS  Provided support for establishment of Information Resource Center at CEC  Number of trainings and participants;  Upgraded official CEC web site ([www.shailoo.gov.kg](http://www.shailoo.gov.kg)); |
| Component 2 | Targets: Institutional communication established, support to civil society and political parties on electoral observation provided | Developed external communications  Developed CEC media unit  Number of communication trainings  Number of training on the communications/spokesperson role and development of a communication manual  Media producing and publishing/broadcasting correct and responsible information  Conducted trainings on Electoral education  Conducted trainings on voter information  Developed voter education campaign  Production of different activities (communication elements, radio/televised programs, posters stickers, leaflets/ pamphlets...)  CSO’s outside the capital strengthened |
| Component 3 | Peaceful and secure environment conducive to the organization of peaceful elections ensured | Developed system for the follow up with electoral complains  Conducted information campaign on EDR  Conducted training for judges on adjudication of electoral disputes  Conducted training for political parties, observers and other stakeholders on accurate submission of electoral complaints  Conducted training for law enforcement officials  Developed crisis management plan for elections  Conducted conflict analysis and analysis of the security element in the electoral process |

# Objectives, methodology and scope of evaluation

The project document envisioned undertaking an independent final outcome evaluation which is to be focused on the effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of the program implementation. It was aimed to highlight issues requiring decisions and actions and to present initial lessons learned about the program design, implementation and management. The program outcomes were supposed to be evaluated by measuring progress indicators and parameters as was reflected in the CPAP. The final evaluation will also look at impact and sustainability of results, including the contribution to capacity development and the achievement of Good Governance goals.

The objectives of this evaluation are to:

1. Analyze the status of results achievements;
2. Assess effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of the project implementation in attainment of project results, highlighting issues requiring decisions and actions:
3. Assess the implementation strategies, processes and performance of the above-mentioned respective stakeholders and partners;
4. Analyze the project’s goals and theory of change and study lessons learnt about the program design, implementation and management for the entire period of the project; and
5. Assess impact and sustainability of results, including the contribution to capacity development and the achievement of Good Governance goals.

Methodology for this evaluation included conducting interviews with the project staff and project partners as well as studying project documents and other documents related to the project activities. Methodology is focusing on the outcome evaluation, i.e. whether the project achieved results it intended to bring. This approach aims to help UNDP to understand whether outputs were delivered.

This evaluation intends to maintain standards of impartiality and other norms usually upheld while assessing delivery of intended results. While interviews with key partners as well as reports by the project staff and reports by partner organizations were important in assessment, verification process entailed study of other documents and additional sources which would highlight presence of intended outcomes as related to project activities.

*Acknowledgements*

Undertaking this evaluation would not be possible without support from the UNDP project staff as well as project partners from CEC, SRS and civil society organizations.

# Project implementation

The project’s activities were grouped around aforementioned three components and they included the following:

1. ***Advancement of ICT introduction into electoral management process***
   1. Provide to the SRS (on its collaboration with CEC) experienced IT-expert’s/company support on TOR development and further Unified Voter Registration Information Management System (UVRIMS) software upgrade with new functional modules and in order to provide smooth electronic citizen’s personal data, including biometric and related Address Register’s data exchange/integration to ensure that the updates from the Address Register, the Unified Population Register and the capture by SRS of citizen biometric data deliver the basis for an improved voter list for 2015 parliamentary elections;
   2. Provide to the CEC experienced IT-expert’s/company support on TOR and further software upgrade of the CEC official web site ([www.shailoo.gov.kg](http://www.shailoo.gov.kg)) for more interactive on-line information and data provision;
   3. IT-equipment procurement (servers, UPSs, network equipment, etc.) for secure citizens personal data, UVRIMS, RMIS, web site data base storage and maintenance;
   4. 5000 MRZ combo readers procurement for 2016 local elections and Constitutional Referenda.
2. ***Institutional communication, Civic and voter education campaigns***
   1. Institutional trainings
   2. Civic and voter education campaigns
      1. Production and distribution of communication elements
      2. Production of various radio programs for broadcast
      3. Production of televised programs
      4. Production of posters and stickers
      5. Production of leaflets and pamphlets
3. ***Electoral dispute resolution and electoral security training*** 
   1. Management of electoral disputes
   2. Training of judges
   3. Training for political agents and electoral observes
   4. Training for law enforcement officials

In the following sections brief presentation of activities as well as results achieved is given for each three components.

## Component 1. Advancement of ICT introduction into electoral management process

### Activities

Collection of biometric data for the population registry was done by the State Registry Service (SRS) to enter it to the Unified Population Register which should be part of the planned civil registry reforms. However regarding the voter lists, legally this remained as a responsibility of CEC. UNDP supported CEC to develop a Unified Voter Registration Information Management System (UVRIMS) as a part of the KESP I project.

For 2015 parliamentary elections it was envisaged that the SRS will provide newly developed Unified Population Register Data Base (both traditional text and, where captured, citizen biometrics, i.e. facial portrait and fingerprints) to the CEC to form the basis of the voter list. The key challenge for CEC was to properly assign each voter to a polling station. This, in turn, was supposed to be facilitated by the accuracy and completeness of the underlying Address Register. In the beginning of September, 2014 SRS with support of CEC’s TECs system administrators just completed the street’s name inventory (both Russian and Kyrgyz) across the country and starting to creating a proper Address Register Data Base.

The mentioned ICT-interventions into the CEC back office activities has to be properly reflected at the CEC front-office - official web site – [www.shailoo.gov.kg](http://www.shailoo.gov.kg) in order to provide widely dissemination of the more interactive information and data **on-line**. This required the CEC’s web site software upgrade, so such support has been provided under this project as well. The web-site is in use since mid-2017 and worked well during Presidential Elections.

All such kind of supports will take into consideration the importance of preparation of planning for contingencies such as partial biometric capture, provision from external sources of data and the flexible response to unforeseen circumstances.

According to the project strategy was based on strengthening the capacities of the Central Election Commission and provision of technical expertise through mobilization and management of resources from donor partners by establishment of a “Basket Fund,” as well as coordination of all such resources and technical assistance to the electoral process.

The main objective of this component of the project was to provide IT equipment to CEC and SRS, offering capacity development so that relevant staff could use the ICT effectively for conducting elections. Furthermore, it was to ensure exercising citizens’ electoral rights and guarantee peaceful, free and fair elections. To achieve these, UNDP provided modern equipment to read voters’ fingerprints and automate the process of identifying voters at polling stations.

The Government of Japan funded this project through a grant aid program of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). In total, CEC and SRS received equipment such as laptops fingerprint scanners, server and network equipment, thermal printers, UPS and wall mounted monitors.In addition, UNDP, with receiving financial cooperation from the Embassies of Switzerland and Japan provided technical training of trainers for CEC and SRS staff so that they could use the new ICT equipment and Automatic Ballot Boxes (ABB, introduced by KOICA). By the end of the project, 9,417 trainers and specialists were trained, and many information and training materials were published for the training and at polling stations.

During the project period of 2015, there was an urgent request of training to 170 trainers and 12,500 specialists of CEC and SRS for proper use of the electoral equipment. Following discussions with the Embassy of Switzerland in July 2015, KESP-II received the second tranche of USD 532,257 for this matter. Some interviewees praised highly quick reactions to requests for capacity building by the project staff and by donors.

Furthermore, in February 2016, KESP-II financially supported to train CEC specialists for the Local Council Elections conducted in six cities and 21 village councils in March 2016. In total, 19 trainers, 60 IT experts, and CEC 2,348 specialists participated. They acquired the proper way to use and maintain ABBs as well as the elective procedures and processes. The fund was prepared through CET by signing the Letter of Agreement (LoA).

Through these opportunities, they became proficient in the use of the new equipment and administering elections. This, however, is a little part of necessary training, and more officials need to be qualified for conducting appropriate polls held in the future and better public services in general. Consequently, on agreement with the Swiss Embassy, the project decided to support the renovation of the center in cooperation with OSCE Kyrgyzstan which provided ICT equipment to the center while KESP-II supported to renovate the facility. The project term was initially three years which meant until December 2017, yet eventually, extended until the end of April 2018 due to the uncompleted work on renovation of the SRS Capacity Building center. This request of the no-cost extension was accepted by the Embassy of Switzerland on 19 December 2017.

Also, in addition to the above, in mid-2016 as per SRS request UNDP procured 5000 MRZ combo readers for Swiss funds. These cameras used during 2016 local elections and Constitutional Referenda to read and identify MRZ of national ID cards.

### Achievement of results

As a result, of introduction of biometric registration and using automatic ballot boxes 1,630,122 voters in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections, 1,190,752 voters in the 2016 Constitutional Referendum, and 1,697,868 voters in the 2017 Presidential Election benefited from the automated system. Not only the parliamentary elections, but also the 2016 constitutional referendum, local council elections in 2016 (twice) and 2017 (three times), and 2017 presidential elections, the automation system worked effectively and efficiently. The project contributed to eliminating multiple voting phenomena which were critical issues that led to citizens’ mistrust towards results of elections.

The 2015 parliamentary elections were conducted in a drastically different way than all previous elections and that was due to the biometric identification of voters and introduction of electronic in the electoral processes. The process of introducing these changes was going with some tension. There were apprehensions of violations of rights to access to the voting due to the possibly incompletion of biometric registration. There were also apprehensions of safety and stable work of electronic equipment.

However, all in all, data collection by the SRS’s Registry System allowed creation of reliable population data and voters’ lists within the framework of the Unified State Population Registry. The overall planning process was done in such a way as to enable effective connection between collected data, equipment use and integration of these into electoral processes.

International and local observers (OSCE/ODIHR and Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society as well as the Taza Shailoo Association) noted that the 2015 parliamentary elections complied with international standards.

Quality of elections depended very much on ability of the electoral commissions’ staff to work effectively with the new ICT and identification equipment. Any technical failures could have undermined trust to electoral results.

Immensity of reforms which need to be done in short period of time were quite risky though they were needed. Donor support was crucial not only in provision of technical equipment, but also in building quickly capacity of relevant partners to work with this equipment and to follow effectively new procedures.

UNDP was recognized as a leading international organization which coordinated matching the needs identified by the government with resources it was lacking, and it was especially praised (in number of interviews) for doing it effectively in a short period of time and often on short notice. This was especially important in regard to training electoral commissions’ and SRS’ staff to work with the new equipment.

UNDP approached several donors to get their response to the proposed request from CEC. As a result additional financial support was received from the Government of Switzerland and CEC electoral commissions and SRS could train those who worked with the ICT equipment during the elections promptly. In total 12,500 CEC specialists and SRS operators were trained in a very short time frame during August-September 2015 for the Swiss funds. Interviewees were noting that funding (especially provided on a short notice) was of crucial importance due to the novelty of procedures and of equipment when untrained staff could become the reasons for failures to do quick and transparent vote counting.

Regarding the SRS Capacity Building Center renovation works, the request came from SRS in late 2016 to do such works for savings in the Project budget held in 2015. This was to be completed at the end of the project and though there were some delays, but (as noted in one of the interviews) this was due to the issues related to the SRS’s planning process itself (issues of construction and ensuring security) rather than due to the project activity. The SRS Capacity Building Center was opened in June 2018 with participation of UNDP, OSCE, CEC and SRS.

One of the indicators of results achieved was international resonance of the new electoral processes introduced by Kyrgyzstan. This was evident by remarks of all electoral observation missions.

## Component 2. Institutional communication, civic and voter education campaigns

### Activities

The 2nd component’s activities were divided into institutional trainings and into voter education campaigns. While the first section of the component focused on what the electoral management can provide (and strengthening related institutions and processes), the second section was more concerned with the attitudes of and trust from voters. In the wake of significant changes coming into the electoral processes it was vital that citizens would understand how the voting process would take place. Introducing the equipment and technical change of the process required particular emphasis on voter education. The first section was focused on developing and training of CEC’s Media Unit to engage in external communications, training of local journalists on coverage of election related issues, development of Information and Resource Center. A Call Center “119” was also established with the aim of providing hot line for citizens on questions related to elections, documentation and other issues under purview of CEC and SRS. It was planned to open the center in 2015, but due to technical difficulties and simultaneous massive works by SRS and CEC on introducing electronic voting, prevented from doing so and it was opened in 2016 (a non-cost extension for unspent resources on this was provided by a donor) with participation of UNDP and the Swiss Embassy. By the written request from CEC it was decided to move the call center under purview of SRS.

The second section aimed at informing the public about the electoral processes through workshops, round-table meetings, various information materials, TV/radio programs. Several CSOs such as “Taza Shailoo”, “Arysh”, and “Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society (CDCS)” were selected to work to implement public information and voter education campaign projects.

### Achievement of results

Achievements in the first section of the 2nd component were reflected in more efficient manner of working by CEC in providing information to voters and to media. There were some issues noted by international observers (ODIHR 2015) such as more transparency by CEC of its agenda and publication of results of its meetings. However the same election observation report noted that “CEC prepared and disseminated materials on provision of information to voters through the state and online media. These materials prompted citizens to check and update their data as voters, provided information about new voting procedure, particularities of out-of-precinct voting, as well as noted importance of secret ballot” (ODIHR, 2015: 9).

Post-training surveys indicate that participants found training useful. This was a crucial time since while political CEC was having some internal rifts it was important for the EMB to communicate the new electoral processes in timely and effective manner, and the project has been largely successful in building this capacity within the Central Election Committee.

As was noted in some of the interview civic education campaigns which entailed also organizing presentations/discussions in the regions led to successful mitigation of apprehension about safety data and efficiency of the electronic voting process. Apprehension was seemingly mostly emerging from the lack of information which was resolved to some extent by activities of the 2nd component of the project. This was also facilitated by journalists who were trained to know peculiarities of the electoral processes, to serve as watchdogs, and provide proper information and results of the elections using the upgraded website, information from IRC in Bishkek and Osh, and the call center.

The call center, which was opened in 2016, played an important role, especially in the presidential elections. According to the SRS’s 3rd report (2018) during the presidential elections the center received since its establishment 150 thousands calls and their peak was on the period of 1-14 October 2017 (960939 calls, and 52538 of them were related to elections).

While in the 2nd component a lot of resources were provided to CEC, CSOs also have been partners who not only had helped the project to achieve its aims, but they also strengthened further their capacity to be effective participants in the electoral processes.

## Component 3

### Activities

Within the 3rd component the project had been working on

* Designing and disseminating manuals on electoral disputes with the help of experts
* Providing training workshops for political parties and CSOs about electoral legislation
* Conducting public awareness campaign through media, social media and through organizing meeting events on electoral dispute resolution and new voting procedures
* Organizing training for law enforcement officials and for judiciary throughout the country
* Engaging international consultants to work with CEC and other stakeholders to work on legislation, new procedures, election dispute resolution and other issues

All these activities were aimed to achieve the 3rd component’s output – ensuring peaceful elections.

Preparing materials, working with population and with media, CSOs and also working with the law enforcement agencies required variety of elaborated approaches since for each segment there was a need for a special approach while retaining the overall campaign approach.

### Achieved Results

Before elections of 2015 CEC received more than 300 complaints and more than 50 complaints between the election day and the official announcement of election results (ODIHR 2015). Most complaints were reviewed by CEC’s working groups and those which were disagreed with were reviewed in courts (which largely upheld CEC’s decisions). While some observation reports note inadequacy of courts’ reviews, but these remain largely beyond the scope of the KESP II project which had to operate within existing legal practice.

The fact that neither serious conflicts/disputes nor significant complaints were reported in the electoral cycle 2015-2017 speaks to the overall successful achievement of result in the component 3. Although there were many disputes registered in CEC’s working groups and in courts, but their results (however some actors were not happy) did not lead to any public contention.

This was also facilitated not only by the trainings, but also by general project’s contribution to the new system of voting which enabled quick calculation of voting results. While in the past the hanging period between the end of voting and announcement of results nurtured possible discontent, since 2015 elections results are announced in few hours after. Even if a party (as was the case with Byutuyn Kyrgyztan in 2015) was few decimal points away from the threshold there were no legitimate reasons to engage in public contentious actions because of that.

Results were also visible in the change of attitude from more skeptical to more positive towards data safety and other concerns related to biometric registration and electronic voting. As was noted in one interview this was largely helped by voter education campaign when participants of workshops could see and hear how the new equipment and the procedures work.

What was also essential for success in the voter education campaigns, aimed at electoral dispute resolution, is participation of high official (at the level of vice-prime-minister) in various events. Tis helped to build trust into the electoral reform process as something which is taken seriously by the government.

## Other aspects

In this section some other aspects would presented as a result of project evaluation

### **Gender aspects**

Women were the most active in biometric registration process – in 2014 they were constituting 54,38% of those registered and in 2015 – 50,67%[[2]](#footnote-2). It, among other possible explanations, may imply that women were reached out effectively by various voter awareness and civic education campaigns.

One interviewee noted that as a result of population registry there were a lot of incidents of unofficial marriages were discovered. During the registry of population the marriage registry is also part of the process. KESP II by helping to work on the transparency and efficiency of voter lists inadvertently also helped to facilitate progress towards one of the big gender issue in the country.

While the project helped to resolve various election related disputes by building capacity of relevant actors to adjudicate them, some issues came up after elections and that mostly relates to the forceful change of lists of candidates by winning parties after the 2015 elections and those who were suffering were largely women. While individual candidates were withstanding their cases individually this was resolved largely later by changes in the relevant electoral law (by stipulating that candidates should be replaced by another candidate of the same gender). While it has not direct connection with the project, future projects can take possibilities of such gender relates consequences of elections into account.

### **Other issues**

It should be stressed again in this section that the overall framework of UNDP functioning as an active participant in electoral reform processes, and not just as a project implementer. This was one of the crucial elements of the processes which helped to build trust between various stakeholders.

One of the indicators of success, mentioned often in interviews, was an international resonance which Kyrgyzstan’s experience with biometric registration and electronic voting had received. It is n not only that many international observers immediately noted high standards of the process on the voting day, but also there were invitations to share this experience in various locations (in Finland and other places).

# Project management, communication and visibility

The project management followed the standard practice of daily implementation done by the UNDP Program Management Unit (PMU), where the Project Coordinator managed KESP-II under the supervision of the UNDP Democratic Governance Program, Chief of Dimension, and PMU National Manager. The UNDP Country Office (CO) assured the entire project implementation. Notably, the CO’s assistance was distinguished during the large-scale procurements for the 2015 Parliamentary Elections. The UNDP senior management, including the RR, Deputy RR, and heads of Operations and Procurement, provided essential help during the critical implementation phases assuring the targeted outputs and deadlines. The general direction was provided by the project Steering Committee (SC), consisting of representatives from the CEC, SRS, donors, Presidential Administration, and others.

In interviews the management processes were generally noted quite positively. An especial praise was given to ability flexibly and quickly respond to needs and requests from the national partners.

The visibility measures were planned for implementation as provided in the “Joint Visibility Guidelines for EC-UN Actions in the Field” which are consistent with the European Commission’s own “Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions. In overall many of these measures were undertaken.

Given the large scope of public outreach activities visibility was an essential element of much of project’s work. However (as was noted in one interview) more consistent and regular hands on approach could have benefited more achieving project’s results through visibility. In this sense it could be advisable for such projects to have a dedicated project assistant working on matters of communication and visibility.

# Project M&E

The KESP II project within its M&E plan envisioned systematic and deliberate assessment of the project progress planned that monitoring will be conducted through regular meetings of the Program Board and Tripartite Review Meetings in accordance with established UNDP procedures. Within the annual cycle the project on a quarterly basis produced a quality assessment which recorded progress towards the completion of key results. Besides that the plan included production of an annual review report to be prepared by the Project Coordinator and shared with the Steering Committee. The Annual Review Report shall consist of the Atlas standard format for the QPR covering the whole year with updated information for each above element of the QPR as well as a summary of results achieved against pre-defined annual targets at the output level. An annual Project Review was planned to be conducted during the fourth quarter of the year or soon after, to assess the performance of the project and appraise the Annual Work Plan (AWP) for the following year.

In overall all regular M&E were undertaken as planned and they enabled to monitor the progress towards achieving intended results and were taken into consideration while modifying plans of activities.

# Project sustainability

In overall KESP II contributed to one of the major changes in the electoral processes in Kyrgyzstan and many of them were embedded in the laws and other normative acts, which facilitated sustainability of project’s outcomes. The process of this electoral reform has been engaging quite intensely many important stakeholders from different sectors working at various levels and as such it contributed to institutional sustainability, when different actors had vested interests in achieving successful results.

Among objectives which the project has been aiming to achieve some are more prone to be sustainable than others.

In the component 1 the main targets were not only achieved but also had lasting impact. The UVRIMS has not only enjoyed greater confidence of voters, but also became an integral part of the electoral processes. Given if there would not technical hurdles than this result is sustained and that was evident when the project was moving from parliamentary to presidential elections and to the referendum. The plans for the upcoming elections of 2020 also envision to be based on the biometric registration. Perhaps by that time the process of voter registration would be passed from SRS completely to CEC (as was noted in one interview) and that would signify also sustainability of another result – strengthening capacity of CEC.

Another result of building greater confidence into new technologies used in elections has been already emerging as sustainable immediately after the 2015 elections. For many it was a landmark elections signifying that new technologies contributed to fairness of vote counting and to producing quick and valid election results.

Sustainability of capacity of law enforcement and judiciary in regard to dispute resolution is something more difficult to establish. Perhaps what is mostly sustained is the linkage of law enforcement and judiciary to the electoral processes, since quite likely that most of the same trained people would be engaged in elections in 2020.

# Conclusions

Conclusions would be drawn according to the evaluation goals which were put forth in the beginning of this document:

1.

Regarding the status of results achievements it should be noted that in overall the project achieved its targets. CEC’s capacity and resources were helped to be brought to the level which enabled the electoral management body to administer elections at higher standards than it was before. The project was concerned not with entirety of all aspects of electoral processes but rather what happens on the day of election, when each vote should be counted fairly. On that specific element of the elections virtually all international and local observers noted compliance with international standards. Establishment of institutional communication and provision of support to civil society and political parties on electoral observation was also by and large took place. This target was aiming at building public confidence to elections. Though it is difficult to expect significant improvements in this area, by the project was essential to mitigate apprehensions about introduction of biometric registration and using IT for electoral processes. Reaching out to most of the critics of these innovations helped to clarify pending issue, and this not only mitigated fears, but also helped developers of IT system to cross-check against possible risks.

The results of the 3rd componentwere also obvious although this largely happened not due to the capacity of law enforcement staff and judiciary to deal effectively with electoral disputes, but due to peculiarities of behavior of electoral actors. Much of possible disputes stumbled at earlier stages due to unwillingness to initiate a dispute, or sometimes due to the lack of legal provisions to deal with some issues (as vote buying for example). A number of issues were considered consequently by the CEC’s working groups and later (disputed ones) by courts. Although not all of them were reviewed substantively well, but in overall it did not lead to public protests. Also there are some intermediate results also achieved as better coordination between police and prosecutors offices (as was noted in an interview it for the first time these two were trained together).

2.

In overall there was effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness in implementing the KESP II project. Some issues such as late coming of SRS Capacity Development Center were mostly happening due to the issues of planning by partners (who decided to take into account some unforeseen before issues of construction and security).

A frequent remark in interviews was recognition by many partners of the key role played by UNDP in coordinating efforts of many stakeholders.

3.

Performance of all stakeholders and partners was largely of a high standard and their engagement and commitment helped to for the project to achieve its results. This started with commitment at the highest level when the president brought the issue of biometric registration to the National Development Council’s meeting. This ensued engagement of the government at the level of deputy prime-minister who has been helped by key people from SRS and other state agencies. If it would not be for that the whole reform would be difficult to achieve in short period of time. The same happened with engagement form CEC and while relations between UNDP and the national EMB were not always easy at the start of the project designation of vice-chair of CEC to work on this project was very essential for its success. A key role of individuals in various locations created many opportunities which were well used and mapping stakeholders could be an essential element in strategy building and planning in further projects.

Performance of partners was also good when there was a need to overcome an emerging divide over the issue of biometric registration (whether it promotes or hinders electoral rights).

Mobilization of resources was a key element in moving towards achievement of results and UNDP was praised highly by many in regard to fulfilling this function effectively.

4.

The electoral cycle approach gave a broader perspective for the project to engage in the reform process rather than to be part of supporting a single event. That helped to be engaged in earlier stages of an electoral reform.

In terms of the project design three components have unequal weight regarding social change theory. The first two unequivocally aimed at supporting the electoral reform’s success. Ability for the national partners to manage the new system of voter registration and electronic voting as well as voter’s confidence in this new system was essential for making elections meeting good standards. While the choice of various activities can be discussed in regard to their merit for contribution toward this outcome, but strategically these very the right choices.

Regarding the 3rd component the choice was between likelihood and gravity of consequences. The risk of post-electoral disputes (and conflicts) was present in many elections in the past and in planning for the 2015 elections this should had been taken into account. Even if likelihood of massive disputes was considered as low, their gravity could have been high. If disputes would have emerged, then activities that were undertaken were the right choice.

Perhaps capacity which was built in the 3rd component still an important outcome in terms of connecting from a proper angle law enforcement and judiciary to the issue electoral disputes.

5.

Some of the achieved results are definitely sustainable as a part of the broader ongoing (or almost finalized) reforms. Using biometric registration for voter identification is one of the examples. Given if there would not technical hurdles than this result is sustained and that was evident when the project was moving from parliamentary to presidential elections and to the referendum.

Among other general conclusions the following could be mentioned. Although the UNDP’s coordinating role in connection donors with local stakeholders was frequently mentioned, it should be noted that there is a risk of falling out from the ongoing pre-electoral (2020) processes, regarding electoral legislation and other issues. It is important to be constantly engaged, and remain a relevant electoral assistance actor trusted by stakeholders. This is especially important given the electoral cycle approach which has been adopted in the KESP II.

The KESP II had a lot of public outreach activities and work on such a massive scale requires more engagement with communication and visibility. This was managed by the project staff, but some opportunities for a wider public outreach could have utilized if there was an additional staff person dealing with these issues.

Project strategies need to go beyond technical aspects of electoral administration since capacity of national organizations has grown and there is a need to address other emerging issues. Although the project helped to improve many aspects of electoral administration and of electoral processes three are still a number of issues remain which worth further donors’ attention such as post-electoral disputes, tackling vote buying practices, election related civic education, out of country voting, CEC’s capacity to handle voter registration process on its own, coverage of elections by media, electoral legislation, etc.

# Recommendations

* Stay engaged with ongoing developments on electoral legislation and other election related processes
* In further election related projects focus on issues beyond technical issues of electoral administration and engage in
* Continue further engagement in electoral issues through the electoral cycle approach, and broaden it by engagement in wider electoral reforms issues
* Use in future a sequence of elections (2020-2023) to help building proper institutions through expanding results from first elections (2020) into the next elections (2023)
* For future project with extensive public outreach activities a visibility and communications staff is needed
* Undertake careful stakeholder mapping in future election related projects (since conditions in this regard could be quite different)
* Build on the capacities built during the project’s direct voter and civic education campaigns for any future project activities requiring active discussion/promotion of possible electoral reforms
* Ensure continuity and sustainability of results obtained in KESP II when the transfer of voter registry from SRS to CEC would take place

# Annex 1. List of interviews and interview questionnaire

1. Ulan Omuraliev, project coordinator, UNDP
2. Dinara Oshurakhunova, Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society
3. Gulnura Toralieva, Promotank
4. Ainura Usupbekova, ex-Chair of Taza Shailoo Association
5. Dastan Dogoev, ex-deputy chief of State Registration Service
6. Gulnara Dzurabaeva, member of the Central Election Committee

**Interview questionnaire (In Russ.)**

**Вопросы по проведению оценки**

**проекта ПРООН «Поддержка выборов в Кыргызской Республике»/KESP-II**

*Меня зовут ….. и я занимаюсь оценкой проекта ПРООН «Поддержка выборов в Кыргызской Республике», реализованного в 2014-2017 гг. Проведение итоговой оценки проекта является стандартной процедурой и мнение партнеров вовлеченных в его реализацию очень важно в этом процессе. Беседа с Вами будет способствовать проведению качественной оценки, которая поможет учесть опыт реализации таких проектов в будущем. Ваши ответы останутся строго конфиденциальными и будут отражены в отчете в обобщенном виде без указания конкретных имен (список интервьюируемых будет указан в отчете по оценке).*

1. Расскажите, в каком качестве Вы взаимодействовали с проектом?
2. Какие позитивные изменения в выборном процессе Вы видите в результате выборов, состоявшихся в период реализации проекта?
3. Какие из этих изменений на Ваш взгляд связаны с действиями, предусмотренными в проекте?
4. Были ли в период реализации проекта ситуации, которые могли помешать, или же помешали в какой-то степени, его успешной реализации и если да, то какие?
5. Был ли на Ваш взгляд гендерный эффект реализации проекта, и если да, то какой?
6. Какие, по-вашему, общие уроки можно извлечь из реализации проекта?

*[уточняющие вопросы по каждому из вышеуказанных вопросов, связанные с сегментом проекта, в который был вовлечен интервьюируемый]*

# Annex 2. Documents used

* Project Document. Kyrgyz Election Support Project (KESP II) 2014 – 2017
* Final Report 16.10.2015\* on the Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan on 4 October 2015. By By Mr. Peter Iiskola, International Human Rights Advisor
* REPORT on findings of election dispute resolution during Parliamentary elections of 2015, by: Linda Mazure, Lativa, KESP-2 complaints advisor December 2015
* Automation of voters’ identification process during the electoral cycle in 2015-2017. Independent evaluation, by Gavin Wise. March 2017
* Inception report, by Rudolf Elbling, UNDP KESP-2 CTA
* Descriptive report about conducting a countrywide information campaign in the process of preparing for the parliamentary elections in the Kyrgyz Republic on October 4, 2015, by the Taza Shailoo Association
* The final report about work conducted within the KESP II project, by the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society
* The final report (within the KESP II project) on conducting information campaign about the system of resolving electoral disputes, by Azamat Akeleev, Promotank, Oct 2015
* OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report (Parliamentary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, 4 October 2015), 3-6 August 2015
* Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (Parliamentary Elections, 4 October 2015)
* Final report. OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (Parliamntary Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, 10 October 2015)
* Final report. OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (Presidential Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic, 15 October 2017)
* Analytic report about violations in elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, by Adilet Clinic, 2018
* The analytic report about activities of the State Registry Service aimed at increasing inclusion of citizens in the electoral processes, by State Registry Service, Bishkek, 1 January 2016
* The 2nd analytic report about activities of the State Registry Service aimed at increasing inclusion of citizens in the electoral processes, by State Registry Service, Bishkek 2017
* The 3rd analytic report about activities of the State Registry Service aimed at increasing inclusion of citizens in the electoral processes, by State Registry Service, Bishkek 2018
* Preliminary 2nd report on results of long term monitoring of preparation for the elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic (30 October 2011), by the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society
* Preliminary report on results of long term monitoring of preparation for the elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic (15 October 2017), by the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society
* Report on results of independent monitoring of presidential elections of 2017, by Civic Platform.

1. Presidential Decree “On Measures on Improvement of the Electoral System of the Kyrgyz Republic,” 22 May 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. SRS analytic report, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)