Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process

##### INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

##### FINAL DRAFT

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# 1. Introduction

UNDP Thailand received a US$260,000 grant from the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF) for a project on “Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process” at national and local levels. The DGTTF aims to support innovative and catalytic programmes to strengthen democratic governance and to address issues in politically sensitive areas.

## A. Project goals

The project aimed to promote democratic governance in Thailand through assisting the Office of the Election Commission in Thailand (OECT) to improve the electoral system. The project is grounded in the "electoral cycle" approach. More than two thirds of UNDP Country Offices use the electoral cycle approach, rather than focusing on supporting a specific election.[[1]](#footnote-1) This type of support bridges different stages of election cycles, including the pre-election, election and post-election periods.

The project had three specific goals:

1. to promote inclusive representation and full participation in the electoral process through a national civic education programme
2. to build the capacity of the OECT to fulfil its mandate
3. to improve the understanding of OECT and electoral stakeholders on institutional processes and systems.

At the central level, the project sought to increase knowledge of civic education, and build the capacity of the OECT to foster inclusive democracy through free and fair elections. At the local level, the project aimed to pilot innovative ideas to promote inclusive representation and full participation in the electoral process, with a particular focus on gender equity and the ratio of women in elected bodies.

This Evaluation is intended to strengthen the DGTTF’s role in supporting innovation in democratic governance by codifying, analyzing and sharing lessons to enhance regional and global interventions.

## B. Historical and political context

Thailand’s political system is a constitutional monarchy, with the King as head of state. Since its democratic revolution in 1932 Thailand has had 17 different charters and constitutions, reflecting a high level of instability in its democratic processes. In 1997 Thailand adopted its latest constitution, which brought about sweeping changes to its political and electoral landscape. Reforms included the creation of an autonomous Electoral Commission to oversee and administer elections, new rules governing the relationship between the members of Parliament and the Cabinet, and the creation of an elected Senate—the first ever in Thailand. The constitution also replaced the Block Vote electoral system that had been in place for most of Thailand’s electoral history with a Parallel system made up of First Past the Post and List Proportional Representation elements.[[2]](#footnote-2)Under the current constitution, in the House of Representatives (*Sapha Phuthaen Ratsadon*), 375 members are elected by plurality vote in single member constituencies to serve four year terms and 125 members are elected through a closed list proportional representation system to serve four year terms. In the Senate (*Wuthisapha*), 73 members are appointed by judges and independent government bodies and 77 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies. However, there is a perception that the electoral process is not free and fair, with allegations of corruption and vote buying commonplace.

Thailand has experienced political instability for the better part of the last decade. There was a military coup in 2006 which overthrew the Thaksin Shinawatra government. Since then, there have been moderately frequent periods of political unrest, polarisation, large scale demonstrations, and related violence. Huge protests took place in 2008, 2009, 2010, and again in late 2013. They have largely been in opposition to the government of the day, calling for change. The most recent protests are the latest round in [the struggle between the Bangkok-centred establishment and the family clan of Thaksin Shinawatra](http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21589873-thailands-former-prime-minister-thaksin-shinawatra-loses-battle-winning-war-blowing), the billionaire former prime minister, and his sister Yingluck, the current prime minister. Thaksin Shinawatra has been living in self imposed exile overseas since his corruption trial in 2008, but remains popular with many rural voters. The latest government came to power in August 2011, following national elections in July for the National Assembly lower house. Yingluck Shinawatra became Thailand’s first female Prime Minister.

The latest demonstrations began in November 2013 after Thailand's lower house passed a controversial amnesty bill, which critics said could allow former leader Thaksin Shinawatra to return without serving time in jail. The amnesty bill, which was proposed by his sister Yingluck Shinawatra's Pheu Thai Party, was eventually rejected by the Senate. However, anti-government protests continued. Yingluck dissolved Parliament on 9 December 2013 in response to large scale protests and called for elections on 2 February 2014. She remains the caretaker Prime Minister of Thailand in the meantime.

Yingluck is one of few Thai women in politics. Only 16% of Thailand’s Parliament and Senate are women.[[3]](#footnote-3) At local and provincial levels, this is even lower. Women hold just 13% of seats in the Tambon Administration Offices and Municipal Councils. Out of more than 7,000 local leadership positions, women account for just 4%.[[4]](#footnote-4) There are 68,606 village head positions in the Kingdom of Thailand but only 4,405 are women. At the provincial and local level, Thailand ranks near the bottom in Asia.[[5]](#footnote-5)

# 2. Evaluation Objectives, Scope and Methodology

## A. Objectives

The overall objective of this Evaluation is to assess the results of UNDP Thailand’s project “Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process”. The Evaluation aims to:

* Review the project performance and assess its achievement
* Identify lessons learned and provide recommendations for OECT to use the results and undertake further activities
* Explore the possibility of UNDP being involved in future activities in this subject area.

Since it is a Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund project, the Evaluation also assesses the sustainability of innovative activities and the potential for further upscaling or replication.

Lessons learned in this project will inform recommendations as to the way forward, including the potential for phase two of the project, future programming options, and knowledge management.

## B. Scope

The scope of the review is the implementation of the project from 2010-2013 in relation to its stated goal and its three outputs. The evaluation has been conducted over 16 working days during the period November to December 2013.

## C. Approach and methodology

The methodology which has been applied is in line with current good practice as laid out in the *Standards for Evaluation in the UN System* and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria, as specified in the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance. The Evaluation applies the agreed DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance, namely: relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

The Evaluation has been conducted by analysis of relevant project documentation and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Primary data collection has included interviews with stakeholders from the UNDP Country Office in Thailand, counterparts from governance institutions and beneficiaries of the project. A list of documents reviewed and people interviewed is included in the Annexes.

## D. Evaluation criteria and questions

The following are the key guiding questions for the Evaluation:

* Is the project relevant and appropriate to the current governance and development situation in Thailand?
* Is the project innovative and catalytic, and if so, in what ways?
* Did it address any critical issues considered important by the Government of Thailand?
* Has it prepared the groundwork for addressing issues that are politically sensitive at the national level?
* Has it initiated any pilot activities that can be replicated in the future?
* Is this project able to respond to the challenges and emerging needs of OECT and Thailand?
* Did the project provide due emphasis to gender in the context of initiatives it supported?
* Has it served to push the frontier of interest of the government in the electoral cycle approach in the future?

## E. Limitations of the evaluation

The project has been implemented at central and local levels in 16 provinces nationwide. Originally the Evaluation was intended to be informed by stakeholders in Chiang Mai and in the Central Provinces as well as at central level in Bangkok. However, due to fiscal constraints, the scope of the Evaluation had to be scaled back. Therefore, the Evaluation has only had the benefit of the views of stakeholders at central level.

Moreover, many project documents are lengthy and only available in the Thai language. The international project evaluator is not fluent in Thai. Given that there is no provision for translation of the documents, the Evaluation has been carried out using the limited material available in English.

Also noteworthy is that the latest political turmoil began during the time that the evaluation was conducted. This constrained the number of target groups interviewed.

# 3. Evaluation Findings

The Inclusive Electoral Process project has been assessed for its relevance, effectiveness and sustainability, in addition to specific DGTTF evaluation criteria detailed above.

## A. Relevance

*The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor[[6]](#footnote-6)*.

The Inclusive Electoral Process project is relevant and well suited to policies and priorities of the DGTTF, UNDP, and its counterparts in Thailand.

The project has contributed to high level UNDP development objectives in democratic governance. The project is in line with UNDP global policies and overarching country documents, such as:

1. the UNDP Strategic Plan 2008-2013 (democratic governance, fostering inclusive participation, integrating a gender perspective into democratic governance to increase development effectiveness)
2. the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Thailand (governance, promoting people’s participation in the development process and decision making at the local level, supporting and promoting decentralisation and strengthening local governance)
3. the UNDP Country Programme (improved social equity through inclusive governance, enhanced local democracy and meaningful participation of civil society in decision making processes), and
4. the UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (increased awareness and legal knowledge of civil society actors, including vulnerable groups, on their rights, as well as participation of women as voters and candidates in local electoral processes).

The main function of the funding mechanism, Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund, is to provide UNDP Country Offices with discretionary funds to explore innovative approaches in democratic governance in politically sensitive environments and within the areas of inclusive participation, responsive institutions, and international principles. The project has been relevant for fostering the inclusive participation of women in politics, strengthening effectiveness across the electoral cycle by building the capacity of the electoral management institution, and by encouraging civic education about international principles of democratic practice. As discussed below, the project has explored several innovative approaches in democratic governance.

**Is the project relevant and appropriate to the current governance and development situation in Thailand?**

The project has been highly relevant as an intervention in the broader governance sector in Thailand. It has played an important role in building the capacity of Thailand’s electoral management body, the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand (OECT). This is key because of the continuing political instability and related electoral violence in the country and the central role that the Election Commission plays throughout the electoral cycle. The project has been well suited to the priorities and policies of the beneficiary, because civic education and electoral dispute resolution are two of the main activities of the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand. Fostering inclusive participation of women in politics is highly relevant for Thailand, which has very low female participation rates in politics both at national and local levels.

Relevance, from the development perspective, focuses very much on partnership, in recognition of the fact that few outcomes can be achieved without joint efforts. As such, inclusive electoral processes must be nationally driven. The project has had a strong partnership with several stakeholders, including with Thailand’s electoral management body, the independent Election Commission of Thailand. Also, underlining the importance of partnership between government and civil society for electoral assistance, partnerships with academia were formed in Thailand, with the Institute of Policy Studies, and the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University. Partnerships organised around the electoral cycle approach have been fostered not just at national but also local levels. The project’s gender and civic education components both worked with OECT offices at the provincial level, underlining the importance of bottom up approaches and working at the grassroots level.

**Was the DGTTF project innovative and catalytic, and if so, in what ways?**

Innovative projects may be characterized by the following criteria:

- Addressing a critical democratic governance issue which may lead to substantial improvements in some aspects of democratic governance

- Recognized as a crucial issue by the government and other donors or partners

- An initiative never before attempted in the country concerned, either in the problems addressed or the approach taken

- Potentially risky. DGTTF projects are not necessarily a guaranteed success. Although it is expected that proper risk analysis will be undertaken, the DGTTF project is expected to be riskier or less certain of success than a ‘traditional’ project

- Carrying out the innovation helps to position UNDP as a key player in democratic governance in terms of ‘pushing the frontier’.

The project has been innovative because it has addressed electoral assistance, which is a critical democratic governance issue. Electoral assistance is recognised as a crucial and risky issue by the Thai government, especially in Thailand’s context of continuing political instability and election related violence. The project is also innovative in that it has promoted and adopted an **electoral cycle approach** to electoral assistance, an approach that has seldom been attempted in Thailand. Technical assistance initiatives have been targeted at institutional development of the electoral management body in the period between electoral events, rather than focusing on supporting a specific election. This innovative programming focuses on providing long term support to improve and strengthen Thailand’s electoral processes and institutions throughout all stages of the electoral cycle. As such, the project has had a role in introducing a paradigm shift from short term to long term electoral assistance. This approach is central to UNDP’s Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS). It aims to create an inclusive and participatory electoral process and a professional electoral administration that can enhance the credibility of the process and trust in its results. Adopting an electoral cycle approach to electoral assistance in Thailand has helped to position UNDP as a key player in democratic governance in terms of pushing the frontier.

Catalytic projects are characterized as having a high likelihood of receiving support from government or other governance institutions (including other donors) for scaling up or following up, if the project is successful. The project has been catalytic because it is receiving support from OECT for scaling up. As discussed below, the project carried out pilot activities in 16 provinces in the gender and elections component and the OECT is currently rolling out these activities in further provinces in Thailand. Moreover, the civil society partner has been engaged by the OECT to adapt its civic education workshop and manual into a civic education curriculum for use in schools.

**Did the project address any critical issues considered important by the governments in the region?**

The project addressed several critical issues considered important by the Government of Thailand. At the national level, the project addressed the critical issues of elections, electoral dispute resolution, civic education and increasing women’s political participation. At the local level, the pilot project in several provinces of Thailand is addressing the issue of gender and elections. Elections are a powerful democratic governance tool of voice, accountability and human development. Inclusive political processes that allow genuine participation by all citizens are critical, and women should not be excluded from participation either as voters or as candidates. In Thailand’s particular context of ongoing political instability and violence related to elections, electoral dispute resolution is considered important by the Government. Electoral assistance would not be complete without engaging in civic education to highlight the rights and responsibilities of citizens in an electoral process and, more broadly, in a functioning democratic society. This also aims to expand democratic participation, particularly among women and other underrepresented segments of society, such as youth and minority groups.

In conclusion, the Inclusive Electoral Process project has been relevant and well suited to policies and priorities of the donor, UNDP, and its counterparts in Thailand. It has been relevant and appropriate to the current political context in Thailand. It has piloted the innovative electoral cycle approach in Thailand. Furthermore, the project addressed several critical issues considered important by the Government of Thailand, namely elections, electoral dispute resolution, civic education and increasing women’s political participation.

## B. Effectiveness

*A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives[[7]](#footnote-7).*

This section seeks to answer the question of whether the project achieved what it set out to do. It begins by assessing progress against outputs and identification of results. It then looks in more detail at issues raised by the evaluation questions relating to effectiveness.

#### Synopsis of DGTTF Inclusive Electoral Process Project

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project title | “Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process” Project |
| Year | May 2011 – December 2013 |
| Funding | US $260,000 from DGTTF |
| Aims | National component * promote inclusive representation and full participation in the electoral process through a national civic education programme
* enhance capacity of the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand (OECT) to promote democracy
* build capacity and understanding of OECT, electoral stakeholders and general public about institutional processes and systems.
 |
|  | Local component – Pilot innovative ideas to foster inclusive participation in local elections, with particular attention to women. |
| Results | National component – Gender: **training package** on gender and elections produced; **workshops** held; documentary **film** about challenges women face when seeking public office produced; operational **guidelines** on promoting women’s political participation published. Local component –training **workshops piloted at local level** in 16 provinces. |
|  | Civic Education: Civil society partner, the Institute of Policy Studies, conducted a training **workshop** drafted a **handbook on the promotion of political/civic education** for OECT with the emphasis on bottom-up approaches. |
|  | Electoral Dispute Resolution: **Study** conducted on Thailand's electoral dispute resolution (EDR) system by The Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies of Mahidol University. **Workshops and dialogues** carried out. |

The gender and elections component and the electoral dispute resolution component successfully achieved all of the planned activities in the project document. However, there were variances between planned and actual results for the civic education component of the project, which are attributable to several factors. First, the delayed signature of the project document reduced implementation time. Second, the busy local elections schedule in Thailand greatly impacted the OECT’s ability to fully participate in capacity building activities. Third, some of the civic education activities, including the second DG-BRIDGE (Building Resources for Democracy, Governance and Elections) and DIOP (Democracy In Our Place) workshops, were affected by the unavailability of project consultants. This was unfortunate since the second workshop aimed to adapt the workshops specifically for the Thai context.

One highlight of the project under “promoting inclusive representation and full participation in the electoral process through a national civic education programme” was the dissemination of a useful awareness raising tool, that has the potential to be used on an ongoing basis by the OECT and other elections stakeholders at national and local levels. The project incorporated a 30 minute **documentary called The Glass Ceiling, which is about the challenges women face when seeking public office**. A joint partnership of UNDP Thailand and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, it seeks to highlight the disparity in Parliamentary representation between men and women in Thailand. It features prominent personalities such as female Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, former Prime Minister and opposition party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva, and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark. The film highlights the struggle of Siriporn Panyasen, a local Tambon Administrative Organisation Chief from Pichai District, Lampang Province.

**Has the project prepared the groundwork for addressing issues that are politically sensitive at the national level?**

The project has prepared the groundwork for addressing issues that are politically sensitive at the national level. The electoral dispute resolution component of the project raised awareness about **electoral system reform**. An electoral system refers to the method used to translate votes cast into seats or offices won by the competing parties and/or independent candidates. The type of electoral system (e.g. majority-plurality, proportional representation, mixed, etc) has long term implications for accountability, inclusiveness and representation.[[8]](#footnote-8) The project raised awareness amongst OECT staff at national and local levels about alternative electoral systems used in different countries, in particular the Mixed Member Proportional system used in Germany and New Zealand. At a time when Thailand is experiencing significant political unrest - with society polarised and calling for electoral reforms after Parliament was dissolved and elections called for February 2014 - the time is ripe for further exploration of the issue of electoral system reform. It is clear that both sides of the political divide do not perceive elections in Thailand to be free and fair and reforms will be necessary going forward.

**Has the project been able to respond to the challenges and emerging needs of OECT and Thailand?**

**Electoral dispute resolution** is one of the core mandates of the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand. Electoral disputes comprise administrative and/or legal proceedings which seek to redress electoral complaints and appeals. The legal and institutional frameworks for dealing with electoral disputes have been the subject of electoral assistance activities under the project. The project commissioned a civil society partner, the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, to conduct a study on electoral dispute resolution in Thailand, including comparative studies in overseas jurisdictions. The study provided a baseline for understanding electoral dispute resolution in the Thai context, developed qualitative and quantiative measures of the Thai system, provided lessons learned in electoral dispute resolution at the national and local levels, and provided international perspectives on the topic.

Electoral dispute resolution is a particular challenge in Thailand where there is a perception amongst voters on both sides of the political divide that elections are not free and fair. As such the project has been able to respond to one of Thailand’s challenges and an emerging need of the Office of the Election Commission of Thailand. The international perspectives raised the issue of prevention of election related violence, a topic that is a salient challenge in Thailand in the wake of the recent political unrest in which several people died. Thailand has experienced political violence on a periodic basis - with over 90 people killed in the mass political protests in 2010 - and it is impunity rather than the rule of law that prevails.

**Has the project initiated any pilot activities that can be replicated in the future?**

The project’s gender component contained a number of pilot activities that may be replicated in the future. The project developed an awareness raising film about increasing women’s political participation in Thailand. Senior OECT officials have indicated that they plan to use the film to raise awareness about gender equity in politics and to encourage female participation at provincial and local levels. Also, as discussed below, the gender component developed guidelines and workshops on gender and elections, which were piloted in 16 provinces in Thailand. The OECT is currently expanding and replicating this work in further provinces.

**Civic education** encompasses awareness raising about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the electoral process, and more broadly in a functioning democratic society The baseline was very weak or absent knowledge of OECT staff about the concept of civic education, notwithstanding its status as one of the core mandates of the OECT. The civic education component of the project piloted a civic education workshop for senior OECT staff. This was developed by the Institute of Policy Studies, a civil society project partner. The Institute went on to develop a handbook on the promotion of civic education for the OECT with an emphasis on bottom up approaches. Senior OECT officials subsequently engaged the Institute to develop a civic education curriculum for use in schools, an activity which was beyond the scope of the project. The civic education workshop was also very well received and could be replicated in the future. The handbook on the promotion of civic education can be used by the OECT in its civic education activities.

**Did the project provide due emphasis to gender in the context of initiatives it supported?**

The project provided particular emphasis to gender in the context of fostering inclusive political participation by including a special component on **increasing women’s political participation in Thailand**. The project engaged a national gender consultant to draft guidelines for OECT on gender and elections, to carry out gender equality training workshops for OECT staff at national and local levels, and to produce an awareness raising film on increasing women’s political participation in Thailand.

UNDP works to reform processes to bolster women’s representation as voters and candidates through an electoral cycle approach. UNDP’s Global Programme on Electoral Cycle Support (GPECS) aims to advance gender mainstreaming in electoral assistance and support interventions to enhance women’s political and electoral participation. Inclusive participation is about enhancing the participation of traditionally underrepresented or underparticipating groups in political and electoral processes, including women. UNDP supports governments to increase the numbers of women representatives at national and local levels.[[9]](#footnote-9) As noted above, Thailand has very poor rates of female political participation, with only 16% representation at national level and 4% at local levels.

As an initial step towards increasing women’s political participation in Thailand, the project sought to raise awareness about the issue of gender equity in politics. It did so through gender equality capacity building with national and local OECT staff. With respect to gender and elections, the project worked to build awareness and capacities for women to play a greater role in political life as candidates for office and political leaders, as voters and as electoral administrators. The project did have positive impact in gender, because the OECT is using the guidelines on gender and elections in its daily operations, and continues to conduct gender equality workshops in further provinces in Thailand. This is commendable given that the baseline was a very weak or non existent understanding of the concept of gender equity amongst OECT staff. The awareness raising film, “The Glass Ceiling” is available on UNDP Thailand’s website.

In conclusion, overall the project has been effective in many ways. It has prepared the ground for addressing issues that are politically sensitive at the national level by raising awareness about electoral system reform. Moreover, the project initiated pilot activities that could be replicated in the future, such as raising awareness about women’s political participation at local and national levels. Weaknesses of the LEPP include the non-achievement of some planned activities in the civic education component and the delayed implementation of the project, which are partly explained by the busy local elections in Thailand and the limited engagement that flowed from that.

## C. Sustainability

*Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.[[10]](#footnote-10)*

**Has the project served to push the frontier of interest of the governments in the electoral cycle approach in the future?**

The project served to push the frontier of interest of the Thai government in the electoral cycle approach in the future. This is demonstrated by the fact that the OECT is continuing to work on civic education, gender, and electoral dispute resolution – the key topics of the project. Moreover, senior officials have assured that the OECT plans to incorporate project subjects into its annual workplans. The project products are being used by OECT, i.e. the electoral dispute resolution report, the gender and elections guidelines, the increasing women’s political participation video, and the civic education manual.

The benefits of some project activities are likely to continue after donor funding is withdrawn. The OECT continues to implement the pilot project at the local level, using the guidelines on gender and elections to train OECT staff in provincial offices. However, in order to consolidate the gains made during the project, the OECT will need more assistance, given the very low awareness and knowledge of gender and elections amongst its staff. Encouragingly, the OECT plans to host a national women’s political participation conference in March 2014 with provincial OECT offices.

In the civic education component of the project, the short project implementation time and the unavailability of certain project consultants were major factors which influenced the incomplete achievement of civic education outputs. Notwithstanding, the OECT requested that the civic education partner, the Institute of Public Policy Studies, develop a civic education curriculum, which has now been published and distributed.

The electoral dispute resolution partner, the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, carried out a research study on electoral dispute resolution in Thailand. It is too soon to tell whether the electoral dispute resolution component of the project will be sustainable. At the time of interviews for this project evaluation, many stakeholders had not yet had an opportunity to review the report and offer an opinion as to continued activities in that regard. The sustainability of this component will depend on continued political will to use the project report and to sustain the positive momentum garnered by the project, noting that the new Election Commissioners have very recently been appointed and taken up their posts.

The OECT has expressed its interest and enthusiasm to work on a phase 2 of the project with UNDP, and has requested assistance to consolidate the gains made in phase 1. This is especially so with respect to capacity building of OECT staff because their knowledge of civic education and gender is so basic. The OECT recognises the long term character of the electoral cycle approach and is keen to partner with UNDP Thailand again in the future.

In conclusion, the benefits of several project activities are likely to continue after donor funding is withdrawn. Strengths include the gender and elections component, which has raised awareness of the importance of increasing women’s political participation in Thailand amongst the national and provincial staff of the OECT. The guidelines and workshops on gender and elections which were piloted in 16 provinces continue to be used by the OECT in further provinces, and there is a women’s political participation conference already planned for 2014. However, due to the long term nature of the electoral cycle approach to electoral support, it is difficult to conclude that the project benefits will be sustainable at this time, given that not even one election cycle has passed in the duration of the project.

# 5. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

This evaluation has identified the following lessons from the project on “Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process”. It also provides recommendations for OECT to use the results and undertake further activities, and explores the possibility of UNDP being involved in future activities in this area. It also makes suggestions as to programming options for a potential phase two of the project and contributes to knowledge management for DGTTF projects.

* Lesson: **Electoral assistance projects can prepare the groundwork for addressing broader issues**, including women’s human rights and democratic practice.
	+ Recommendation – Continue to programme to increase women’s political participation in Thailand. See specific programming recommendations in gender section below.
* Lesson: The **electoral cycle approach is an innovative but long term approach** to electoral assistance and as such it is difficult to measure the sustainability and impact of relatively short term DGTTF elections projects.
	+ Recommendation – Consider designing phase 2 of the project using the programme recommendations in this evaluation. This will enable the consolidation of impact made in the project thus far and contribute to sustainability of benefits gained.
* Lesson: Projects are more likely to foster inclusiveness and build public confidence in election processes if they are designed to **address the needs of multiple stakeholders**. Working with several stakeholders has been key in the project – the project worked with the electoral management body, and civil society partners, as well as engaging in civic education of the population.
	+ Recommendation – A future elections project could also consider engaging political parties, the media, and education bodies.
		- UNDP has particular expertise in working with **political parties** so UNDP Thailand could draw on the global expertise available through GPECS. Moreover, OECT has a Bureau of Political Parties so a phase 2 of the project could partner with this Bureau in addition to the Bureau of Public Participation. OECT’s Bureau of Political Parties works directly with political parties, members of parliament, and is involved in candidate recruitment and nomination. Political parties determine party lists and this is a good vehicle for more inclusive representation in parliament, especially for women candidates. As elaborated below, future programming could emphasise capacity building of political parties to increase women’s participation as candidates for election both at central and local levels.
		- Working with the **media** is important because the media can raise awareness of issues relating to increasing women’s political participation, civic education, citizens rights and responsibilities, alternative electoral systems, democratic principles of free and fair elections, and other issues central to electoral assistance. An independent and professional media plays a key role in creating conditions for democratic elections by informing the people, analyzing issues, investigating problems, promoting transparency and accountability, and serving as a watchdog over the election process. In many countries, UNDP has found that capacity building is needed to enable the media to perform such functions effectively and professionally. A particular aspect of election media coverage that can often benefit from UNDP assistance is training to promote equitable elections media coverage of women, portraying them in a positive light and on an equal basis with men as candidates, leaders and voters. The media can be encouraged to focus attention on issues of special concern to women in news programming.
		- **Education bodies** are another key stakeholder that could be engaged to further disseminate the civic education, and gender materials, and raise awareness of electoral issues. Targeting high schools and the general education curriculum is smart because this reaches the population of tomorrow’s voters and political candidates. It has been highly effective to incorporate civic education as part of the school curriculum. Fostering inclusive participation needs to include youth as well as women.
* Lesson: **Civil society** can play a central role in electoral processes, including by building the capacity of the electoral management body, mobilizing and informing citizens, advocating for positive change, contributing to conflict mitigation, and acting as watchdogs over the process. UNDP support for civil society has the potential to enrich and improve citizen participation and enhance the overall quality of election processes.
	+ Recommendation: Future elections projects in Thailand should consider continuing partnerships with academic institutions and other civil society organisations, including women’s NGOs.
		- Capacity development of the electoral management body should continue to focus on both high level and operational staff at central and local levels.
* Lesson: Plan electoral assistance projects with the country’s national and local **elections schedule** in mind. Thailand had several local elections during the project. This meant that the electoral management body had limited staff available to attend civic education and gender workshops, some of which had to be cancelled.
	+ Recommendation: When planning electoral assistance project activities, find out the relevant elections schedule. Likewise, when working with particular stakeholders, for example universities, ensure that they have sufficient time to engage in the project activities. Non-availability of key project and partner staff has the potential to negatively impact the timeline for project implementation.
* Lesson: UNDP’s value added is its presence on the ground in many countries, and its ability to **work at decentralized as well as central levels**. It is difficult to influence policy in a vacuum, by concentrating efforts at the national level. UNDP projects need to bridge the gap between policy and the grassroots level. This means working to influence partners at the operational and local levels as well as raising awareness in local populations. The project helped to bridge the gap between OECT headquarters and its provincial offices.
	+ Recommendation: A future elections project could consider more programming at the local level. The project has piloted several successful initiatives – including in improving women’s political participation, and in civic education – these could be scaled up and replicated in more provinces.
* Lesson: UNDP can create more value added for its election work by making **links with other UNDP governance portfolios**. For example the elections, anti-corruption, gender equality, parliamentary assistance, and justice and human rights portfolios are likely to have relevant expertise for electoral assistance. UNDP Country Offices can take advantage of the resources at UNDP’s Regional Centres, especially if they are collocated. Regional policy staff in relevant areas can respond to emerging needs in election issues from Country Offices. Expert advice is available to improve the quality of projects.
	+ Recommendation: Consider synergies between electoral assistance in a future stand alone project and other UNDP governance portfolios. Anti-corruption would be highly relevant, since this is what the Thai public has been calling for in recent mass demonstrations. Also, the project laid the groundwork for addressing the issue of vote buying in the electoral dispute resolution study. Voter and civic education could potentially address this issue. Gender would also be important for increasing women’s political participation. Future projects could call upon UNDP expertise in these subject areas to inform programming options.
* Lesson: When the root causes of conflict exist, **conflict prevention should be an integral part of UNDP electoral assistance programmes**, not only in the immediate run up to an election, but - just as important - throughout the full electoral cycle where the most fruitful opportunities for institutional and individual capacity development occur.
	+ Recommendation: Since Thailand has experienced periodic election related violence and political instability for the past decade, future electoral assistance programming could usefully include a strong conflict prevention component.
		- UNDP has a unique role in developing elections and conflict prevention programmes because it is widely perceived as impartial and it can mobilize technical expertise and coordinate donors.
		- At the same time, it is essential to recognize the importance of local ownership and of local stakeholders playing a leading role in successful violence prevention efforts.
		- Elections provide an entry point for many types of conflict prevention programming, including training and education, capacity building, stakeholder consultations, and legislative review. Targeted voter and civic education can help to promote conflict prevention messages.

#### Civic education

* Lesson: DGTTF projects have the potential to prepare the groundwork for addressing issues that are politically sensitive at the national level. The project has raised awareness about the possibility of electoral system reform in Thailand.
	+ Recommendation: Future programming could consider developing a study on **alternative electoral systems** that could be useful in the Thai context, and potentially assist with transforming Thailand’s conflict. At a time when Thailand is experiencing significant political unrest, the time is ripe for further exploration of the issue of electoral system reform. It is clear that both sides of the political divide do not perceive elections in Thailand to be free and fair and reforms will be necessary going forward.
		- Recognise the importance of developing an electoral system that has broad support among competing parties and candidates. The study could provide the impetus for inclusive and strategic dialogue to get buy-in.
		- Any reform in the electoral system is likely to require a significant civic education and voter information effort. The study could form the basis for civic education on electoral system reform.
		- Electoral systems are not gender-neutral. The type of system in place can have a major impact on the number of women elected to office. More women are likely to be elected in countries with proportional representation (or party-list) systems than in countries with majority (or first-past-the-post) systems. Other aspects of election systems including types of candidate lists, district magnitude, and threshold levels significantly affect women’s electoral prospects as well.

#### Gender

* Lesson: Raising awareness about gender equality and capacity building of the electoral management body is an excellent first step towards improving women’s political participation. However, increasing women’s political participation through elections projects needs a **three pronged approach – addressing women’s participation as voters, as candidates and as election administrators**.
* Recommendation: It is a good time to be working on gender and elections in Thailand because the election of the country’s first female prime minister has provided a role model in politics, and a goal to which women candidates for elected office may aspire. Future programming should consider including activities to increase women’s political participation as candidates, voters, and election administrators.
	+ - The groundwork has already been laid for increasing women’s participation as **election administrators** through the capacity building work and raising awareness about gender equality with the staff of the OECT. This work could be scaled up to assist the OECT to adopt internal gender responsive policies, drawing on the expertise of UNDP’s Global Programme on Electoral Cycle Support.
		- Voter and civic education could be specifically targeted at women voters, to ensure that they understand their rights and responsibilities as **voters** in the electoral process, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. The information conveyed should be gender sensitive and designed to be relevant to women. Civic education can enhance women’s participation in elections through the dissemination of positive images of women as voters, leaders, and participants in all aspects of the political process.
		- Programming could provide capacity building for women **candidates**, by strengthening the skills and resources of women candidates for elected office through initiatives with political parties, the media, and NGOs, including knowledge networks, mentoring programmes, skills training, and funding for women candidates. UNDP can offer assistance on promoting the role of women and other marginalized groups in party leadership structures and as party-backed candidates, as well as in developing party platforms that take into account their special concerns.
* Lesson: Innovative DGTTF projects address critical democratic governance issues that are potentially risky. Even though the issue may be recognized as crucial by donors or partners, the beneficiary government may be harder to convince. Carrying out the innovation may require efforts beyond the timeframe of one project. The project raised awareness about how **adopting affirmative action quotas can increase women’s political participation**. However, longer term efforts will be required to garner support for this type of innovative tool for gender equality in Thailand.
	+ Recommendation: Future programming could consider raising awareness with a variety of actors, including political parties, Parliament, local elections stakeholders, the media, and voters about the benefits of a gender quota for women in politics, and about successful experiences with this in other countries. Many countries have adopted special measures such as candidate quotas or reserved seats to increase the number of women elected. When properly implemented, these measures have been especially effective tools for promoting women’s participation in electoral processes.
		- Consider reviewing laws regulating candidate recruitment processes for all parties; the use of reserved seats for women members or gender quotas for candidates generally expand women’s representation. [[11]](#footnote-11)
* Lesson: **Grassroots based and bottom up approaches to civic education on gender and elections can be effective tools to inspire women’s participation in politics**.
	+ Recommendation: Scale up and replicate the local level civic education activities on gender equality in political participation. Such work could include disseminating information on the different ways that women can enter the political arena, including through involvement in national women’s movements, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and the media.
		- One of the best ways for women to enter the political arena is through involvement in national women’s movements. In post-conflict countries in which women have been active in mobilizing against the regime, participation in the women’s movement may provide them with the credentials needed to become a party leader or a candidate. Women’s movements can also influence political party platforms and help ensure that all parties seriously address issues of special interest to women.

#### Electoral Dispute Resolution

* Lesson: Electoral dispute resolution is a key area, which often attracts less attention than other aspects of elections, often until after voting has taken place. Nevertheless, inadequate performance of the electoral management body, courts or other dispute resolution mechanisms can lead to loss of public confidence, rejection of election results by some contestants, or even violence. Therefore, **electoral dispute resolution deserves consideration as a priority area in UNDP electoral assistance projects**.
	+ Recommendation: Consider enlarging the electoral dispute resolution research study to the local level, identifying and examining the problems occurring with local elections.

# Annexes

## A. Terms of Reference for the Evaluation

* Please see attached Terms of Reference for the Evaluation

## B. Documents consulted

* + UNDP Sustaining Thailand’s Democratic Practice through Improvement of Inclusive Electoral Process - Project Document
	+ UNDP Thailand Country Programme Action Plan
	+ UN Development Assistance Framework
	+ UNDP Global Strategic Plan 2014-2017
	+ UNDP & OECT Women’s Political Participation Project – Conclusions and Recommendations
	+ Electoral Dispute Resolution Research Framework Report
	+ UNDP Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support documentation
	+ UNDP/NDI - Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties, A Guidebook to Promote Women’s Political Participation
	+ UNDP/NDI – Entry Points for Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties
	+ Background documents on political context of Thailand
	+ [www.bridge-project.org](http://www.bridge-project.org)
	+ Building Resources for Democracy, Governance and Elections: A Course on Electoral Processes
	+ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Civic Education Database – Some Preliminary Observations
	+ People Network For Elections in Thailand
	+ Asian Network For Free Elections
	+ Open Forum for Democracy Foundation
	+ UNDP Study on Understanding Electoral Violence in Asia
	+ Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund – Local Governance in Complex Situations
	+ Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund – Asia Pacific Rights and Justice Initiative Assessments
	+ Office of the Election Commission of Thailand
	+ UNDP – Governance for Peace
	+ Southern Thailand Empowerment and Participation Project Document

## C. Stakeholders interviewed

* + Meeting with UNDP Governance Team
	+ Mr. Somchai Yensabai, Programme Specialist
	+ Ms. Mallika Lertsuwanwong, Programme Associate
	+ Ms. Roschong Premsub, Consultant for Gender and Elections
	+ Mr. Gothom Areya, Associate Professor, The Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Project Partner for Electoral Dispute Resolution
	+ Ms. Thippaporn Tantisunthorn, Co-Director, Institute of Public Policy Studies, Project Partner for Civic Education
	+ Mr. Benjapol Udomsuwon, Director – General, Department of Electoral Campaign and Information Dissemination, OECT
	+ Mr. Suthep Phromwas, Deputy Secretary – General, Public Participation Bureau, OECT
	+ Ms. Patchara Katikul, Specialist, OECT
	+ Mr. Puchong Nutrawong, Secretary - General, OECT
	+ Mr. Sompol Pongpipat, Director – General, Department of Legal Affairs, OECT
	+ Pol. Capt. Manu Wichiannit, Deputy Director – General, Department of Investigation and Adjudication 4, Investigation and Adjudication Bureau.
1. DGTTF Annual Report 2012, p 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ACE Project [www.aceproject.org](http://www.aceproject.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Human Development Report 2013, UNDP. The Glass Ceiling, UNDP. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Glass Ceiling, UNDP. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Glass Ceiling, UNDP. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Definition given in *DAC Summary of key norms and standards*, available from: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Definition given in *DAC Summary of key norms and standards*, available from: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. UNDP Electoral Assistance Implementation Guide, p 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. UNDP Fast Facts: Gender equality and democratic governance, p 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Definition given in *DAC Summary of key norms and standards*, available from: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluationnetwork. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. UNDP, Gender Equality in Elected Office in Asia Pacific: Six Actions to Expand Women’s Empowerment, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)