



UNDP Research Report

EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

**Sustaining Peace during Electoral
Processes (SELECT) Project**



Copyright ©UNDP 2024. All rights reserved.

Preferred citation: UNDP (2024). SELECT Project Report: Integrating Electoral Assistance into Broader Governance Programming for Inclusive Governance to sustain peace during electoral processes 2021–2025.

One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at undp.org or follow at @UNDP.

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| Acknowledgement & Disclaimers..... | 4 |
| Chapter 1 Introduction..... | 5 |
| The SELECT project | 5 |
| Chapter 2 Recommendations | 7 |
| Ensure contextual understanding and needs | 7 |
| The use of traditional versus digital means..... | 7 |
| Risk and incident verification | 8 |
| How to effectively link early warning to early response | 8 |
| Multi-stakeholder collaboration..... | 9 |
| Security of personnel | 9 |
| Security of users and data on digital platforms | 10 |
| Countering the duplication of efforts | 10 |
| Continuous improvement through monitoring and evaluation..... | 10 |

Acknowledgement & Disclaimers

This report is a part of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project by the European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The development of this research report would not have been possible without FPI's generous support.

Its content focuses on identifying approaches that can be implemented on a national level as opposed to global strategies. Based on the recommendations set forth, a set of programmatic activities has been consolidated. This menu of activities is meant to be context-tailored and include practical considerations and implications. This document should, however, not be considered a policy document, and any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country's context will be unique. We are grateful to the many colleagues and partners who contributed to this research process by participating in consultations and meetings, serving as members of the Joint Working Group and reviewing and providing input to this report.

Gabriel van Oppen was the lead expert of the Early Warning and Early Response workstream and drafted this report. Saré Knoope (UNDP) provided critical supervision and guidance throughout the research process. A special thank you is also extended to Said Tahri (UNDP) for invaluable support throughout this process. We are grateful to all colleagues that participated to the virtual consultations, which provided critical input to the report and thank UNDP colleagues for their support in preparation of each of one of the consultations.

We appreciate the input from all stakeholders who participated and provided invaluable insights. Lastly, we thank Gianpiero Catozzi and Aleida Ferreyra for their support throughout the development and clearance of this report. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or any Member States. Moreover, the contents of this publication shall not be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The SELECT project

Credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral processes are essential to confer legitimacy to national and local governments. When these processes are conducted in a well-organized and transparent manner, they can offer the means of channeling grievances and expectations into respectful and constructive debate. Yet, electoral processes can also exacerbate underlying conflict dynamics triggering violence, sometimes undermining years of development and peacebuilding efforts.

The overall objective of the 'Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes' (SELECT) project is to build the capacity of both national electoral stakeholders and international partners to (a) identify risk factors that may affect elections (b) design programmes and activities specifically aimed at preventing and reducing the risk of violence and (c) implement operations related to the electoral processes in a conflict-sensitive manner, by delivering on the two following project outputs:

- Output 1: Development of an online knowledge hub where implementable programmatic activities related to the prevention of electoral-related violence are listed, informed by research and knowledge development, available in English.

Topics under the SELECT project

1. Promotion of information integrity
2. Youth participation
3. Electoral violence monitoring and analysis
4. Parliamentary support and citizen consultations
5. Gender equality and women's participation
6. Programming inclusive governance

- Output 2: The organization of outreach events/workshops to enhance electoral violence prevention capacities at national, regional and international levels.

The Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project's main objective is to research and develop programmatic options to prevent violence during electoral processes. The project focuses on a number of topics and how they relate to the prevention of electoral violence, including on women's participation, information integrity, youth participation, inclusive governance and parliamentary support. Under the SELECT project, the Gender Equality and Women's Participation workstream has been formulated with the aim to bring to light examples of programming that works towards advancing gender equality during electoral processes. These examples include both aspects of ensuring women's meaningful political participation and preventing and mitigating violence occurring before, during and after elections, all

intended for use by practitioners when developing gender-sensitive electoral programming for the context in which they work.

Against this background, the SELECT project has developed an inclusive research process to ensure a multi-regional lens that takes into consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders. The research process will be applied to various research topics included in the SELECT project document whereby the topics identified have the potential to positively mitigate or negatively contribute to the potential for electoral violence. The aim of this topic-specific research process is to understand the main challenges in relation to the nexus between the topic and electoral violence and outline actionable solutions to be implemented in the second phase of the project. Any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country's context will be unique.

Each research topic under SELECT will be accompanied by a working group comprised of experts in the field and representatives of relevant organizations. The members of the working group shall share their experience and expertise, as well as support, with their networks.

The outputs of this project will not constitute United Nations policy recommendations. This report is dedicated to the SELECT workstream on gender equality and women's participation.

Chapter 2 Recommendations

Ensure contextual understanding and needs

Prior to the implementation of any programmatic option linked to the prevention and/or mitigation of electoral violence or the establishment of an early Warning and early response system, it is crucial to understand and assess matters such as the contextual realities, the historical electoral violence data and potential risks, whether structural or triggers, that may be relevant to correctly implement the programmatic option in question. Some of the programmatic options are aimed at facilitating precisely this, namely the electoral violence risk assessment.

Why it's important: Effective prevention and mitigation of electoral violence require a deep understanding of the local environment. This includes historical trends, sociopolitical triggers, and structural risks unique to the context.

Implementation: Conduct responsive **electoral violence risk assessments** (see programmatic option) to gather critical data. Engage local stakeholders to validate findings and ensure the analysis is grounded in local realities.

Outcome: Programmes tailored to specific contexts are more likely to address root causes and prevent electoral violence effectively.

The use of traditional versus digital means

The inclusion of digital technologies needs to be carefully assessed, rather than be implemented as a given. While the promises and benefits of digital technologies can enhance the capacity to collect, verify, respond and analyse risks and incidents of electoral violence, their implementation needs to be aligned to two factors: (a) the access to digital means and Internet in-country to make use of these systems; and (b) the digital literacy of the users, who may not be proficient in the use of digital technologies, thus posing an obstacle hampering the exercise's efficiency rather than providing a benefit. The implementation of technologies, while recommended, should always be considered alongside traditional or non-digital manners of conducting these exercises.

Why it's important: While digital technologies offer speed and scalability, their effectiveness is limited if not matched with local capacities and conditions.

Implementation:

- Assess **digital infrastructure**: Ensure there is sufficient access to the Internet and devices in the target area and/or for monitors and responders in the field. Where such access may be limited, consider alternative reporting methods, including text-based methods.
- Evaluate **digital literacy**: Identify whether potential users are capable of effectively using these tools. Provide training where needed. See programmatic option 'Fostering Media Information Literacy and Digital Literacy'.
- Blend approaches: Use **traditional methods** like community meetings, radio announcements, or printed reports alongside digital platforms to ensure inclusivity.¹

Outcome: A balanced approach minimizes exclusion and ensures comprehensive data collection and response.

¹ Blending approaches have been used in the implementation of the iReport system. For more information see: [iReport: Early Warning and Early Response Systems | United Nations Development Programme](#)

Risk and incident verification

During electoral violence incident mapping exercises, incoming reports may often overlap, be fast-changing and, quite frequently, be erroneous. To avoid the negative consequences of implementing misguided responses, it is crucial to ensure proper risk and incident verification methods are introduced into the methodology and standard operating procedures of the system, ensuring all reported risks and incidents are thoroughly verified prior to the implementation of any action.²

Why it's important: Unverified reports can lead to misdirected or counterproductive responses, exacerbating tensions or wasting resources.

Implementation:

- Establish **verification protocols**: Use triangulation (e.g. cross-referencing reports from multiple sources). See for example the programmatic option on 'Analysis of Electoral Violence Data' to facilitate open-source data analysis in addition to reporting by monitors linked to any early warning system.
- Consider employing technology: Tools like geotagging, timestamps and multimedia uploads can aid in verifying reports.
- Assign dedicated verification teams: Ensure that personnel trained in verifying incidents review all reports before taking action.

Outcome: Reliable data ensures effective responses and maintains trust in the system.

How to effectively link early warning to early response

One of the main challenges concerns how to ensure that the early identification of incidents and risk actually leads to early response, including the most effective response. This challenge may be unpacked further, as early response may be hampered by capacity gaps and coordination challenges beyond the mere lack of identification tools. In contexts where means are limited, there is a need to address capacity gaps. Incidents that are reported and verified will likely require a response. Nevertheless, capacity gaps at the local level (e.g. personnel, vehicles, gasoline, etc.) may hamper the ability to implement these responses. Seasonality and weather can have a large impact as well. To facilitate effective and timely response, consideration needs to be given to the strengthening of local capacities, particularly in hotspot areas, ensuring decision-making can lead to the required response. This may require investment in technology, leveraging multiple modalities, to try to overcome these obstacles of implementation.

Why it's important: The impact of the identification of risks and incidents is limited without actionable and timely responses.

Implementation:

- Build **response capacity**: Equip local responders with resources (vehicles, fuel, personnel) to act swiftly. In addition, response capacity may be built through training on [electoral conflict mediation](#), [peace messaging](#), [support to dialogue forums](#) and [inter-party dialogue](#) efforts.
- Strengthen **decision-making processes**: Define clear workflows and responsibilities to translate warnings into action. The set-up of a [situation room](#) with representatives of all relevant institutions may facilitate this process, ensuring timeliness.
- Invest in **hotspot areas**: Prioritize high-risk regions for capacity-building and resource allocation. An electoral violence risk assessment can facilitate the identification of hotspot areas.

² For the iReport system, SOPs have been developed to facilitate proper risk and incident verification. First the incident or risk is identified in the field, then it is verified at the central level in coordination with the field monitor, after which a coordinator approves of action.

Outcome: A seamless link between warning and response enhances credibility and reduces the likelihood of violence escalating.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration

The involvement and participation of different State and non-State actors is crucial to ensure the appropriate legitimacy, presence and modalities of interventions are available for the establishment of an early warning and early response system.

Human rights commissions are generally well positioned to lead electoral early warning systems due to their impartiality, established grassroots networks, and mandate to monitor and address human rights violations facilitating sustainability beyond elections. As independent bodies, they are trusted by diverse actors, including government agencies, civil society and international partners, enabling them to serve as neutral conveners in often-polarized contexts.

Why it's important: Electoral violence prevention requires diverse perspectives and legitimacy, which only a multi-stakeholder approach can provide. Ensuring collaboration between State institutions and civil society organizations can foster credibility and diminish the likelihood of violence, thereby building confidence in institutions.

Implementation:

- Engage **State actors and independent commissions:** Include human rights commissions, electoral commissions, law enforcement and local government.
- Include **non-State actors:** Partner with civil society, community leaders, youth and women.
- Define roles and responsibilities: Ensure clear terms of engagement for each stakeholder to avoid overlaps or conflicts.

Outcome: Broader ownership and legitimacy of the early warning and early response system improves its sustainability and effectiveness.

Security of personnel

It is important to assess how the conduct of certain activities may be perceived by citizens, political parties and institutions, especially in the context of polarized, tense and disputed electoral processes. A do no harm and human rights-based approach needs to be the starting point for any implementation. In this regard, establishing the right framework, security measures and contingency plans for personnel that may be accused and targeted is important to ensure the safety and security of the staff involved in any early warning and early response system. In this regard, considerations should be taken to understand whether communication actions and visibility materials for field-staff may be counter-productive and endanger personnel.

Why it's important: Personnel are often at risk, especially in polarized and high-stakes electoral environments.

Implementation:

- Develop **security protocols:** Include physical safety measures, contingency plans and psychological support.
- Minimize visibility: Avoid unnecessary identification of field personnel in sensitive contexts.
- Conduct **risk assessments:** Anticipate and mitigate risks tied to specific roles or regions. See electoral violence risk assessment.

Outcome: Personnel can operate effectively without compromising their safety or well-being.

Security of users and data on digital platforms

Due to the sensitive nature of exercises related to data collection and response to risks and incidents of electoral violence, any digital means implemented to support these actions need to be securely protected from data leaks and cybersecurity attacks. Furthermore, given the importance of safeguarding the security and safety of personnel, special consideration should be put into ensuring measures that mitigate any exposure of staff names, addresses and other personal details, with special emphasis on field-monitors.

Why it's important: Early warning and early response systems handle sensitive information that, if compromised, could endanger individuals and undermine the system.

Implementation:

- Secure **data encryption**: Protect data at all stages – storage, transmission and access.
- Use **cybersecurity best practices**: Regular updates, firewalls and secure login protocols.
- Streamlined knowledge management practices.
- Protect personal data: Implement measures to anonymize and safeguard personal details of field staff and other users. These measures have been integrated into UNDP's 'iReport: Early Warning and Early Response System' (see option).

Outcome: A secure digital environment ensures trust and protects users from harm.

Countering the duplication of efforts

Countering duplication of efforts ensures that resources are used efficiently and that roles and responsibilities among stakeholders are clear. In contexts where multiple actors – such as government agencies, civil society organizations and international partners – are engaged in early warning and early response initiatives, overlapping mandates can lead to wasted resources, confusion and gaps in service delivery. To address this, it is essential to map existing efforts and clarify mandates before implementing new programmes. Establishing shared platforms or situation rooms can promote coordination, while agreeing on common tools and methodologies ensures consistency in data collection, analysis and response. This approach fosters synergy among stakeholders, reduces redundancies and enhances the overall effectiveness of the early warning and early response system.

Why it's important: Overlapping initiatives waste resources and create confusion.

Implementation:

- Map existing efforts: Identify ongoing programmes and their mandates prior to any implementation.
- Foster **coordination**: Create shared platforms or working groups to streamline efforts.
- Harmonize tools and methodologies: Agree on common frameworks for data collection and response.

Outcome: Maximized resource efficiency and clearer roles for stakeholders.

Continuous improvement through monitoring and evaluation

To enhance the impact of early warning and early response systems, it is critical to regularly assess the results for their effectiveness, timeliness and efficiency. Implementing monitoring and evaluation metrics and frameworks that allow for continuous learning and improvement based on feedback and outcomes will prove useful in addressing challenges and capacity gaps.

Why it's important: Regular feedback ensures that the system remains adaptive and effective.

Implementation:

- Define **monitoring and evaluation frameworks**: Include metrics for timeliness, accuracy and impact.
- **Gather feedback**: Collect inputs from users, responders and communities to identify strengths and gaps.
- **Integrate learning**: Use findings to refine strategies, tools and workflows.

Outcome: An evolving early warning and early response system that consistently meets its objectives and adapts to emerging challenges.

