



Support to Arab Parliaments

advancing participation, accountability, and the rule of law



“Strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law is critical to achieving social progress and modernization,

Algeria
Attendees from 16 Arab countries gather in Algeria for a regional conference on empowering Arab members of parliament.
(Thomas Huyghebaert/UNDP)

For UNDP, democratic governance is a vital component of human development. Human rights, the rule of law, and democracy are ends in themselves; they are also central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which represent the shared commitment of 189 nations to reduce extreme poverty in its many dimensions.

In the Arab region, UNDP’s governance efforts focus on strengthening national development strategies and encouraging reform to improve the quality of democratic institutions and processes. A central aim is supporting the development of efficient and fair institutions that protect citizens’ rights and freedoms, foster inclusiveness and participation, and guarantee the rule of law.

Parliamentary development, a robust and fast-growing area of UNDP support, is a particularly strategic entry point for advancing democratic governance. Well-functioning parliaments express the will of the people, pass laws, and hold governments, particularly the executive, to account. They control and administer national budgets; mediate different constituency interests; and act as a counterweight to the power of the executive. They can also foster the development of more just and equitable societies by engaging citizens and grassroots organizations in the policy and decision-making process.

DEMOCRACY

DEVELOPMENT

and to meeting the challenges of development [in the Arab world].”

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Parliaments in the Arab region are beginning to play a more prominent role in national governance. Political parties and individual members of parliament (MPs) are increasingly vocal in calling for parliamentary development, reform, and independence. Arab parliaments face many of the same capacity challenges as nascent parliaments in other parts of the world, including resource constraints, a lack of autonomy, and an asymmetry of power in relation to the executive. Yet they have received significantly less development assistance than have parliaments in other regions.

Through its Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS), funded by the Belgian government, and its Regional Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), UNDP launched the Parliamentary Development Initiative in the Arab Region to ensure that Arab parliaments have the capacity, resources, and independence required to carry out their core functions effectively.

UNDP focuses its assistance to Arab parliaments in the following four areas:

- Supporting national parliamentary reform efforts;
- Addressing the knowledge deficit in parliamentary development;
- Enhancing the effectiveness of MPs through regional training and networking; and
- Building the capacity of women MPs and advocating for enhanced women's political participation.

In addition to building the capacity of parliaments, the organization's support in this area has stimulated greater regional interest in parliamentary development, fostered debate about parliaments' role in critical national issues such as crisis recovery, peacebuilding, and anti-corruption efforts, and increased regional collaboration among parliamentarians.



Lebanon
MPs and administrative staff from 17 Arab parliaments attend a regional seminar on the budget process and gender budgeting in Beirut in June 2004. (UNDP)



Support to Arab parliaments

Since 2001, UNDP has more than doubled its parliamentary assistance in the Arab region; the organization is currently supporting parliamentary initiatives in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. A neutral, long-term development partner, UNDP is uniquely well suited to assisting emerging elected institutions.

REFORM

Morocco

President of the House of Representatives of Morocco addresses the World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in September 2005. (United Nations Photo) Bottom: Moroccan Parliament building in Rabat.



supporting national parliamentary reform

UNDP is piloting different approaches to parliamentary reform in various countries in the region.

■ In **Algeria**, activities focus on strengthening the capacity of MPs and administrative staff through training in the budgetary process, parliamentary oversight, law-drafting techniques, and parliamentary outreach and communication strategies. UNDP is providing support aimed at empowering women MPs and promoting national debate on women's political participation.

■ In **Lebanon**, activities center on strengthening the parliament as a forum for national dialogue and reconciliation. A key partner in the country's peacebuilding process, UNDP is supporting the Lebanese parliament in drafting new laws on political parties and administrative decentralization. With the support of UNDP, a new organizational structure for the Lebanese parliamentary administration was developed and adopted; it is now being put into place.

■ In **Morocco**, UNDP is working to help the parliament better understand the implications of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). An awareness-raising seminar was organized for MPs in 2005, presenting the country's current progress toward the MDGs, the main constraints it faces, and possible strategies for overcoming them. UNDP also organized targeted workshops for specific parliamentary committees on how MDG efforts can be supported by the national budget. It is foreseen that the 2007 national

budget discussion will provide a strategic opportunity for the parliament to commit resources to meeting the Goals.



Lebanon

Participants from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria attend a sub-regional parliamentary seminar on legislative drafting in December 2004 in Beirut. (UNDP)

Jordan

To facilitate public access to information, UNDP provides IT training throughout the Arab States. Here, a Safawi woman teaches another to use the Internet. (Bill Lyons/UNDP)

addressing the knowledge deficit

UNDP is making knowledge and information available to Arab parliaments and research institutions to improve the quality and relevance of parliamentary activity. To address the dearth of Arabic-language materials on parliamentary development, the organization is supporting studies on key issues facing Arab parliaments as well as translating and disseminating important global policy documentation, including research on economic, environmental and social policy issues, studies on good governance and democratic parliamentary systems, case studies of good practice, and practical manuals on nuts-and-bolts issues like legislative drafting techniques. The box below contains a sample of resources produced or translated as part of the regional initiative.

Another key area of activity is the creation of a parliamentary development knowledge portal for the Arab region, www.arabparliaments.org. The site provides user-friendly access to a host of parliamentary development resources, such as studies, policy guidance, translated documents, and links to networks and databases. It also serves as a home for various issue-based regional parliamentary networks and a vehicle for highlighting UNDP-supported parliamentary development activities.



The Arabic translation of this IPU/DCAF Handbook, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector, Principles, Mechanisms and Practices*, is among the materials available online.

Generating and disseminating knowledge for Arab parliaments

Studies

- Regional Comparative Study of Parliamentary Rules of Procedure
- Regional Comparative Study on the Budget Process in Arab Countries
- Regional Comparative Study of Political Party Legislation in Arab Countries
- Role of Arab Parliaments and Parliamentarians in Fighting Corruption
- Review of Parliamentary Development in the Arab Region, Highlighting Arab Women's Political Representation
- Survey of International Youth-related Legislation
- Analytical Study of Youth-related Legislation in Arab Countries

Translation into Arabic and dissemination

- Handbook for Parliamentarians, *Parliament, the Budget and Gender*
- IPU/DCAF Handbook, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector – Principles, Mechanisms and Practices*
- UNDP Parliamentary Development Practice Guidance Note
- IPU/I-IDEA Handbook, *Making Reconciliation Work: the Role of Parliaments*
- “Assessing Legislation” and “Legislative Drafting for Democratic Social Change,” manuals prepared by Boston University

These documents can be found at www.arabparliaments.org.



KNOWLEDGE

TRAINING



enhancing effectiveness of MPs through regional training and networking

Parliamentarians in the Arab region face similar issues and benefit from opportunities to share their experiences. UNDP thus makes regional training and networking a priority for support.

- UNDP is supporting efforts to create and strengthen thematic networks focused on improving parliamentary oversight and promoting transparency and accountability. A network of Arab Parliamentarians Against Corruption (ARPAC) is up and running, as are parliamentary working groups on security sector reform and political party legislation.
- Over 100 MPs and parliamentary administrative staff from 16 Arab countries met in Algiers, Algeria, in September 2005 for a regional conference on empowering Arab members of parliament. The conference was jointly organized by the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Algerian Council of the Nation (Upper House), and UNDP. The conference provided a forum for discussing the need for strong administrative support services, the regulatory framework (such as the rules of procedures and the concept of immunity and how it influences the work of MPs), and the importance of effective outreach strategies, particularly interaction with civil society, academia, and the media. The conference concluded with a series of recommendations, among them the need to improve the quality of the legal and research services available to MPs. Other such regional capacity-building events include a June 2004 workshop on the budgetary process and gender budgeting attended by MPs and staff from 17 countries; and a June 2005 Arab parliamentary conference on the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

Algeria

Above: The Morocco delegation (left) and presiding panel attend one of the sessions of the UNDP September 2005 conference on empowering Arab members of parliament. Below: MPs and staff from both houses of parliament attend a training workshop on legislative drafting in Algeria in November 2005. (UNDP)



Egypt

The June 2005 Arab Parliamentary Conference on the UN Convention Against Corruption took place in Cairo. (UNDP)



✓ Participation of women in Arab parliaments*

Country	% female MPs	
	2001	2006
Tunisia	11.5	22.8
Syria	10.4	12.0
Djibouti	0	10.8
Morocco	0.6	10.8
Algeria	3.4	6.2
Jordan	0	5.5
Lebanon	2.3	4.7
Egypt	2.4	2.0
Yemen	0.7	0.3

* Note: The figures in the table represent percentage of female MPs in lower houses of parliament.

empowering women

According to the Arab Human Development Report 2002, human development in the region is severely hampered by what it calls 'the women's empowerment deficit'. The Arab region has the world's lowest rates for women's participation in the workforce and representation in parliament. Some positive trends have developed in recent years, however; for instance, women's participation in Arab parliaments has doubled, increasing from 3.6% in 2001 to 7.8% in 2006.

United Arab Emirates

Local literacy rates are higher for women than men, but this has not translated readily into more opportunities in other areas. UNDP has helped develop a strategy to expand the possibilities for women's participation across society and sponsored projects that focus, for example, on training advocates to work with legislators and policy-makers. (UNDP United Arab Emirates)

UNDP makes women's involvement a priority in all the parliamentary activities it supports in the Arab region. Sponsoring the participation of women MPs and staff in conferences, trainings, and meetings guarantees that at least one participant out of five is a woman. A regional working group on women in political parties, which will seek to establish strategic partnerships among elected members of parliaments (both women and men), women's rights organizations, and the leadership of political parties, will be launched soon.



QUALITY



United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Bureau for Development Policy, Democratic Governance Group

Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening

304 East 45th Street, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10017

Tel. +1.212.906.6945, Fax +1.212.906.6471, gpps@undp.org

<http://www.undp.org/governance/sl-parliaments.htm>

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners. In all our activities, we encourage the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women.

Copyright © UNDP 2006, all rights reserved. Produced using environmentally safe materials.

Content development: Kristen Lewis, Scarsdale, NY, USA. **Design:** Suazion Inc., Bloomingburg, NY, USA. **Production:** Scanprint, Denmark.