



# **Electoral Training and Education: The Case of IIIDEM in India**

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# Electoral Training and Education: The Case of IIIDEM in India

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Case Study

Dr Shahabuddin Yaqoob Quraishi

## 1. The IIIDEM's beginnings (2010–2011)

The author joined the Election Commission of India (ECI) as a newly appointed Election Commissioner in 2006. From the outset there was a palpable feeling of inadequacy in the capacity-building offered, with a token budget of INR 100,000 (USD 1,500). Training during this period consisted of just a two-hour briefing. Therefore, there was urgent need for a standardized capacity development programme at all levels if the nearly five million poll staff members were to deliver a zero-error election in the future.

In September 2010, during one of the Chief Election Commissioner's first field visits (in post) to Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh (India's largest state), the need for better training was identified as a concern. The consensus among commissioners was that a national training facility would be helpful, and a small committee was constituted to promote this project, but its report fell below expectations. Finally, on 22 February 2011 a national working group of experts convened and invited Dr Bhagban Prakash, an internationally reputed training and human resource consultant, to head the group. He worked hard for four months and submitted a comprehensive concept framework and project document (CFP) along with a broad statement of the vision, mission, goal, guiding principles and composition of such a national training centre. Four senior officials and domain experts from the ECI—Ashish Srivastava, Director; Shangara Ram, Principal Secretary; and K. Wilfred and Varinder Kumar, Secretaries—were the national working group members. Before the CFP report was finalized, it was posted on the Commission's website, and extensive consultations were held with Deputy Election Commissioners and Directors General of the Commission, as well as field officials.

The CFP recommended that the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management's (IIIDEM) vision must ensure meticulous, accurate and voter-friendly implementation of election processes by developing a critical mass of committed, competent, credible and skilled electoral managers. In its earliest incarnation, IIIDEM was envisioned to

be an advanced resource centre for learning, training, research and extension on participatory democracy and election management in South Asia and Africa. In fact, most of the commissioners from these regions who participated in the ECI's diamond jubilee celebration (25 January 2010) were of the view that India should share its experience and expertise in democracy support internationally. Challenges shared by various developing democracies include the elimination of criminal and financial influence, guaranteed voter participation on the basis of an accurate electoral registry and peaceful handover of power—all of which require professionalized electoral services to be in place.

The IIIDEM was also to promote an inclusive democratic culture in India itself—as reflected in the ECI's diamond jubilee year theme, 'Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy'—and to incubate stronger institutions of democracy in the country. The CFP articulated its own mission statement within the ECI as follows: 'To promote social awareness, voter education and democratic values and practices, enhance and build human resource and capacities for efficient conduct of free, fair and periodic elections in India and develop partnership as well as collaborations with other countries.' This was further elaborated upon by adding a section in the CFP on the guiding principles. IIIDEM's mission statement was then amended in 2015 to emphasize that the institute would 'sensitize, motivate, prepare and mobilize' stakeholders (see Box 1).

**Box 1. Factsheet: The IIIDEM of the Election Commission of India**

The India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), a division under the direct supervision and control of the Election Commission of India (ECI), was established on 17 June 2011 by order of the ECI.

From early 2019 IIIDEM moved from the ECI's Nirvachan Sadan headquarters in central New Delhi to a dedicated campus in Dwarka, New Delhi.

IIIDEM's mission is 'to fully sensitize, motivate, prepare and mobilize the machinery as well as the stakeholders of elections and democracy, synergistically connecting them to the ideals and values of these themes, helping them overcome shortcomings and challenges and achieve their goals in these domains by getting properly oriented and amply inspired, energized and equipped'.

IIIDEM's vision is to realize 'an era of true democratic values and principles by reinforcing honest, firm and transparent electoral systems and processes, addressing emerging challenges with foresight, clarity and strength'.

IIIDEM's main goal is to: 'train the electoral machinery in the delivery of free, fair and flawless elections. To orient stakeholders of the democratic and electoral systems toward possibilities of better and more productive delivery therein. To explore and expand the horizons of intellectual know-how in these fields.' Functions include capacity-building (operational training and professional development), electoral education and research.

IIIDEM consists of five main wings: the Training and Capacity Development Wing; the Voter Education and Civic Participation Wing; the Research, Reform, Evaluation and Documentation Wing; the International Technical Cooperation Wing; and the Administration, Finance, Coordination and Support Services Wing.

IIIDEM's personnel includes a Director General and approximately 50 staff. IIIDEM maintains a network of national and international trainers.

IIIDEM's main beneficiaries include representatives from the ECI (chief electoral officers, district election officers, returning officers, assistant returning officers, electoral registration officers and field officers), the Indian Police Service and overseas EMs.

IIIDEM offers six domestic courses and six international courses on various topics related to electoral administration.

For more information about IIIDEM, visit its website at <<http://iiidem.nic.in/index.html>>, or contact IIIDEM directly via email <[iiidem@eci.gov.in](mailto:iiidem@eci.gov.in)>.

*Sources:* ECI website <<https://eci.gov.in/>>; and IIIDEM website <<http://iiidem.nic.in/index.html>>, accessed 26 September 2019.

**By name, by nature: Indian and international**

After due deliberation by the full Commission, with some discussion about the international dimension of the proposed institute, the CFP report was promptly accepted. More than 60 election commissioners had participated in the ECI's diamond jubilee celebrations; a desire was expressed, as mentioned, to benefit from Indian experience. While an initial suggestion had been to call the institute the Indian Institute of Democracy and Election Management,

Dr Prakash, head of the working group, insisted that the ‘international’ designation also be included in the name, in keeping with the mission’s international component.

Indeed, the initiative continued to find international as well as domestic support. It was included in the Indo–US strategic dialogue before the India visit of US President Barack Obama. The Commonwealth Secretariat and its forum of electoral management bodies (EMBs), the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), among others, showed great enthusiasm. The then-Law Minister, Veerappa Moily, promised his full support. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also showed strong interest, matched by cooperation on the part of the Department of Expenditure, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Attorney General. For a young institute, struggling to grow its roots, such spontaneous offers of cooperation came as a welcome boost.

IIIDEM signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with a number of intergovernmental agencies to secure technical cooperation. Since then, requests for collaboration have surged in from different regions of the world, the first being the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, in May 2012), followed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA, in December 2012) and the Commonwealth Secretariat. At the time of IIIDEM’s founding, some young democracies in South Asia had established capacity-building institutions (e.g. Bangladesh’s Electoral Training Institute in 1995; Nepal’s Electoral Education and Information Centre in 2011). However, none of these institutions had an international function.

### Finding a physical home for IIIDEM

An improvised facility within the ECI premises was assembled and began offering domestic and international courses within the field of election management. Areas of focus included facilitator training, electoral planning, monitoring and evaluation, capacity development, gender, vulnerability mapping, voter education and civic participation, expenditure control and campaign finance, and finally model codes of conduct. The makeshift facility was inaugurated on 16 June 2011 jointly by the author (as Chief Election Commissioner of India) and Mr Ken Nyaundi, the Election Commissioner of Kenya. Assistance with sourcing a permanent site was offered first by the Government of Haryana, then by the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Tejinder Khanna. A location in the institutional area of Dwarka was just 13 km from the ECI headquarters, making logistics easier compared with Haryana, which is 40 km away.

The foundation stone was laid on 30 April 2012 in the presence of the heads of election management bodies from the SAARC countries (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation), who each planted saplings and were asked to inscribe their names on the foundation plaque. The new campus was completed and training there began in 2019.

An ominous ‘bump in the road’ occurred when the Delhi Development Authority received a letter suggesting that the allocated land be taken out of IIIDEM’s hands. The source of the letter was one of the several ministries invited to take part in the IIIDEM National Advisory Council, namely the Ministry for Law and Justice, which had been markedly less supportive than other senior stakeholders in the initiative. The Election Commission was able to step in and provide clarification regarding rightful ownership of the land in question. The initiative has gone on to emerge as a global centre of excellence in capacity-building in electoral management.

In the author’s view the Ministry’s misgivings about IIIDEM were unfounded, and opportunities for proper consultation and consensus-building were missed. It is therefore unfortunate that as a second best, in response to continued pressure, IIIDEM has had to be supported from an independent budget within the Election Commission. Proposals for

autonomy were effectively withdrawn (in a letter to the Prime Minister in March 2012), with IIIDEM continuing to be run as a part of the Commission. As a result, it was agreed that IIIDEM would be under the direct supervision and control of the ECI, similar to other divisions within the Commission.

### IIIDEM's beginnings—findings and lessons

1. The creation of a working group and the development of a comprehensive CFP were important steps in the process of establishing IIIDEM. The CFP helpfully contained a broad statement of vision, mission, goal, guiding principles and composition of the Institute, which was broadly shared and discussed.
2. The decision to have an international capacity-building programme was based on a desire expressed by EMBs to benefit from Indian experiences of electoral administration and the fact that no other election commissions or institutions of higher education in the region were offering specialized professional development courses on topics related to electoral processes.
3. The international and national enthusiasm and support for the Institute provided a strong foundation for its establishment and mandate.
4. Although IIIDEM was initially envisioned as a separate, autonomous organization, this was made impossible at the time due to concerns expressed by the Ministry for Law and Justice. Instead, the decision to run IIIDEM as part of the ECI from a dedicated budget ensured its continued development.

## 2. First years of operations (2011–2012)

Making IIIDEM operational required a number of parallel processes, such as identifying staff from within the ECI for facilitation, training trainers, recruiting a Director General and Directors, conducting a training needs assessment (TNA) of stakeholders, developing curriculum and scheduling, carrying out procurement and establishing contacts with international partners. One of the first priorities was setting up the units ('wings') of the Institute.

### Training, Education, Cooperation and Research wings

The goal of the Training, Education, Cooperation and Research wings was to prepare a new generation of well-trained and committed electoral managers by updating their skills and improving their professionalism, as well as to help build a positive electoral culture in the country. For international capacity development programmes, IIIDEM has sought collaboration with agencies such as the United Nations, IFES and International IDEA. The IIIDEM Training and Capacity Development Wing conducted its first national programme, for its own staff, in June 2011. This was followed in the same month by an international course for senior officials from the Interim Independent Electoral Commission of Kenya. These occasions also provided the opportunity to pretest some of the modules and curriculum materials.

Other wings of the Institute in early development during this period included a Voter Education and Civic Participation Wing, which works on electoral literacy and voter participation projects directed towards women and youth by working with civil society groups and other stakeholders. The International Technical Cooperation Wing promotes inter-institutional contacts and provides technical support to election commissions and authorities around the world upon request. During this early period, all of the wings started



implementing projects except for the Research, Reform, Evaluation and Documentation Wing (due to a lack of staff and space within IIIDEM's temporary office).

### Curriculum development

Since training and capacity development programmes were a priority area, one of the Institute's first initiatives was to develop the curriculum. Therefore, a Curriculum Development Task Force was established, with Dr Prakash as its convener, and engaged for the development of customized needs-based training modules. The other members were Ms Anita Karwal, Chief Electoral Officer, Gujarat; Mr Vasu Mohan, Deputy Director, IFES-Europe and Asia; Ms Katie Ryan, Senior Training Specialist, IFES; and Mr Harry Neufeld, Senior Election Adviser, IFES. A suggested list of 34 modules, along with content outlines, was prepared so that the Task Force could develop these into functional modules for different contexts and needs. The Task Force worked for six months and developed modules inspired by the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) curriculum in the first phase. In order to start the training process, the Task Force also developed a guide for the training of trainers and facilitators.

### Financial plan and budget

The Government of India earmarked budget funds to the ECI to run the various programmes and activities at IIIDEM. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs sponsors overseas trainees from UN member states on a case-by-case basis. In the beginning, it was estimated that the Institute would require about INR 100 million per annum (approximately USD 1.4 million). Of this about 35 per cent would be for staff salaries, allowances, establishment, etc., and 65 per cent would be allotted to programmes (partnerships, activities, equipment). This excludes construction and maintenance of hostel and conference facilities, for which about INR 1.21 billion (USD 17.1 million) had been allotted by the government (ECI 2015; Sputnik News 2018). In general, core staff were paid as per the pay structure of the ECI, and in the case of contract appointments from the open market, consolidated packages were offered. As of March 2019 IIIDEM had not solicited any grant or donation from external agencies or intergovernmental sources.

### IIIDEM's first year of operations—findings and lessons

1. The administrative, financial and human resource challenges related to setting up the Training, Education, Technical Cooperation and Research wings as per IIIDEM's vision and mission were overcome by taking a pragmatic and medium-to-long-term step-by-step approach.
2. Of these challenges, the establishment of a Curriculum Development Task Force concerned with both domestic and international training audiences was rightly prioritized.

## 3. Development and expansion (2013–2019)

By 2019 the Institute, which had almost never come to fruition, had successfully organized 58 international programmes for 1,030 election managers from 88 countries. During the same period, it organized 730 domestic capacity development programmes for more than 2,000 participants, mostly senior officials. Once construction is completed IIIDEM's 12,500 sqm facilities will include training rooms, conference halls, an auditorium, a library, an IT centre, a museum, office space and a hostel and there is now scope for further expansion of activities (ECI 2015).

To achieve this expansion, IIIDEM has worked hard to recruit its electoral experts, who are not easily found in the open market. They have included domestic subject specialists and former officials with decades of hands-on experience in election management. Partner institutions such as administrative training institutes, legal and other universities, as well as CEOs, have been appropriately utilized. Negotiations are ongoing with international electoral institutes to design, develop and offer a Postgraduate Diploma in Election Management to meet human resource needs in the future. The Institute is negotiating with selected universities and management institutes to introduce election management as an academic discipline.

Nonetheless, IIIDEM's management and academic structure needs to be continually improved in order to match its goals spelled out in the strategic plan (some of its programme wings not yet being functional) and in harmony with the ECI's own strategic and operational plans. IIIDEM has identified and approached 31 international experts for training services. A large number of retired electoral personnel have been retrained to create a common pool of experts who could be used as facilitators at the state level, as India and its states were in election mode for most of 2019 (since the chain of simultaneous elections to Parliament and state assemblies was broken in the 1960s). Every year the ECI has to conduct four to six state-level assembly elections. In support of this, IIIDEM organizes additional training programmes and support activities that are based on election-related legal provisions in the Constitution of India as well as other legislation, regulations and procedures. The training method used for training temporary staff is predominately through the following cascade model: national-level master trainers are prepared at IIIDEM and are tasked with training state-level master trainers, who in turn train assembly-level master trainers, who in turn train local election officials (ECI 2019b).

Over the years, IIIDEM has partnered with regional organizations such as SAARC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, and the Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia. IIIDEM has reached out to a wide range of countries—Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Myanmar—to train EMB officials. It has provided technical assistance to Nepal for setting up a prospective 'South Asia Institute of Democratic Research'. Another very important partner is the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, a division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, which sponsors overseas trainees from UN member countries.

IIIDEM's knowledge partners for its international programme include, in addition to those already mentioned, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Australia India Institute, Moldova's Centre for Continuous Electoral Training and Mexico's National Electoral Institute. Furthermore, in September 2019, during the fourth General Assembly of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), in Bengaluru, the ECI took over as A-WEB Chair for the period 2019–2021 (ECI 2019a; UNI 2019). These collaborations have been mutually beneficial, adding value and opening up new avenues and opportunities. With the help of international experts, IIIDEM is expected to gain an edge while offering programmes following international standards and good practices.

In 2019 a series of training and certification programmes for election returning officers of poll-going states was completed. IIIDEM was involved in numerous training programmes ahead of India's 2019 general elections. IIIDEM has also run training-of-trainers and leadership programmes, as well as induction and motivational programmes for senior officials from, for example, the Indian Police Service (see Indian Express 2019 and the list of IIIDEM beneficiaries in Box 1). The training programmes organized by IIIDEM are all preceded by a TNA, which includes organizational, task and individual analyses. Based on the TNA, training, learning and action goals are established. In September 2019 IIIDEM ran a BRIDGE workshop developed by five leading organizations in the field of elections for 20

ECI staff (BRIDGE partners include the AEC, International IDEA, IFES, the UNDP and UNEAD). The initial workshop was designed to improve the skills, knowledge and confidence of ECI staff to run training programmes in general and to independently run BRIDGE module workshops in the future.

### Regional Centre of Democracy and Election Management

The IIIDEM's scope of work could cover only training of electoral managers at the state and, to some extent, the district level. For electoral managers below that level, training and capacity development responsibilities lie with each respective state (states and union territories in India are also the implementing partners of the ECI). Each state has a Chief Electoral Officer supported by a core staff. The number of polling-booth-level officers alone is 980,000. Therefore, there is a genuine need to establish state-level election management institutes. This idea is yet to take off; however, IIIDEM has involved state-level administrative training institutes as training partners. MOUs have been signed with 12 such institutes in states including Kerala, Telangana, Gujrat, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand. Discussion is imminent in other states, so joint programmes such as collaborative research, faculty exchange, conferences and seminars could be organized without additional investment in infrastructure at the state level. In 2018 the State Election Commission of Maharashtra set up an Institute of Democracy & Elections for Good Governance, focusing on local election-related training, education and research (State Election Commission of Maharashtra 2018).

## 4. Conclusion

For the author it has been a fulfilling experience to dream of an institute and build it at rapid speed, to see its services reach as many as 96 countries and more than 1,000 international stakeholders, as well as more than 30,000 domestic ones, within nine years. Had we waited for the completion of a campus and other infrastructure to start activities, IIIDEM would have lost precious time and a rich learning experience. Prior to 2010 the phrase 'election training' was a passing reference for the ECI; today it is a priority and a part of daily discourse when commissioners meet and review the state of electoral preparedness. The foundation has been laid and the work is still in progress. The Institute needs constant and conscious improvements, bit by bit—the Japanese call it *kaizen*—to reach the top. IIIDEM is now nearer that goal.

### IIIDEM's development and expansion—findings and lessons

1. The decision to house IIIDEM within the ECI's headquarters in an improvised facility, rather than wait for several years for new premises, enabled the timely implementation of programmes and activities. It also facilitated institutional, financial and human resource sustainability for the long term.
2. The Institute's capacity to run continuous domestic and international training courses has been facilitated by the creation of a common pool of retired electoral personnel and in-house and international experts, and by close collaboration with domestic universities and international organizations.

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## About the author

**Shahabuddin Yaqoob Quraishi** (PhD) became the 17th Chief Election Commissioner of India on 30 July 2010. He previously held the position of Election Commissioner with the Election Commission of India. Prior to joining the Commission, he was Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, and Special Secretary (Health) and Director General of the National AIDS Control Organization. He is currently on the International IDEA Board of Advisers.

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In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work.

International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

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