

ANNUAL LEARNING REPORT 2025

THREE YEARS OF SYSTEMATIC LEARNING
FROM PRACTICE

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Executive Summary

This report presents the third and final annual review of learning activities by International IDEA in the context of its institutional Learning Agenda developed in 2023. The agenda established thematic priorities and learning questions, guiding evidence gathering and analysis across the Institute's work. Over the past three years, the Institute has systematically addressed critical challenges including democratic backsliding, funding cuts to democracy assistance, strengthening political representation, protecting constitutional governance, and defending citizens' rights to political participation.

Key learnings highlight the need for innovative, shared models of democracy assistance and emphasize the importance of inclusive partnerships. Convening stakeholders and organizations has proven essential to bolstering policy makers' capacity and reaffirming states' commitment to democratic values. Evidence-based analyses support efforts by policy makers, civil society, academia, and media to safeguard and advance democratic principles. The findings from 2025 confirm and build upon those from 2023 and 2024, demonstrating consistent progress and reinforcing the Institute's commitment to learning and adaptation in complex environments. This report summarizes and systematizes learnings across the three years, providing a foundation for future policy and practice.

International IDEA has responded to its institutional learnings by continuously refining its strategies and approaches to support democracy. The Institute has strengthened its convening power, highlighted in its updated institutional Strategy, and intensified efforts to bring together democratic actors, policymakers, and influencers globally. Feedback from users of IDEA's data and knowledge products has led to improvements in policy-focus and user-friendliness, which will be further enhanced in coming years.

To improve impact, International IDEA has emphasized participatory methods and ownership in project design, implementation, and monitoring, with updated templates and guides to ensure objectives are developed collaboratively with boundary partners. The Institute also maintains a non-prescriptive, comparative approach to facilitating dialogue, presenting options rather than solutions to local stakeholders, and reinforcing this culture through staff onboarding.

In capacity development, IDEA uses mixed approaches such as on-the-job training, mentoring, peer learning, and study visits. Institutional learnings are integrated through regular evaluations led by the Budget and Programme Performance Team, ensuring that lessons from projects inform future practices. These learnings are shared within the Institute and among project managers to foster ongoing improvement.

In 2026 the Learning Agenda will be reviewed and revised. The next learning agenda will build on the foundations established in the previous cycle while responding to emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in the democracy assistance landscape. It will prioritize adaptive learning that is responsive to rapid changes in political, social, and technological contexts. The agenda will emphasize cross-regional knowledge exchange, the integration of climate and environmental considerations into democratic governance, and the development of innovative partnerships with non-traditional actors such as youth-led organisations and private sector entities. Regular reflection, feedback mechanisms, and iterative adaptation will be embedded, ensuring that the learning agenda remains dynamic and relevant throughout its implementation. This approach will enable International IDEA to remain at the forefront of supporting democracy globally, continually refining its strategies to meet evolving needs.

Background

In 2023, International IDEA developed an institutional Learning Agenda, with the following objectives.



For the three sub-objectives International IDEA developed thematic priorities for learning, as outlined in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Thematic priorities



The thematic priorities are articulated through a series of learning questions that the Institute will aim to explore through evidence gathering and analysis. The learning questions are found in Annex A.

This report is the third annual report on learning activities undertaken by the Institute in the context of the approved learning agenda. As the learning questions have not changed and learnings draw on similar sources, the learnings from 2025 confirm and build on learnings from 2023 and 2024, and thus, there are strong similarities and overlaps between the learnings over the last three years. Hence, this will be the final learning report on these learning questions, where learnings over the last three years are summarized and systematized.

How do we learn about and address the complexity of the environments in which we work?

Learning how to deal with democratic backsliding and funding cuts to democracy assistance



Key learnings

- Addressing democratic backsliding and decreasing funding for democracy assistance requires a new model for democracy assistance, based on shared learning and inclusive partnerships.
- Convening people and organizations bolsters policy makers' ability to support democracy and reasserting states' commitment to democracy itself.
- Efforts to protect and improve democratic principles are reinforced if underpinned by evidence-based analyses. Such analyses have proved to be more useful if partners are involved in the process of translating them into knowledge products and guidelines for themselves and their peers.

During the work of updating the Institutional Strategy in 2025, International IDEA conducted an analysis of the trends that characterize the current geopolitical situation. The analysis notes that democracy is in decline in every region of the world, including within long established democracies. This democratic downturn has been stimulated and aggravated by a complex interplay of factors, from mounting economic inequality, to the growing spread of online and offline disinformation amid societal and political polarization, to geopolitical shifts as autocratic powers strive to reinforce and export their authoritarian models. Moreover, the multilateral system of intergovernmental organizations, laws, and norms is in crisis.

Democracies everywhere face critical tests of legitimacy and trust, and International IDEA is convinced that strengthening and rebuilding these democratic pillars depends on global cooperation to benefit from insights and capabilities across diverse regions, experiences, and traditions. However, global democracy support that can facilitate such interaction is under pressure. Many traditional donors are reducing Official Development Assistance and shifting resources to domestic and security priorities. The defunding and shutdown of USAID in 2025 is the starkest demonstration of this trend, but democracy support actors around the world are dealing with cuts and closure.

As will be evident from the experiences that will be highlighted in this report, **International IDEA has learned that the best response to these funding challenges is to embark on a journey of more effective democracy support—evolving from a model of donor-led promotion and aid, to one of shared learning and inclusive partnership.** At the same time, funding constraints may make cooperation and collaboration more challenging. Feedback from evaluations conducted by International IDEA in 2025 revealed that cuts to development funding has contributed to intensifying competition for funding between organizations. While this shift underscores the growing need for stronger collaboration to mitigate financial pressures and align interventions more effectively, partners are now reluctant to share information and coordinate as they are now competing for the funding from the same smaller pool of funding.

International IDEA has a unique role to play in overcoming such challenges. The Institute's strategic alliances with partner organizations and networks can offer thematic complementarity and operational efficiency, while leveraging International IDEA's unique strengths as a convenor and facilitator. **This insight has been reinforced in 2025, when the Institute has seen how important it is to convene people and organizations to bolster policy makers' ability to support democracy and reasserting states' commitment to democracy itself.** This understanding also boosts the learning that democracy assistance must be developed through participatory processes, where actors from South and North together explore how democracy assistance can be improved.

As concluded in International IDEA's outcome harvesting process in 2025 (documented in the *2025 Annual Outcome Report*), the Institute noted that events organized by the Institute have contributed to:

- Deepening partnerships among democratic actors and influence on the EU democracy policy, including the European Commission's 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework and the Global Europe funding instrument.
- Strengthening collaboration with policy influencers and policy makers in US-based democracy organizations during a period of significant change for global democracy assistance.
- Developing the Stockholm Consensus on Electoral Integrity, which is based on input and discussion with electoral leaders from 40 countries, convened in Stockholm to share and learn from one another. The Consensus establishes principles that address the nuanced risks facing elections today. These principles have inspired international donors to review their approaches to electoral assistance.
- Empowering the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) of more than 160 partners to take collective global action to defend and advance democracy. The Coalition has demonstrated that strong professional networks are essential for collective global action.
- Launching the International Climate and Democracy Coalition community of practice. This has inspired civil society, government officials, and donors, to engage in joint action on climate-democracy nexus topics.

Another pillar of this work is to ensure that the actors who protect and renew democracy can do so based on data and evidence. **In 2025, International IDEA has noted an increasing demand for its knowledge products, which strengthens the idea that evidence-based analyses are important for upholding and continuously improving democratic principles.** For example, the outcome harvesting process in 2025 revealed that:

- Civil society organizations, think tanks, and advocacy groups worldwide are actively leveraging Global State of Democracy (GSoD) data and report findings to inform debate, promote democratic accountability, and support regional democratization efforts.
- The GSoD initiative, including the Democracy Tracker, is becoming a key resource for academics and researchers worldwide, providing data and conceptual frameworks to deepen understanding of democratic trends. Its impact is evident in a range of published works, from country profiles and analyses of governance, to references in major academic volumes and opinion pieces addressing democratic reforms.
- The GSoD report has been widely referenced by both local and international media across various countries. In 2025, its analysis and data have been used by media

outlets such as El Pais, DW, The Guardian, BBC, New York Times, and SwissInfo, to scrutinize democratic performance and inform citizens.

- International IDEA's Political Finance Database is widely recognized as a key resource for evidence-based political finance reform. Its comparative data equips policymakers, reformers, and civil society with actionable insights, directly informing new regulations and strengthening democratic standards worldwide.
- International IDEA has played a leading role in strengthening cooperation between actors working on transitional justice, constitution building, and peace mediation, by facilitating negotiations, offering expert advice, and organizing dialogues. These efforts have often been informed by knowledge products and comparative examples developed by the Institute.
- International IDEA's six databases and two dashboards on elections underpin global media coverage, support electoral stakeholders, and contribute to the development of good practices in electoral management.
- International IDEA's data and analyses contributed to raising awareness of and responses to the impact of natural hazards on electoral processes among electoral stakeholders.
- International IDEA organized a workshop with the National Assembly of Zambia and participants from 11 parliaments to strengthen strategic planning and foster peer learning. The event led to practical changes in participating parliaments' planning processes and resulted in the co-creation of a practitioner-informed handbook for parliamentary strategic planning.

It is likely that the growing interest in the GSoD is a result of continuous development of the GSoD products. Based on feedback and learnings these products have increasingly focused on policy-friendly analysis and recommendations. Similarly, it is evident that knowledge products that are developed to respond to a specific request or requirement by a boundary partner are more likely to be utilized. A good example of this are the knowledge products that have been developed to inform dialogues on unconstitutional changes of government in Africa. **Another good practice is to ensure that boundary partners are involved in the process of developing knowledge products and guidelines for themselves and their peers.** Such a process-oriented approach to advancing knowledge creates the conditions for the practitioners' problems to be answered and ensures that their experiences are included in analyses. A good example of this was the handbook for strategic planning at parliaments developed at the workshop in Zambia. Another example is the global learning exercise on electoral assistance that International IDEA conducted in 2020 and published in a report entitled *Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Electoral Assistance* (EBA Report 2021:05).

Learning how to ensure **political representation** by protecting elections from deliberate harm



Key learnings

- International IDEA has led efforts to update electoral norms to protect electoral integrity and other emerging electoral challenges. Global lessons learned have been codified in the Stockholm Consensus on Electoral Integrity, the Model Commitments for Genuine and Credible Elections, the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity (GNSEI) principles, and the Global Methodology on the Enablers and Incentives of Electoral Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).
- Global norms can guide work in countries, but local stakeholders must tailor these to their context in a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, ensuring that civil society is included. Effective processes that bring together diverse stakeholders are essential for protecting electoral integrity.
- Protecting elections from deliberate harm is not possible through outdated and unresponsive electoral assistance frameworks and approaches such as inflexible programming, short-term funding, and risk aversion. Any effort to protect elections must be responsive to evolving challenges and adapt as situations change, noting the importance of maintaining engagement even when political conditions deteriorate.

Electoral regulations, institutions, and processes have been under transformation and under threat for some years as electoral authorities face intersecting challenges including political pressure, security risks, evolving digital landscapes, and extreme weather events. In response to these challenges International IDEA initiated a global learning exercise on electoral assistance in 2020 and published a report for the Swedish Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) that summarized the learnings, entitled *Supporting Elections Effectively: Principles and Practice of Electoral Assistance* (EBA Report 2021:05). The report concludes that three context-related developments shapes electoral assistance today:

1. Firstly, democracy backsliding is affecting the integrity of elections, and electoral assistance principles require expanding, even recalibration, from an emphasis on "consolidating electoral processes" to one of "protecting elections" from unscrupulous, deliberate harm.
2. Secondly, the impact of misinformation spread through social media and the risk of contestation at every electoral step exemplify how the public trust necessary to accept election results as legitimate can no longer be taken for granted. Electoral management bodies must contend with a new world of online campaigns, rampant disinformation, digital finance, and electronic voting.
3. Thirdly, electoral processes are becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards, such as weather calamities, and man-made ones, such as epidemics, misinformation, and global terrorism.

In response, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are revisiting established practices in electoral system design, voting arrangements and campaign regulation, while reassessing policies to safeguard their independence. With an aim to support EMBs and other electoral stakeholders to develop such practices International IDEA has facilitated a cycle of events to promote the exchange of experiences and learnings on how to protect elections. These events culminated with the Stockholm Conference on Electoral Integrity, in June 2025. The conference brought together representatives of more than 40 EMBs, researchers, international development partners, and other stakeholders.

The learnings from these discussions informed the Stockholm Consensus on Electoral Integrity, highlighting achievements in upholding electoral integrity as well as other emerging electoral challenges. The Consensus charts a four-point agenda for protecting electoral integrity, calling on national and international actors to enhance cooperation, strengthen mechanisms to protect Electoral Management Bodies' independence, promote respectful electoral conduct, and ensure timely and effective democratic electoral reform.

Moreover, the Institute convened electoral actors to promote updated guidelines on electoral processes in the form of the Model Commitments for Genuine and Credible Elections, as well as the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity (GNSEI) principles on EMB independence and electoral reform. Working closely with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Red de Observación e Integridad Electoral (RedOIE), the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the core GNSEI members have revitalized the wider network to prepare for the next round of key global norms documents. **Each of these efforts is designed to be responsive to lessons learned about complexities of modern elections, such as the rise of voting outside traditional polling stations, the role of new technologies, disinformation, and the risks of legitimizing unsustainable electoral processes.**

Another key learning is that protecting elections from deliberate harm is not possible through outdated and unresponsive electoral assistance frameworks and approaches such as inflexible programming, short-term funding, and risk adversity to engage in volatile contexts. To address such shortcomings in electoral assistance International IDEA in 2025 published a technical note for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). This note was designed to provide Sida with guidance on gauging and implementing electoral assistance, putting particular emphasis on the role of EMBs, the information environment, and civil society, as well as the transformed risk environment in which elections take place. Based on the insights of International IDEA's report for the Swedish Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), **the note highlights the need for context-aware, flexible, and people-centred approaches in electoral support.** Moreover, with Sweden and France as partners, in July 2025, International IDEA supported the OECD's Development Assistance Committee's Governance Network to raise the importance of updated electoral assistance principles.

This normative work is building on International IDEA's work on protecting electoral integrity, inclusivity, and effectiveness in Albania, Finland, Gabon, Guyana, Mauritius, Nepal, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, and Ukraine and advancing good practices against digital interference in elections in Albania, Central America, Côte de Ivoire, Fiji, Iraq, Libya, Macedonia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Senegal, and Ukraine. **Based on lessons generated from interacting with stakeholders in these countries International IDEA has developed an Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections, which aims to enhance electoral integrity by equipping electoral stakeholders with structured and collaborative resources for risk management, resilience-building, and crisis management.**

The Institute has also released a Global Methodology on the Enablers and Incentives of Electoral Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI). The Guide has been used by CSOs to guide national analyses and identify enablers and incentives of electoral FIMI in Moldova, North Macedonia, Senegal, and, [North Macedonia](#), Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. These analyses seek to identify reforms and dialogue spaces to address domestic vulnerabilities and to increase FIMI resilience. **The fact that the analysis is led by networks of local actors is crucial, as it enables them to both identify the contextual intricacies that characterize disinformation and to develop the collaborative strength needed to build democratic resilience against FIMI.** Côte d'Ivoire. These analyses seek to identify reforms and dialogue spaces to address domestic vulnerabilities and to increase FIMI resilience. **The fact that the analysis is led by networks of local actors is crucial, as it enables them to both identify the contextual intricacies that characterize disinformation and to develop the collaborative strength needed to build democratic resilience against FIMI.**

In a lessons-learning workshop International IDEA's Electoral Processes team reflected on these learnings and elaborated on three types of electoral integrity safeguards—legal, institutional, and procedural. They concluded that while democratic laws and strong institutions are necessary, effective processes that bring together diverse stakeholders are essential for protecting electoral integrity. **The group agreed on the importance of whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches, ensuring that civil society is included in efforts to protect elections and that remedies are coordinated across different actors.** The team highlighted the need to foster resilience and professional courage among civil servants and EMB staff, emphasizing the value of supporting them to resist political pressure and maintain integrity during periods of democratic backsliding.

Another key theme that emanated from the lessons-learning workshop was that any effort to protect elections must be responsive to evolving challenges and adapt as situations change, noting the importance of maintaining engagement even when political conditions deteriorate. In donor funded electoral assistance projects this can be challenging as rigid project workplans and financial requirements sometimes makes it difficult to shift focus when circumstances evolve. Participants argued that project teams may become 'hostage' to logframe logic and donor contracts, limiting their ability to adapt activities when the context changes, and emphasized the value of designing projects with built-in flexibility.

Learning how to improve citizens' political representation by strengthening parliaments



Key learnings

- International collaboration can be a key driver for strengthening parliamentary institutions and advancing democratic governance. Peer-to-peer partnerships can facilitate the exchange of expertise, foster mutual understanding, and support institutional development.
- Capacity development activities must take their departure from an understanding of the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist in the Parliament they are supporting. Only then can trust be established so that activities can address the specific needs of participating parliaments.
- Blending experience exchanges, structured training, and advisory services produces deeper learning and helps embed new tools and practices institutionally.

Since 2019 International IDEA has implemented the EU-funded INTER PARES programme, which operates through a collaborative model that brings together parliaments from the EU with parliaments in various countries to share knowledge and expertise. Its core mechanism involves establishing peer-to-peer partnerships, where parliamentary representatives engage directly with their counterparts in other nations. These exchanges allow for the transfer of good practices, mutual learning, and the strengthening of institutional capacities. Through the programme International IDEA has developed its knowledge and skills in parliamentary support, which has led to more long-term projects with parliaments in countries such as Bhutan, The Gambia, Libya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Panama, Ukraine, and Uruguay.

The INTER PARES programme has yielded several key learnings. Firstly, it has highlighted the importance of international collaboration in strengthening parliamentary institutions and advancing democratic governance. The project demonstrated that peer-to-peer partnerships can facilitate the exchange of expertise, foster mutual understanding, and support institutional development. **Another significant learning was the value of tailored capacity-development activities, which address the specific needs and contexts of participating parliaments.** Additionally, the programme has underscored the necessity of long-term engagement and sustained support to ensure lasting impact and institutional resilience. Some other key learnings can be summarized as follows:

- **Trust-building is essential in challenging political contexts:** In difficult or sensitive environments, sustained trust-building with partner parliaments is a prerequisite for progress. International IDEA's experience is that flexibility, patience, and open dialogue enable partners to engage more openly and collaborate across a wider range of themes.
- **Capacity development activities must take their departure from an understanding of the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist in the Parliament they are supporting.**
- **Involving parliamentary staff in baseline assessments enhances ownership and commitment:** When their work and priorities are reflected in planned activities, staff

become more engaged and responsive, ensuring greater impact throughout implementation.

- **Peer-to-peer approaches generate transferable knowledge:** Peer-to-peer learning is especially powerful when experiences are documented and adapted for different contexts. Well-designed exchanges can lead to reusable methods and knowledge products that strengthen parliamentary development beyond a single country or partnership.
- **Engagement and ownership strengthen peer learning:** Hands-on, context-relevant formats — such as round tables and practical exercises — enhance engagement among parliamentary staff and experts. Involving staff directly in assessments and planning processes increases ownership and the likelihood that new practices will be applied.
- **Combining methods leads to deeper learning:** Blending experience exchanges, structured training, and advisory services produces deeper learning and helps embed new tools and practices institutionally. Monitoring and evaluation data consistently supported the effectiveness of this mixed-method approach.
- **Gender equality requires deep, long-term institutional change:** Sustainable progress on gender equality cannot rely on one-off activities. It depends on cultural and institutional transformation, adequate resources, cross-parliamentary learning, and the presence of internal champions. Change happens when informal networks and committed actors work together to shift both practices and norms.

[Learning how to respond to unconstitutional changes of government and protecting constitutional governance and rule of law](#)



Key learnings

- Strengthening the social contract between the government and citizens is likely to be the most effective way to avoid unconstitutional changes of government, such as coup d'états. This requires a multifaceted strategy that strengthens democratic institutions, promotes inclusivity, and enhances socioeconomic resilience.
- The challenge in balancing engagement with de facto authorities after an unconstitutional change of government without appearing to legitimize unconstitutional access to power has led to shortcomings in responses to such events.
- International support would benefit from becoming more inclusive, context-driven, and focused on the broader social contract between citizens and the state. Such an approach would imply working toward more inclusive and accountable systems of governance with both formal and informal authorities.

Since 2020, there have been a notable increase in the number of Unconstitutional Changes of Governments (UCGs) in West Africa and the Sahel region, in countries such as Mali, Guinea,

Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon. These sudden and often violent changes in government have raised concerns both within the continent and internationally, prompting questions and analyses about their underlying political, economic, and security causes. These analyses suggest that addressing such challenges requires strengthening democratic institutions, promoting good governance, tackling corruption, and ensuring that governments can meet the needs and aspirations of their people.

For these reasons, the Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands decided to support International IDEA to implement the *Toward Peace Building and Inclusive Governance: Responding to Governance Challenges in Transitional Contexts* project, which is funded with earmarked core funding to the Institute. The purpose of this project is to learn about and support efforts to mitigate against emerging threats to political stability and democratic governance in Africa and the Middle East, particularly in the form of coups and other forms of UCGs and constitutional transitions in fragile and conflict affected States.

Many of the meetings, dialogues, conferences, and research activities undertaken under this project have aimed at enhancing learning on how UCGs can be prevented altogether or addressed if they occur. One underlying hypothesis has been that a means to find solutions is to analyse which societal factors trigger UCGs, i.e. to examine their root causes and the political contexts that make such disruptions more probable. Building on International IDEA's experiences and an analysis of panel discussions hosted by International IDEA during a high-level meeting in Dakar in September 2025, there seems to be consensus among international actors that UCGs in Africa are rarely the result of a single factor. Rather, they reflect the interplay of institutional weakness, social division, economic distress, and contested legitimacy, including weak political institutions, endemic corruption, disputed elections, political exclusion and marginalization, and security challenges which weakens state authority.

These insights resonate well with one of the ideas underpinning the *Toward Peace Building and Inclusive Governance* project, namely that applying a 'social contract lens' while analyzing the root causes of political unrest, may help shape effective responses to UCGs. **More concretely, this would imply that strengthening the social contract between the government and citizens is likely to be the most effective way to avoid UCGs.**

There seems to be general agreement that this requires a multifaceted strategy that strengthens democratic institutions, promotes inclusivity, and enhances socioeconomic resilience:

- **Electoral reforms** that improve transparency and fairness can restore public trust and deter actors from seeking extra-constitutional means of change. Establishing independent electoral commissions, adopting robust monitoring mechanisms, and ensuring timely resolution of disputes are essential steps.
- **Inclusive governance is critical to reduce exclusion and marginalization.** This involves guaranteeing equal political participation for all groups through legal protections, affirmative policies, and meaningful representation at all levels of government. National dialogues and reconciliation processes can help bridge divides and foster shared ownership in state institutions.
- To **address security challenges**, states should invest in professionalizing security forces, strengthening rule of law, and promoting community-based approaches to

conflict prevention. International partnerships and regional cooperation can also help tackle transnational threats that undermine stability.

- **Economic reforms aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment**, focusing on job creation, equitable resource distribution, and social safety nets to mitigate grievances that fuel support for unconstitutional change is fundamental.
- Sound fiscal policies and **anti-corruption measures** can further enhance state legitimacy and resilience. Ultimately, sustained commitment to democratic norms, responsive leadership, and broad-based participation forms the foundation for preventing UCGs and ensuring long-term stability.

However, strengthening good governance is more difficult after a UCG has taken place, as the legitimacy of leaders who come to power through unconstitutional means is highly contested. There is thus a challenge in balancing engagement with de facto authorities without appearing to legitimize unconstitutional access to power, which complicates efforts to address governance issues and restore constitutional order. International IDEA has learned that this dilemma has led to several key shortcomings in the African Union's and African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) responses to UCGs and other complex constitutional transitions:

1. Firstly, there has been an **overemphasis on reinstating incumbents** rather than promoting inclusive and participatory transitions, which can undermine efforts to reestablish a social contract as the process often lacks a focus on the legitimate aspirations and rights of citizens, especially those of vulnerable groups such as women and youth.
2. Additionally, immediate responses have included **coordinated diplomatic pressure**—such as issuing joint statements condemning the UCG and calling for a swift return to constitutional order – as well as targeted sanctions against coup leaders and their supporters. These responses have prevented diplomatic dialogue.
3. Furthermore, there has been insufficient institutional capacity within Mediation Support Units, unclear principles of engagement, and inadequate coordination among RECs and international partners. These issues contribute to less effective mediation efforts and the risk of **mechanical implementation of normative frameworks** that do not address the root causes of crises.

Overall, International IDEA's conclusions in combination with an analysis of the various interventions by speakers and panelists at the high-level meeting in Dakar suggest that the AU's and RECs' **support would benefit from becoming more inclusive, context-driven, and focused on the broader social contract between citizens and the state. Such an approach would imply a coordinated approach with peace mediators, working toward more inclusive and accountable systems of governance with both formal and informal authorities.** It would involve:

- **Inclusive Engagement:** Involvement of all relevant stakeholders—including transitional authorities, civil society organisations, and affected communities—in transitional design and dialogue. This ensures that support is not only about, but also with, the people it aims to serve, thus strengthening social contract principles of participation and accountability.
- **Country-Level Technical Assistance:** Effective programming is achieved through sustained, context-specific technical support at the national level, rather than relying

solely on large, one-off workshops. This approach allows for deeper engagement with the social contract dynamics unique to each context.

- **Safeguarding Civic Space:** Enabling civil society and the media to participate in governance processes is crucial for a vibrant social contract.
- **Strategic Partnerships and Coordination:** Effective programming requires collaboration with regional and international actors (such as the AU, EU, and RECs) to provide both technical and political support. This helps create the enabling environment necessary for long-term social contract-based reforms to take root.

In summary, actors seem to agree that international support can be more effective if it is inclusive, context-driven, protective of civic space, and strategically coordinated. These conditions help ensure that governance reforms are both accountable and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

Learning how to defend citizens' rights to political participation

Key learnings

- By convening dialogues between political leaders, social leaders and other authorities in Peru, International IDEA and its local partners have helped these actors to develop strategies for improving democratic dialogue at local and regional levels. The key to success has been a dialogue methodology where much attention is given to the art of listening to others, instead of arguing and presenting opinions.
- Another successful method tested in Peru is Neighbourhood Hearings, a mechanism that directly connects citizens with their mayors, under clear rules that require listening, responding, and making public commitments.
- A pilot with citizens assemblies which informed advocacy at COP 30 in Brazil proved to be a valuable method for closing the vertical gap between citizens and policymakers. The methodology strengthened the relationships between local and state governments, climate finance actors, deliberation facilitators and climate-focused CSOs.

Inclusive participation is a fundamental enabling element of a functioning democracy. Yet women, minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, youth and people exposed to socio-economic challenges often struggle to access democratic institutions. For these and other reasons many people have lost trust in existing political institutions and processes, which are often seen as dominated by elites—a factor in the recent rise of populist and illiberal parties. In this context, citizen movements are increasingly prominent alternatives to political parties, especially on complex issues like climate change. Civil society groups play growing roles as countervailing institutions, upholding democracy even when formal institutions like legislatures are weakening.

By implementing projects in challenging contexts, the Institute has learned about approaches to enhancing political participation which seem to work well. For example, in response to the political crisis in Peru International IDEA has aimed to rebuilding trust between citizens and political actors by facilitating meaningful political dialogue. By convening dialogues between

political leaders, social leaders and other authorities, International IDEA and its local partners have helped these actors to develop strategies for improving democratic dialogue at local and regional levels. **Participants testified that these dialogues have facilitated constructive discussions where the stakeholders were able to deal with tensions and conflicts to solve problems.** As the stakeholders represented groups that did not meet often and did not trust each other this was regarded as a key achievement, **enabled by dialogue methodologies where much attention is given to the art of listening to others, instead of arguing and presenting opinions.**

In another innovative approach in Peru, International IDEA partnered with El Comercio, the country's oldest newspaper, to conduct Neighbourhood Hearings, a mechanism that directly connects citizens with their mayors, under clear rules that require listening, responding, and making public commitments. International IDEA designed the methodology and provided technical assistance to the initiative, which includes two stages. First, a workshop is held in which residents identify and prioritize their main concerns, formulating representative and evidence-based questions. These questions are then presented to local authorities at a public hearing, where mayors must offer concrete, achievable answers, and solutions with defined deadlines. El Comercio subsequently provides journalistic monitoring of compliance with these commitments.

At the beginning, mayors were reluctant to participate. **Over time, and after learning about the methodology, they became actively involved and facilitated their implementation. At the same time residents strengthened their capacity to organize information, present evidence, and demand results, which contributes to safe, regulated, and evidence-based dialogues that reduce mistrust and improve collaboration between public and social actors. El Comercio contributes to these results by increasing the visibility of the activities and monitoring the commitments made.** In 2025, more than 2,300 people participated in eight hearing processes, in which residents identified, organized, and presented their main civic problems to eight mayors.

A final example on effective ways to enhance political participation is International IDEA's Climate Change and Democracy work, where methods for how deliberative democracy can enable citizens and regional and local governments to close the vertical participation gap in climate policymaking have been explored. International IDEA and its local partner, Delibera Brasil, in 2025 piloted two citizen assemblies in Brazil. Lessons from these assemblies were subsequently shared at strategic events at the 30th global meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – COP30. **The methodology strengthened the relationships between local and state governments, climate finance actors, deliberation facilitators and climate-focused CSOs. They also gave these actors space to reflect on how citizen deliberation in climate assemblies can produce actionable recommendations to governments on how to make climate finance more accessible, transparent, and effective. What are the best-fit interventions for the complex contexts in which International IDEA works?**

What are the best-fit interventions for the complex contexts in which International IDEA works?

Key learnings

- A key to success is working closely with boundary partners to understand institutional incentives and constraints and find ways to address these constraints. Investing time and resources in building trust between stakeholders is crucial.
- Adaptation and flexibility need to be embedded in programme design, through flexible results frameworks, work plans and budgets built around outcomes, not around predetermined lists of activities with pre-set output targets.
- Instead of implementing international “best practices” local stakeholders must be provided with opportunities to shape and own solutions that work for them, in their specific context.

As evident by the learnings generated in response to the previous learning question it is time to move away from searching for best practices or attempts to answer questions on *what works* to instead explore contextual approaches to *what works, for whom, in which circumstances*. Through implementation and evaluation of projects in various countries on different continents over the last few years International IDEA has repeatedly learned lessons that resonate well with this approach.

To summarize these institutional learnings on how to find best-fit interventions one of the most prominent learnings is the importance of facilitating joint project design processes with boundary partners. For example, as outlined above, the EU-funded INTER PARES programme, which supports parliaments, has concluded that **good projects must take their departure from an understanding of the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist** in the Parliament they are supporting. Similarly, the Programme concludes that involving parliamentary staff in baseline assessments enhances ownership and commitment: **When their work and priorities are reflected in planned activities, staff become more engaged and responsive, ensuring greater impact throughout implementation.**

Similarly, an internal annual review of International IDEA’s rule of law programme in Nigeria found that **a key to success is working closely with boundary partners to understand institutional incentives and constraints and find ways to address these constraints.** Moreover, the Programme team notes that **investing time and resources in building trust between stakeholders is crucial:** If stakeholders treat each other with respect, they will be able to work better together, as they understand and solve problems.

The upshot of these learnings is that development cooperation is not so much about implementing “best practices.” Rather, an international partner such as International IDEA can help facilitate discussion with local stakeholders on how to use international experiences to shape solutions that work for them, in their specific context.

Another key learning that emanates from projects across the world with various thematic priorities and boundary partners is that **adaptation and flexibility need to be embedded in programme design, through flexible results frameworks, work plans and budgets built around outcomes, not around predetermined lists of activities with pre-set output targets.** International IDEA's system for project design results management, where the focus lies on tracking and analysing the web of changes in behaviours, relationships and practices that evolve during a change process, is underpinned by these lessons. This system for learning-based management (LBM) is quite different from practices where results-based management is accountability focused, with an emphasis on measuring whether activities are implemented in accordance with plans and whether preset milestones and targets are achieved. In contrast, learning-based management is an ongoing process where plans are regularly adapted based on lessons that have been learned through monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

However, it is sometimes challenging to persuade some donors to accept flexible workplans and International IDEA's approach to learning-based management. According to a study published by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, the reasons for this are that there has been a tendency for donors to i) prioritize what can be measured easily; ii) pursue the purpose of accountability at the expense of learning and policy direction; and iii) become overly bureaucratic and rigid. The study points out that some of these challenges derive from a rigid application of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA).¹ **None the less, based on its institutional learnings International IDEA is convinced that its LBM approach is well tailored for democracy assistance and an enabler for relevant and effective projects.**

How does the work of International IDEA lead to improved democratic outcomes for our boundary partners and stakeholders?

Learning to deliver innovative capacity development approaches



Key learnings

- Ensuring boundary partner ownership is the most critical factor for the successful achievement, and sustainability, of project results.
- Local presence, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement are critical drivers of effectiveness.
- Capacity development projects should combine approaches to learning, as this leads to deeper learning and helps embed new processes and tools within institutions. Such approaches may include on-the-job advisory services, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and study visits.

¹ For reference, see OECD, "Learning from Results-Based Management Evaluations and Reviews" (OECD 2019).

The learnings related to how International IDEA can tailor best-fit interventions resonate well with what the Institute has learned about capacity development processes. Over the last few years, the Budget and Programme Performance team (BPP) at International IDEA has undertaken several evaluations which have accumulated evidence on how capacity development can be most effective. In 2025, evaluations were conducted for projects in nine different countries, across four different continents, each within a unique context which influenced approaches to implementation. Despite this, common themes did emerge. **As noted in previous Learning Reports, ensuring boundary partner ownership was seen as the most critical factor for the successful achievement, and sustainability, of project results.**

Due to these differing contexts, projects adopted different approaches to ensuring relevance and enhancing ownership, reaffirming that a tailored, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to programming is beneficial. **Another recurring learning is the significance of flexibility and adaptability in project implementation. Projects that maintained close engagement with boundary partners and were responsive to changing contexts – whether political, social, or logistical – were better able to remain relevant and effective.** This was evident across diverse settings, from dynamic environments like the African Union, Peru, and Fiji among others, to more stable contexts such as Bhutan.

For example, the EU-funded *Strengthening Pan-African Capacities for Electoral Observation and Assistance* (SPEC) project, where the African Union (AU) served as the main boundary partner, was implemented in an unpredictable environment where, in many instances, AU priorities were informed by unplanned political developments in AU Member States. The project thus adopted a demand driven approach to implementation which emphasized flexibility and adaptability to accommodate emerging priorities and respond to AU requests as they arose. This flexible approach allowed the project activities to remain relevant to the AU by providing support where it was needed the most. Boundary partners noted this approach as a strategic advantage of the project.

Similarly, the South Pacific, where the UKFCDO-funded *South Pacific Electoral Enhancement and Development* (SPEED) project was implemented, is also characterized by a dynamic political context. The project's flexibility and adaptability in its engagement in Fiji were credited as important in ensuring project activities remained relevant to boundary partners when the planned local government election was postponed. Through close collaboration with boundary partners, the project developed a set of knowledge products which will be adapted, and updated, for the elections should they eventually take place.

Likewise, in Peru, the evaluation of the USAID-funded *Consolidación de la Democracia Peruana* project found the project's ability to adapt to a changing context, which led to its original objectives being unrealistic and some of the planned activities redundant, as a strength. By changing approach, the project found meaningful ways to use the changed context as an opportunity to engage with boundary partners.

In Bhutan, where the context is more predictable, it was noted that the EU-funded *Nyamdrel II* project's efforts to contextualise activities as well as its constant engagement with boundary partners were key factors contributing to its relevance and in fostering a strong sense of ownership. The project's approach to engaging local experts as resource persons was highly valued as this supported the contextualization of democratic processes in Bhutan, where historical, cultural, and social values were seen as important in shaping its democracy.

While these projects were implemented in different countries and contexts, flexibility, and adaptability to respond to in-country developments and the resultant changing priorities were key in ensuring relevance. Programmatically, this was made possible by the projects'

constant engagement with boundary partners. Close interaction with the boundary partners was made possible by the projects' in-country presence which, as noted by evaluation interviewees, allowed them to be more responsive to requests and quicker to adapt to changes needed for the project to remain relevant. **Local presence, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement were therefore critical drivers of effectiveness.**

Through its evaluations BPP has also systematically evaluated and documented a diverse range of capacity development initiatives across multiple contexts. The evolving landscape of these projects has yielded a rich repository of lessons, drawing from both formal evaluations and practical experiences. These insights, shared through project reports, brown bag lunches, and Communities of Practice, have helped shape an understanding of what makes capacity development effective within the Institute. **A key learning is that capacity development projects should combine approaches to learning, as this leads to deeper learning and helps embed new processes and tools within institutions.**

For example:

- In Nepal International IDEA has worked with a mentoring approach model in several projects. **The idea is to embed mentors in organizations, who can promote innovative approaches and practices in the institutional culture and develop staff capacities at the same time.** Lessons learned from the mentoring approach are positive, as it enables International IDEA to combine inspiring and supportive approaches over time, and thus gradually embed new practices in organizations.
- One of the key lessons identified in a handbook published by the Inter Pares Programme is that **real change happens when informal networks, critical actors, and champions work together to transform both culture and practice.**
- In Bhutan International IDEA applied a training of trainers approach where **international trainers trained local boundary partners to provide training to peers:** for example, local journalists were trained to provide training to CSOs and Parliament on the role of media in a democracy. The peer-to-peer approach increased the project's impact and sustainability as the trainers were able to tailor the training to the local stakeholders' needs and to strengthen their own knowledge and skills in the process.
- In another innovative approach in Bhutan, **trainings to CSOs on advocacy were complemented with opportunities for sub-grants for advocacy projects.** This proved to enhance insights gained from training and generated tangible outcomes.
- In Nigeria and Libya, **study visits with peer-to-peer learning have been well received and seem to lead to results.** International IDEA's Programme team in Nigeria also reports that **convening people to share experiences with each other** is particularly useful.
- Inter Pares' **hands-on exercises with EU Member State parliaments' staff strengthened Inter Pares' peer-to-peer learning model.** Moreover, Inter Pares' Staff Members have found that **practical formats like roundtables, which encourage peer-to-peer dialogues on real-world experiences, foster mutual learning.**
- In Inter Pares' project in Zambia, the Youth Parliamentary Academy (YPA), introduced **an innovative model that prioritizes direct youth engagement over traditional civic education.** By bringing together young people, parliamentary staff and experts, the initiative fostered meaningful dialogue and co-creation of educational materials.

- In The Gambia and in Gabon, International IDEA supported political parties to develop Codes of Conduct to guide responsible election campaigning. **The participatory way in which the Codes were developed facilitated ownership and thereby behavioural change, which was reinforced by the appointment of local moral guarantors, who intervened if the Code was breached.**
- In the Philippines, a project aimed at strengthening Indigenous peoples' rights **provided both duty-bearers² and right-holders³ with the tools they needed to constructively engage with one another.** This contributed to results as it helped both sides overcome knowledge, capacity, and network constraints.

In conclusion, the collective learnings from International IDEA's recent evaluations and project experiences underscore the importance of combining multiple approaches to capacity development. As demonstrated across a variety of contexts—from Nepal and Bhutan to Nigeria, Zambia, and Fiji—lasting change is rarely achieved through isolated activities. Instead, it is the strategic layering of methods, responsiveness to local realities, and commitment to continuous learning that build resilient institutions and empower individuals.

How do we strengthen and enhance our learning across Programmes and Teams and share findings with donors and partners?

Communities of Practice, brown-bag lunches, audits, and internal and external evaluations

International IDEA had two existing Communities of Practice (CoPs) which share experiences and learnings across regions and workstreams. One CoP targets Programme Managers and the other financial and administrative Staff Members. In 2025 both CoPs met four times. The meetings are virtual and typically 20-30 Staff Members participate in the CoP Project Managers and up to 40 in the CoP Finance and Admin.

These CoPs are used, *inter alia*, to communicate key learnings including an understanding of what works where and how, or what is challenging. Topics include lessons learned from implementing projects and project evaluations, discussions on findings and conclusions from external and internal audits, and feedback sessions on draft policies and procedures. In addition, an annual regional Heads of Finance and Operations meeting is held in person in Stockholm to tease out challenges experienced in project management and implementation and to develop solutions.

In 2025, given the success of these initiatives it was decided to create a Community of Practice for Monitoring and Evaluation, and the CoP Finance and Admin was split into three separate CoPs that will cover similar topics, but with different points of focus – these are the CoP Finance which will focus on financial management and accounting aspects of new policies and procedures and two CoPs Admin which will focus on the administrative aspects. Two CoPs Admin have been created as the audience for this CoP was becoming too large to allow for effective participation.

² Duty-bearers are those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realize human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most used to refer to State actors, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers.

³ Rights-holders are individuals or social groups that have entitlements in relation to duty-bearers.

The Institute also organizes hybrid brown-bag lunches (BBLs) on a regular basis to share experiences across regions and teams, and to get input from external actors. In 2025, International IDEA convened eight BBLs focused on democracy, governance, elections, and institutional innovation. These included discussions on strengthening democratic resilience through support to civil society organizations and media in Central America, as well as practical institutional learning on International IDEA's publications strategy and editorial standards, the use of the TalentLMS platform to enhance online learning and stakeholder engagement, and the Electoral Risk Management Tool (ERMTTool). Artificial Intelligence and digital disruption emerged as key cross-cutting themes across several sessions and dedicated BBLs explored the internal use of AI tools such as MS Copilot. Participants also examined how to amplify International IDEA's global voice through the Global Democracy Coalition and reflected on new models of democratic innovation, including the Permanent Global Citizens' Assembly, launched at the UN Summit for the Future. Together, these sessions strengthened internal learning and reinforced cross-regional collaboration.

2025 also saw the continuation of the Democracy Exchanges for Member States (DEMS) on Electoral Integrity between Electoral Management Bodies of IDEA Member States, championed by Australia and Sweden, as well as a series of three Exchanges on gender, in close collaboration with Luxembourg. These Exchanges are a trusted platform for participants to discuss, debate and exchange on substantive issues connected to democracy, in a structured manner and on a continuous basis. As such, they served to enhance networks, spread good practices, stimulate further thinking and offer opportunities to build and learn. The exchanges highlighted, for example, that openness to experiences and practices from across the diversity of IDEA's membership is – to some participants surprisingly – rewarding. Participants confirmed that it takes time to build the trust required for frank exchanges, especially in online environments and on topics that involve diverse types of institutions and agendas. This multi-dimensional character of the Exchanges also proved to be a crucial factor in enabling closer collaboration between and across International IDEA's Programmes and Teams.

Another tool in the learning toolbox are evaluations. The Institute includes, wherever possible, internal mid-term or annual evaluations of restricted projects. The purpose of these evaluations, which are led by BPP, is both to provide semi-independent assessments of projects with recommendations intended to improve the individual projects, and to identify learnings that emerge during the implementation of projects. These learnings are shared in the Communities of Practice or as recommendations in other evaluations. To enhance institutional learning BPP may include colleagues from other teams in the evaluations.

The evaluations are shared with the donors and are thus a tool for evidence-based discussions with them. They are also made available on the intranet for all Staff Members. In 2025, the BPP team evaluated 11 projects. These included one regional project, which targets the African Union, as well as country projects, targeting various boundary partners, in Belarus, Bhutan, Fiji, Samoa, The Gambia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Panama and Peru. BPP also evaluated the Dutch earmarked core contribution to International IDEA, while an external evaluation of the EU funded Sudan project was commissioned.

How do we regularly update/refine policies and procedures to reflect new knowledge gained?

2025 report from the Executive Division



Key lesson learned: Policies, standard operating procedures, templates, and user-guides are key for documenting lessons learned. Trainings and coordination meetings are key to integrate the learnings into institutional practices.

In 2025, International IDEA updated its institutional Strategy to reflect new knowledge gained and increased emphasis on shared learning, partnership, convening, advocacy, and increased flexibility in programming areas. Moreover, the Executive Division regularly updates policies, standard operating procedures, templates, and user guides to facilitate institutional effectiveness on accounting and treasury, annual planning and reporting, human resources, learning-based management, partnerships, procurement, project management, resource mobilization, and risk management. These updates are based on continuous lesson learning from practice, internal and external audits and evaluations, and feedback from Staff Members and the Institute's Finance and Audit Committee.

The following strategies, policies, procedures, user guides, and templates were developed or reviewed in 2025, namely the:

1. Procurement FAQ was updated
2. Invoice templates were reviewed and revised
3. Opening (moving) an office checklist
4. Financial Regulations were revised and the revisions approved by Council
5. New procedure for payment of Stipends
6. New User guide for Transaction Descriptions
7. Project Management Procedure were revised
8. Procedures for setting up and operating Security Call Trees
9. Revision of the Prevention of Fraud and Corruption Policy
10. Guide for engaging with the EU
11. Project development, start up and inception phase checklist
12. New procedure for Internal Secondments
13. New procedure for HEAT Training
14. New procedure for Incident Reporting
15. New procedure for using Seerits
16. New User Guide for Other Services Revenue
17. New procedure for Utilizing In-House Staff Expertise and Skills in Projects

18. New user-friendly new intranet page developed for Onboarding
19. New User Guide for Credit Cards
20. Budget Management Manual
21. Revised User Guide for Contract administration and loading contracts into UBW
22. New User Guide for Properly Coded Purchase Orders for use as an alternate to Service Orders
23. A Factsheet for EU Grant Management at IDEA
24. Amendments to the Resource Mobilization Policy and the Resource Mobilization for Restricted Funding Procedure
25. A reworked supplier contract set separating the General Terms by contract type and including enhancements for the use of AI

As an example, International IDEA's Resource Mobilization Policy and Procedure was adopted in 2021. Subsequently various templates aimed at facilitating the resource mobilization process to improve institutional collaboration have been developed. These templates include a pre-award assessment template, which aims to ensure that the regions and HQ agree on what project proposals the Institute should present to donors. The template is continuously updated based on lessons learned about, for example, the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of ongoing projects.

During 2024, SGO and BPP developed a training handbook on resource mobilization and undertook trainings on the Resource Mobilization Policy and Procedure, including on the updated templates, with all Programmes. The trainings enabled constructive discussions and joint learning between HQ and regions, which resulted in further revisions of the Policy and Procedures in 2025. A key learning was that the Institute must be better at prioritizing where and with whom it should undertake fund-raising efforts. In response to this learning, Programme's Resource Mobilization strategies were operationalized in resource mobilization plans in the 2026 annual planning process.

Joint learning processes between various functions at the Institute are similar regarding other policies and procedures. For example, to improve procedures for monitoring and evaluation, International IDEA advocates for the adoption of its outcome focused learning-based management system in all projects and have an ambition to include internal evaluations of all projects. As all the internal evaluations are conducted by just four BPP Staff Members it is essential for projects to budget and plan for evaluations as part of their broader MEL efforts to ensure timely planning and coordination with BPP. However, the institutional guidelines and tools to support project managers develop MEL Plans, are not consistently utilized meaning plans are generally not developed in a timely manner, or they do not get operationalized. This not only affects planning and coordination but is also weakens efforts to institutionalise learning.

From learning to practice

For International IDEA, these learnings imply that:

- ✓ **To bolster policy makers' ability to support democracy and develop and revive democracy assistance, International IDEA shall boost its efforts to convene people and organizations from the global South and North on these issues.**

Action: When International IDEA's institutional Strategy was updated in 2022 the Institute's convening power was highlighted and incorporated as one of four reinforcing implementation strategies and this message was further strengthened in the update of the Strategy in 2025. Since then, the Institute has significantly bolstered its efforts to convene democratic actors and organizations across the globe. Not only has IDEA strengthened its convening role in many of its projects and partnerships such as the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC), but through the 30th anniversary events in 2025 the Institute intensified its efforts to convene policy makers and policy influencers at global level. Moreover, the Institute has developed its interactions with its Member States through Member State Exchanges over the last three years. That these efforts are relevant and achieve results is evidenced by outcome narratives in the 2025 Annual Outcome Report.

Discussions at events that are organized or co-organized by International IDEA are often underpinned by the Institute's data, analyses, and knowledge products. Over the last few years, International IDEA has sought feedback from users of these products and has responded by improving their policy-focus and user-friendliness. These efforts will continue in the coming years.

- ✓ **International IDEA shall continue to develop utilization-focused analyses and knowledge products to inform policy makers' and policy influencers' dialogue and decision-making.**

Action: It is likely that the growing interest in the GSoD is a result of continuous development of the GSoD products. Based on feedback and learning, these products have increasingly focused on policy-friendly analysis and recommendations. Similarly, it is evident that knowledge products that are developed to respond to a specific request or requirement by a boundary partner are more likely to be utilized. Another good practice is to ensure that boundary partners are involved in the process of developing knowledge products and guidelines for themselves and their peers. Such a process-oriented approach to advancing knowledge creates the conditions for the practitioners' problems to be answered and ensures that their experiences are included in analyses.

- ✓ **To improve impact, International IDEA shall nurture collaboration with its boundary partners and promote ownership through participatory methods in project design, project implementation, and project monitoring, evaluation, and learning.**

Action: In International IDEA's internal evaluations of projects, boundary partners often emphasize that the Institute has a more genuine approach to ownership than other international organizations. The reason for this is that IDEA's approach is deeply anchored in the belief that an international actor should not impose solutions or best practices on boundary partners but rather facilitate their development processes and provide them with ideas and examples on how to improve their

democratic practices. To strengthen this approach, the Institute's Project Proposal Template and User Guides for Project Design and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plans have been updated in 2024 and 2025 to further emphasize that project objectives should be developed together with boundary partners and that MEL practices should be participatory and learning focused. Moreover, these guiding documents emphasize that projects must be focused on supporting changes in relationships, behaviours, and practices of boundary partners rather than delivering outputs (such as trainings or new policies or operating procedures, for example).

However, it has been increasingly challenging to implement this approach in some projects, where International IDEA has been requested to implement pre-designed projects that have not always built on broad consultations with boundary partners. In such cases, the Institute undertakes consultations with boundary partners while developing workplans, but time for doing this is often limited, and the project design cannot change significantly at this stage in the process. The Institute is engaging in dialogue with donors that apply this approach, with an aim to inform them in what way such an approach can have negative implications.

- ✓ **International IDEA will continue to act as a neutral external convener and facilitator to facilitate dialogue between local actors while allowing them to identify local solutions to their challenges.**

Action: Over the years, International IDEA has learned to work with a non-prescriptive approach, presenting comparative examples and options (or a 'choice architecture'), rather than solutions, to local stakeholders. This approach has been embedded in the theories of change that underpins the updated institutional Strategy and is used for developing new projects. Moreover, this is an approach that is well integrated in the Institute's working culture, where experienced Staff Members continuously transfer their knowledge and experiences to new colleagues. It is important to maintain this institutional culture, which can be further reinforced in onboarding of new Staff Members.

- ✓ **International IDEA will advance its efforts to use mixed approaches to learning in capacity development efforts. Such approaches may, for example, include, but are not limited to, on-the-job training, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, study visits, networking, and dialogues.**

Action: International IDEA has increased its capacity development work significantly over the last decade and has continuously improved its methods for learning from good practice in projects and transfer these lessons to other projects. First, the Project Proposal Template was developed and updated since it was adopted. Second, the Institute has developed in-house evaluation capacity over the last few years and gradually adopted an approach where internal evaluators led by the Budget and Programme Performance Team undertake reviews of all projects either annually, mid-term, or at the end of the project cycle. An important aspect of these evaluations is to ensure that learnings from what works well (or not so well) in a project can be integrated into institutional learnings. These learnings are shared in this learning report, in the Community of Practice for Project Managers, and by BPP Staff Members in project design processes.

- ✓ **To maneuver effectively in complex contexts, International IDEA's work plans should be flexible and continuously revised, while drawing on local knowledge and feedback in learning-based management processes.**

Action: Democratic processes are shaped by volatile and ever-changing power relations which are formed by culture, context, political interests, and personal motivations. This illustrates that change processes in societies are complex and unpredictable. To strengthen this approach the Institute's Project Proposal Template, User Guides for Project Design and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plans and the Project Management Procedures emphasize the need to design projects that can adapt to changes political circumstances or learnings that emerge during project implementation. At the same time, it is always challenging to revise workplans and budgets to changing circumstances, as they are agreed upon with donors which may sometimes have strict rules and regulations in this regard. Staff Members in the Executive Division in Stockholm support project managers in such situations, as they have experience of how it has been possible to adapt projects in other countries.

Annex A: International IDEA's learning questions



On the first learning priority, **Context Matters**, the learning questions outlined in 2023 were:

- How do we learn about and address the complexity of the environments in which we work, with an initial focus on backsliding contexts, crisis contexts (i.e., volatile, and complex environments including war), and repressive contexts?
- What are the best-fit interventions for the complex contexts in which International IDEA works?



On the second learning priority, the **Democracy Support Cycle**, the questions were:

- How does the work of International IDEA lead to improved democratic outcomes for our boundary partners and stakeholders? How do our interventions lead to the intended change in behaviour or practices?
- How do we leverage and combine all International IDEA's approaches effectively to drive improved outcomes?
 - How do we better connect the four types of work International IDEA executes (think-do-convene-advocate)?
 - How can we create a virtuous cycle of knowledge production, capacity development, advocacy and convening of dialogues? How do we make our knowledge useful?
- How do we adapt programmes during their implementation to reflect ongoing learning?
 - How do we ensure that we learn from what works well and not so well to adapt our capacity development projects during implementation?
 - How or to what extent can we adapt our programming to changing dynamics on the ground?



And on the third learning priority, **Connecting and Institutionalizing Knowledge**, the questions were:

- How do we institutionalize a process to use the knowledge and to revisit that knowledge on a regular basis to make sure we stay relevant and effective? What kind of knowledge management is needed?
- How do we strengthen and enhance our learning across Programmes and Teams and share findings with donors and partners?
 - How do we create and nurture a learning culture at International IDEA and with donors and partners where one is free to express one's honest observations, doubts, and struggles without the fear of jeopardizing the existing funding, power dynamics, or relationships?
- How does our learning impact our project design and implementation?
- How do we regularly update/refine policies and procedures to reflect new knowledge gained? How can we explore alternate procedures with donors who rely on us to execute our existing procedures?

Annex B: Workplan

Thematic Priority 1: Context Matters

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
1.1 How do we learn about and address the complexity of the environments in which we work?	--Understanding of each context is developed locally through expertise, knowledge gathering, and contacts of project teams in each country. --Information is shared informally within a region through meetings and discussion. --Information is shared occasionally across the Institute through Community of Practice events.	Establish a process to develop context/power analysis for each new environment in which IDEA enters – how to do this at the ground level. This should include a process of how this information can be refreshed at regular intervals for all environments in which IDEA works.	Not achieved	Regional Directors to develop regional/context-sensitive approaches. BPP to support, e.g. provide options and consider if/how to leverage outside guidance.
		Dedicate at least two Community of Practice meetings annually to sharing learning across the Institute on working in specific contexts.	Achieved	BPP in collaboration with project leads working in relevant contexts
		Learning about relevant context is included as a learning objective in two restricted and two core projects across Institute.	Included in earmarked core funding from the Netherlands.	Project leads (with consultation from BPP as needed).

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
1.2 What are the best-fit interventions for the complex contexts in which International IDEA works?	--Many if not all restricted projects undergo ongoing, midterm and/or final evaluations which examine relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of interventions in meeting stated outcome objectives. --Evaluations are shared with project Staff Members, donor and posted on intranet. --Findings are shared across Institute through Community of Practice events.	Document learnings in an annual learning report as an integrated part of the Annual Outcome Report and conduct CoP on findings and how to integrate into new projects. Report to be shared with MS, donors, Staff Members, Directors, partners. Consider a webinar for MS and external partners.	Achieved	BPP
		Conduct at least one learning session with Member States, external stakeholders, and donors in targeted contexts to share learnings.	Achieved	Project leads starting with: --BPP to support coordination, meeting structure

Thematic Priority 2: Democracy Support Cycle

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
2.1. How does the work of International IDEA lead to improved democratic outcomes for our boundary partners and stakeholders?	-- International IDEA follows a Learning Based Management approach, with full buy-in to this approach from leadership. -- A results framework with standardized theories of change, goals and objectives has been developed and is continually updated. This is the basis for project design, though used inconsistently. --Outcome harvesting is conducted during annual planning meetings with all programme Teams. --Evaluations are conducted for most restricted projects to examine success in achieving outcomes.	Establish regular training in LBM for Staff Members.	Ongoing	Heads of Team responsible for scheduling BPP to deliver
		Include learning objectives in majority of new restricted projects.	Not achieved, as some donors are reluctant.	Project leads with guidance/support from BPP
		Have Staff Members more involved in restricted projects evaluations – at least two non-BPP staff attending evaluations per annum.	Ongoing	Regional Directors & Staff Members
2.2. How do we leverage and combine all International IDEA's	--IDEA's established results framework with standardized theories of change, goals and objectives reflects capacity development,	Develop advocacy guidelines	Achieved	SGO in collaboration with REP and DC offices

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
approaches effectively to drive improved outcomes?	knowledge building, and inspiring approaches to developing outcome objectives but the framework is not fully utilized by all Teams. --GP Teams often attend at least a portion of regional annual planning sessions and vice versa to bridge “think” and “do” efforts. --GP Teams often participate in regional projects as experts/facilitators/knowledge sharing. --Regional Teams continually contribute to knowledge development. --Advocacy/convening offices (REP, UN) increasingly attend regional and GP planning sessions to increase cross-pollination.	Ensure that our LBM approach is utilized to reflect all 4 of the approaches/kinds of interventions IDEA undertakes. Document what we are learning from combining different approaches.	Achieved	BPP in collaboration with all Programmes
		Conduct feedback sessions with stakeholders on usefulness of knowledge products and pilot refined ways of sharing knowledge based on stakeholder needs.	Not yet systematically implemented	GP
2.3. How do we adapt programmes during their implementation to reflect ongoing learning?	IDEA’s approach to learning based management is utilized in many projects, but implementation is uneven.	Ensure that our LBM approach is utilized in all projects.	Achieved Ongoing	BPP in collaboration with all Programmes

Thematic Priority 3: Connecting and Institutionalizing Knowledge

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
3.1. How do we institutionalize a process to use the knowledge and to revisit that knowledge on a regular basis to make sure we stay relevant and effective?	--Staff Members are often unaware of the knowledge that the Institute already has. --New staff are not consistently onboarded, particularly in thematic areas. --There is no process for storing or managing knowledge.	Enhance onboarding processes – guidelines for teams on how to best induct and train Staff Members.	Significant work has been done and is showing results. Ongoing	HROD in collaboration with all Programmes.
		Each Programme develops their own induction manual with key knowledge information new Staff Members need from their own Team and across the Institute.	Ongoing	All Heads of Programme
		Map solutions to systematize, organize, and store learning (e.g. knowledge management tools and systems)	This is a significant task that will take considerable time and financial resources. It will be addressed when funds permit.	BPP
		Locate and organize proposals & concept notes for sharing as examples across the Institute.	Ongoing	SGO & IT
3.2. How do we strengthen and enhance our learning across programmes and teams and	--Within small teams there is good learning via	During the planning process, help Teams utilize the existing tools for project design to encourage co-design processes.	Ongoing	BPP

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
share with Member States, donors, and partners?	WhatsApp groups, weekly calls. --Limited learning across programme Teams and across regions. --Limited and irregular briefings to Member States on program findings and evaluation outcomes	Organize one annual Staff Member learning event, likely in Stockholm/hybrid, to include working level Staff Members to exchange programme findings, discuss challenges and lessons learned, co-design and evaluate opportunities.	Due to financial constraints no event has been organized for all Staff Members. However, EP organized an institutional learning event on elections.	ED (with support of Working Group) to take lead in organizing
		Institute cross-Member State thematic learning opportunities, starting with sharing across Election Management Bodies in 2024	Member State exchanges is an on-going initiative, which started in 2024.	SGO and GP
		Invest time in cross-Team discussions, trainings, brown bag discussions.	Ongoing	All staff
		As budget allows consider Team members visiting or working remotely in another team/region in IDEA.	Ongoing, but challenging	All staff in conjunction with Head of Team
		Share learning findings with Member States, major donors, including EU, in strategic coordination meetings and regular interactions, and ask for their feedback and findings	Ongoing	ED, REP, SGO

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
3.3. How can we integrate our institutional learnings into project design and project implementation?	--Project evaluations (including learnings) are published on intranet and often shared in the Community of Practice --BPP and other HQ teams review project proposals as part of quality assurance to support integration of institutional learnings at project design phase	Document learnings in an annual learning report as an integrated part of the Annual Outcome report. Conduct CoP on findings and how to integrate into new projects.	First report 31 March 2024 and then annually	BPP
		Share learning report internally but also with MS and boundary partners regularly and ask for feedback to improve/refine learnings.	By 30 June 2024 and then annually	SGO, all Programmes
		Institutional learnings are integrated in templates for project proposals and relevant policies and procedures.	Ongoing	ED, BPP
3.4. How do we regularly update/refine policies and procedures to reflect new knowledge gained?	--Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated	The process of updating processes and procedures continues on a rolling basis, reflecting learnings from annual learning report, audits, and evaluations. Training is instituted on project management, financial management and resource mobilization.	Ongoing	ED