



ANNUAL LEARNING REPORTING 2023

IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL IDEA'S
LEARNING AGENDA

idea.int

Table of Contents

Background.....	4
International IDEA's objectives for learning	6
The Learning Report	9
1. Lessons learned on Context Matters	9
1.1 How do we learn about and address the complexity of the environments in which we work?9	
1.1.1 Lessons from unconstitutional changes of government in Africa: Responding to crises in constitutional democracy	9
1.1.2 Lessons from Guinea Bissau, Myanmar, and Sudan: Democratic developments may create backlashes	11
1.2. What are the best-fit interventions for the complex contexts in which International IDEA works?	13
1.2.1. Learning from implementation and evaluation of projects	13
2. Lessons learned on the Democracy Support Cycle	15
2.1 How does the work of International IDEA lead to improved democratic outcomes for our boundary partners and stakeholders?	15
2.1.1 Lessons from Inter Pares' peer-to-peer parliamentary strengthening: What enables change?	15
2.1.2. Lessons learned from evaluations in Bhutan and the Philippines.....	17
2.1.3 Lessons from the knowledge product on Special Voting Arrangements.....	19
2.2. How do we leverage and combine all of International IDEA's approaches effectively to drive improved outcomes?.....	21
2.2.1 A combination of approaches resulted in a record number of women elected to the Paraguayan Parliament.....	21
2.2.2 Nurturing the next generation of female political leaders in Zimbabwe	23
2.3. How do we adapt programmes during their implementation to reflect ongoing learning?	24
2.3.1 Adopting a learning-based management approach	24
3. Lessons learned on Connecting and Institutionalizing Knowledge	26
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?	26
3.2 How do we strengthen and enhance our learning across Programmes and Teams and share findings with donors and partners?	26
3.2.1 Communities of Practice, brown-bag lunches and internal evaluations.....	26

3.3. How does our learning impact our project design and implementation?	28
3.4. How do we regularly update/refine policies and procedures to reflect new knowledge gained?	30
2023 report from the Executive Division	30
Annex A: Workplan	32

Background

International IDEA prioritizes learning as a critical part of the Institute's identity, as codified in the *Institutional Strategy 2023*:

International IDEA's 'think-and-do' approach is underpinned by continuous learning with a virtuous cycle of knowledge production, capacity development, advocacy and convening of dialogues. International IDEA strives to establish and strengthen an institutionalized learning loop where the Institute's comparative knowledge and research inform its capacity development, and both enable policy influence and advocacy and the convening of dialogues. In turn, capacity development provides valuable lessons from the field for knowledge production and policy influence and advocacy, enabling continuous learning within the Institute.

While the Institute has developed some formal and informal learning and evaluation procedures in the last several years, the new strategy and the enthusiasm of stakeholders presented a refreshed opportunity to dedicate time and resources to developing a sustainable and resourced Institutional Learning Agenda. The Chair of the Council of Member States in 2023, the Netherlands, further made learning its chairship theme, providing incentive and support to International IDEA as well as making available additional outside expertise.

In 2023, International IDEA formed an internal Working Group with representatives from across the Institute's programmes and offices, supported by the expertise that was made available by the Netherlands. The Working Group embarked on a process of understanding and developing objective-driven learning through an institutional Learning Agenda, which was presented to the Council of Member States in December 2023.

The Learning Agenda assumes that all Staff Members at International IDEA continuously learn by developing knowledge products and implementing activities and projects, as well as working to improve the systems and processes that support effective implementation.

It is also designed to enable and encourage the exchange of knowledge and experience within International IDEA as well as to provide learning opportunities to strengthen and support Staff Members and to further systematize knowledge and learnings to disseminate to internal and external stakeholders.

The Learning Agenda included a set of priorities for the first six months following approval as set out below together with progress in the first two months of 2024 leading to this report:

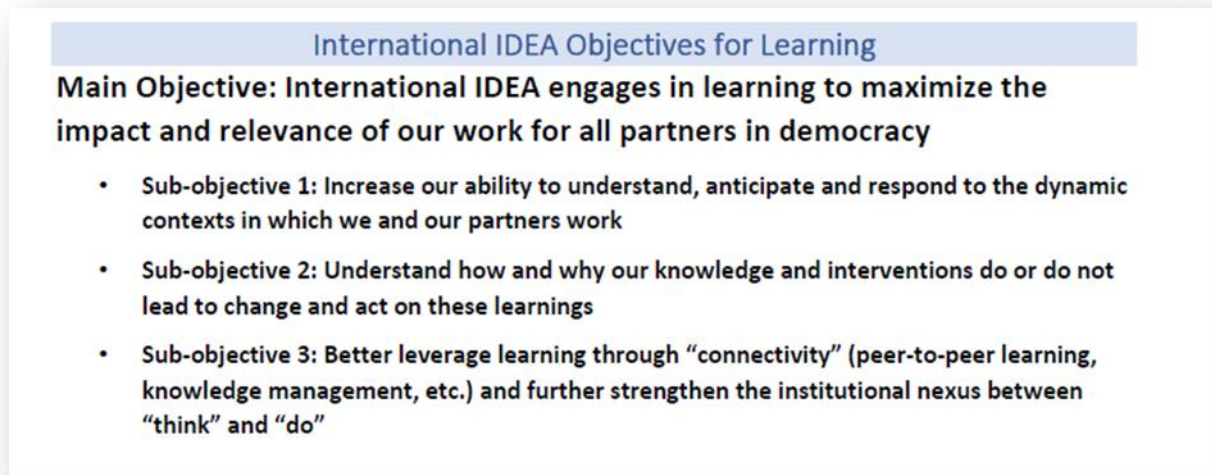
First 6 months (January 2024-June 2024):

- ✓ Integrate learning in 2025 annual planning process.
- ✓ Establish a process to develop context/power analysis² for each new environment in which IDEA enters including a process to refresh this information on a regular basis.
- ✓ Dedicate at least one Community of Practice event to learning.
- ✓ Organize a dedicated cross-institution learning event, likely hybrid or at HQ. Consider how to involve Member States in this event to further share learnings.
- ✓ Create an Annual Learning Report to be integrated in the Annual Outcome report of International IDEA to share with Staff Members, Member States, and stakeholders. This will begin the process of knowledge management and systematizing learning.

The Institute started to integrate the learning objectives of the Learning Agenda already in the 2024 planning process and will continue with this when the annual planning process for 2025 starts in June. Moreover, the Community of Practice for project managers on 12 December was dedicated for the Learning Agenda. Finally, this report is the first annual report on Learning activities undertaken by the Institute in the context of the approved learning agenda. It summarizes activities as well as key learnings for the 2023 financial year.

The Learning Agenda also included a Workplan which is included in this report as Annex A.

International IDEA's objectives for learning



For the identified sub-objectives International IDEA stakeholders have developed thematic priorities for learning for 2024-2026 (Figure 1). The thematic priorities are articulated through a series of learning questions that the Institute will aim to explore through evidence gathering and analysis.

Figure 1. Thematic priorities



Thematic Priority 1: Context Matters



1.1. 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?

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

Thematic Priority 2: Democracy Support Cycle



2.1 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?

2.2. How do we leverage and combine all of 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?)

2.3. 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?)

Thematic Priority 3: Connecting and Institutionalizing Knowledge



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? What kind of knowledge management is needed?

3.2. 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?)

3.3. How does our learning impact our project design and implementation?

3.4. 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?

The Learning Report

This learning report is a first attempt to systematize some of the learnings that have evolved from the implementation of International IDEA's activities. As the Learning Agenda had not been operationalized in 2023, the report is not based on a plan for strategic learning, but instead draws retroactively on lessons that IDEA's Staff Members have learned by implementing projects as well as from evaluations of these projects. It is structured to respond to the nine learning questions under the Agenda's three sub-objectives.

As this learning report is summarizing lessons that emerge from the existing approaches to learning and will not be able to explore answers to all learning questions.

1. Lessons learned on Context Matters

- 1.1 How do we learn about and address the complexity of the environments in which we work?
 - 1.1.1 Lessons from unconstitutional changes of government in Africa: Responding to crises in constitutional democracy



Key lesson learned: There is a need to move from a legalistic approach to constitution-building towards one prioritizing constitutional value that is meaningful for citizens.

Political instability has increased in Africa in recent years. The reasons, consequences and possible solutions to political crises are manifold, but in many cases they have involved processes of constitutional reform (Somalia, South Sudan), unconstitutional changes of government conducted or supported by militaries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Niger, Sudan), or constitutional coups, in which leaders revise constitutions to change presidential term limits (Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire, Central Africa Republic, Rwanda, Uganda), or undermine constitutional democracy in other ways.

These trends provide the context for International IDEA's work on constitution-building processes as constitutions are central to resolving and preventing societal conflict and promoting stability and economic development.

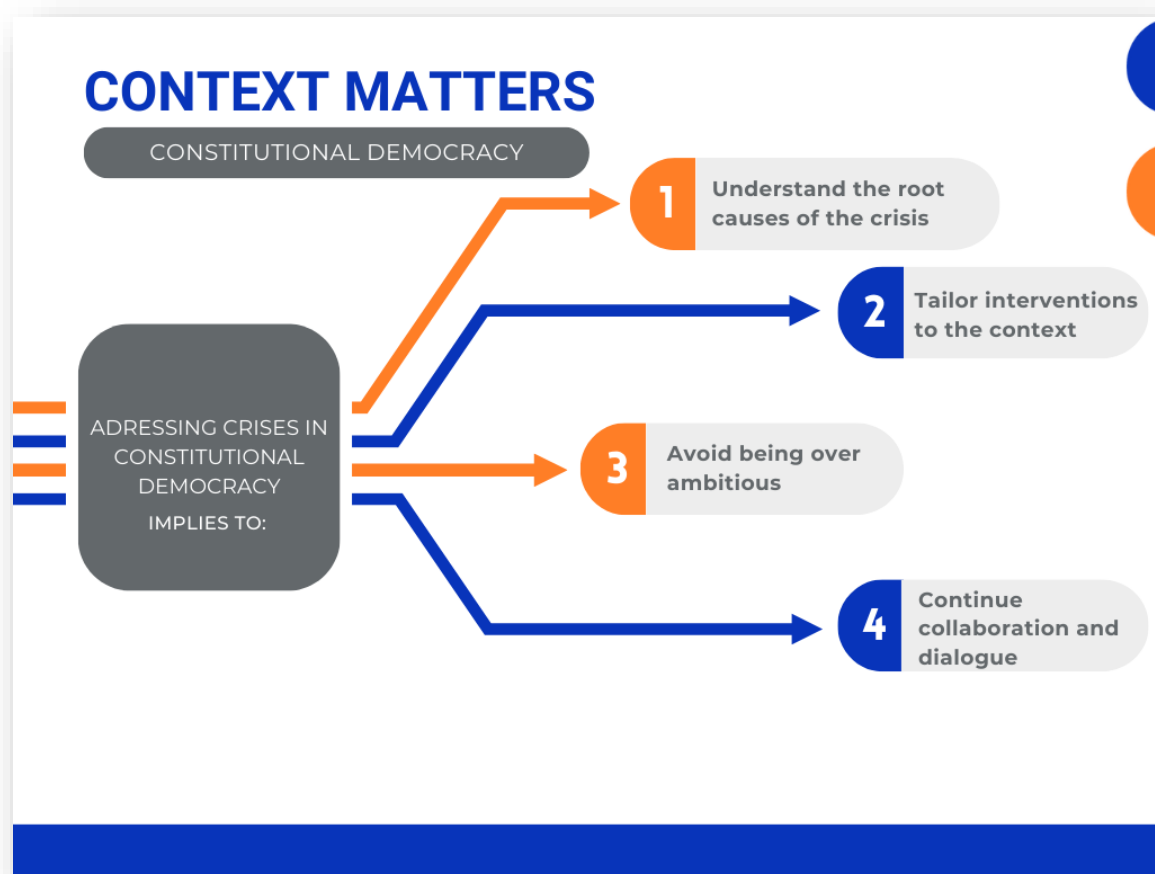
During 2023 International IDEA worked in some the countries affected by unconstitutional changes of government. The Institute organized and participated in meetings and workshops with other actors involved in these processes and through these reflective sessions have learned that:

- **As constitutions concern the legitimacy of the authority of the state over the individual there is a need to move from a legalistic approach to constitution-building** towards one prioritizing *constitutional value* that is meaningful for citizens. Otherwise citizens may not engage in constitution-building processes, which undermines the purpose and legitimacy of both the process and the product.
- **A social contract lens may demonstrate constitutional value** as misalignment between citizens' expectations and their perceptions of the outcomes of the social contract between citizens and the state is a major driver of unrest.

For International IDEA this implies that:

- **Any intervention in transitional contexts must take its departure from a proper understanding of the root causes of the crisis** it aims to address, as well as of the power dynamics between actors involved in the process. This analysis needs to be regularly updated.
- Each intervention should be tailored to respond to the root causes and the specificity of each transitional context.
- It is important to avoid being over ambitious on what can reasonably be achieved in these fragile and complex environments.
- There may be good reasons to continue collaboration and dialogue with national governments in countries where constitutional democracy is under pressure, for example to prevent further deterioration of the security situation or avoid a situation where countries drift into the sphere of influence of competing geopolitical players. Crises may also provide opportunities for positive changes.

Figure 2. Addressing crises in constitutional democracy. Summary.



1.1.2 Lessons from Guinea Bissau, Myanmar, and Sudan: Democratic developments may create backlashes

Key lesson learned: Even if it is important to provide democracy assistance in transitional contexts it is important to tread carefully and not do more harm than good. This requires conflict-sensitive and adaptive implementation.

Over the last few years International IDEA's Inter Pares programme, which is funded by the EU, has developed the capacity of the Parliament in Guinea Bissau. Despite good results the task has been challenging. In 2022, Members of Parliament voted unanimously to put their draft constitutional revision on Parliament's agenda. The draft was not voted on however, as the

President dissolved Parliament on 13 May 2022. The presidential decree stated that Parliament had become a space for guerrilla warfare and conspiracy aimed at weakening the institutions of the republic. A nuanced context analysis suggests that Parliament's efforts to use its constitutional and oversight powers may have motivated the dissolution.

In June 2023, the president's party lost its majority and faced another parliamentary vote on the Parliament's draft constitutional revisions. In December 2023, the president proclaimed that armed clashes linked to investigations into misused funding by the Finance Secretary and Treasury Minister constituted a coup d'état. He dissolved Parliament again.

When Parliament starts using its oversight to ensure transparency and due process, as in the case of the Parliament in Guinea Bissau, it can signal democratic progress. At the same time, more effective use of parliamentary powers can provoke an executive backlash to curtail parliament and democratic processes. This is an example of how democratic progress alters power dynamics which may cause democratic backlashes and explain some of the democratic contractions that International IDEA's Global State of Democracy indices has shown in recent years. International IDEA also has learned similar lessons from democratic backlashes in, for example, Myanmar and Sudan, where democratic progress triggered coup d'états.

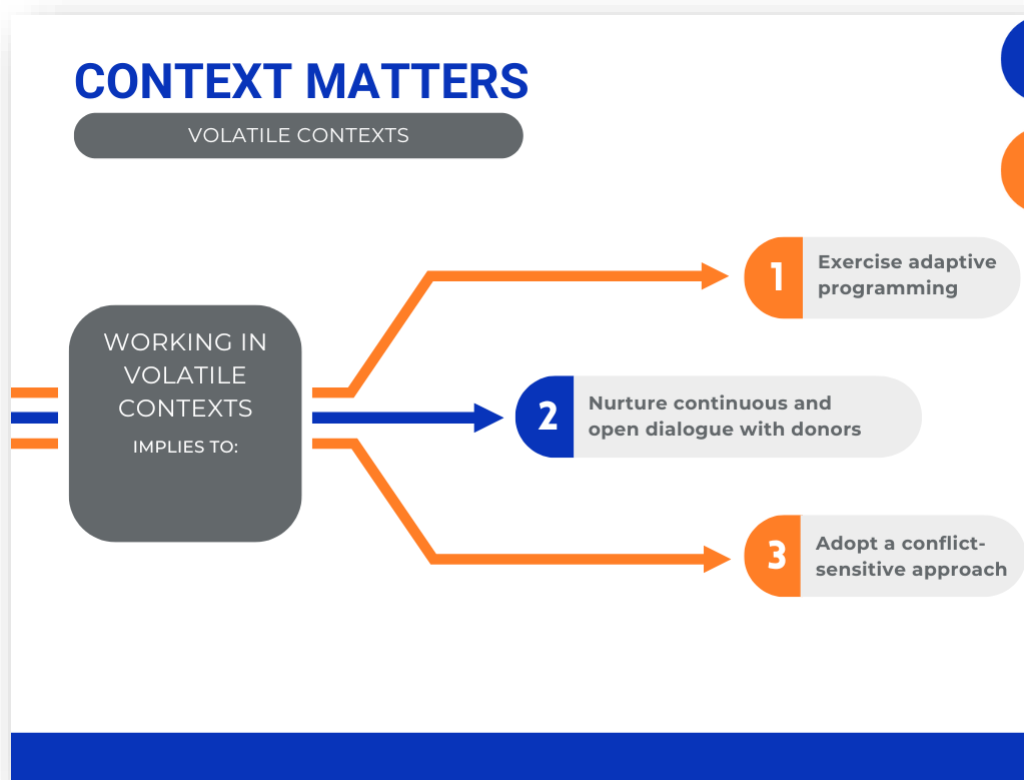
Lessons to be learned are that:

- Even if it is important to provide democracy assistance in transitional contexts **it is important to tread carefully and not do more harm than good.**
- **Projects in volatile contexts must be flexible** and continuously adapt to changing circumstances.

For International IDEA this implies that interventions in volatile contexts need to be:

- designed in a manner that allows adaptive programming, which requires a continuous and open dialogue with donors.
- implemented in a conflict-sensitive manner and build on a thorough risk assessment and risk mitigation plan.

Figure 3. Working in volatile contexts. Summary.



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

1.2.1. Learning from implementation and evaluation of projects

Key lesson learned: Instead of implementing “best practices” local stakeholders must be provided with opportunities to shape and own solutions that works for them. A neutral external facilitator may have a role to play in facilitating dialogue between them, while providing comparative examples and options.

The development community has moved away from searching for best practices or attempts to answer questions on *what works* to instead explore *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 concurs with this approach. The

lesson learned from these projects is that as stakeholders and power dynamics vary greatly **local stakeholders must be provided with opportunities to shape and own solutions that works for them.**

For International IDEA this implies that:

- To build ownership it is important to build relationships with and “contract-in” all stakeholders in a project at a preparatory stage. Such a process requires contextual knowledge, relationships, patience, and time.
- A neutral external facilitator may have a role to play in facilitating dialogue between local actors but must gently and patiently allow them to debate, define and refine local solutions to their democratic challenges in an ongoing process. In this way external partners can build ownership and trust, empower local partnerships and promote sustainability.
- International experiences and tools are likely to be useful in democratic reform processes, but the way forward should build on local knowledge and energy. Therefore, International IDEA has learned to present comparative examples and options (or a ‘choice architecture’), rather than solutions to local stakeholders.
- Democratic processes are shaped by volatile and ever-changing power relations which are shaped by culture, context, political interests, and personal motivations. This illustrates that **change processes in societies are complex and unpredictable**. To maneuver effectively in complex contexts projects should exercise learning-based management to foster learning from success and failure. To be effective in this regard work plans should continuously be revised, while drawing on local knowledge and feedback.

Figure 4. Designing best-fit interventions. Summary.



2. Lessons learned on the Democracy Support Cycle

- 2.1 How does the work of International IDEA lead to improved democratic outcomes for our boundary partners and stakeholders?
 - 2.1.1 Lessons from Inter Pares' peer-to-peer parliamentary strengthening: What enables change?



Key lesson learned: Projects must take departure from an understanding of the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist and tailor a combination of inspiring and supportive capacity development approaches accordingly.

Peer-to-peer partnerships developed by International IDEA's EU funded Inter Pares programme support parliaments to develop strong legislative, oversight, representation, budgetary and administrative capacities. Having worked in a total of 22 partnerships, involving 23 EU Member States, International IDEA has been able to garner lessons learned on the nature of peer-to-peer collaboration and how such programmes could be effectively designed. Lessons include:

- **Initial and continuous contextual analysis to tailor interventions is key** as this helps understanding the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist and what types of activities are needed for improvements to develop and take root.
- **Partnerships require adaptation and flexibility**, to meet the initial and ongoing political context, partner needs, and to capitalize on opportunities that arise.
- **Combining capacity development approaches supports deeper learning and institutionalization** of new processes and tools. This lesson resonates well with International IDEA's results framework.

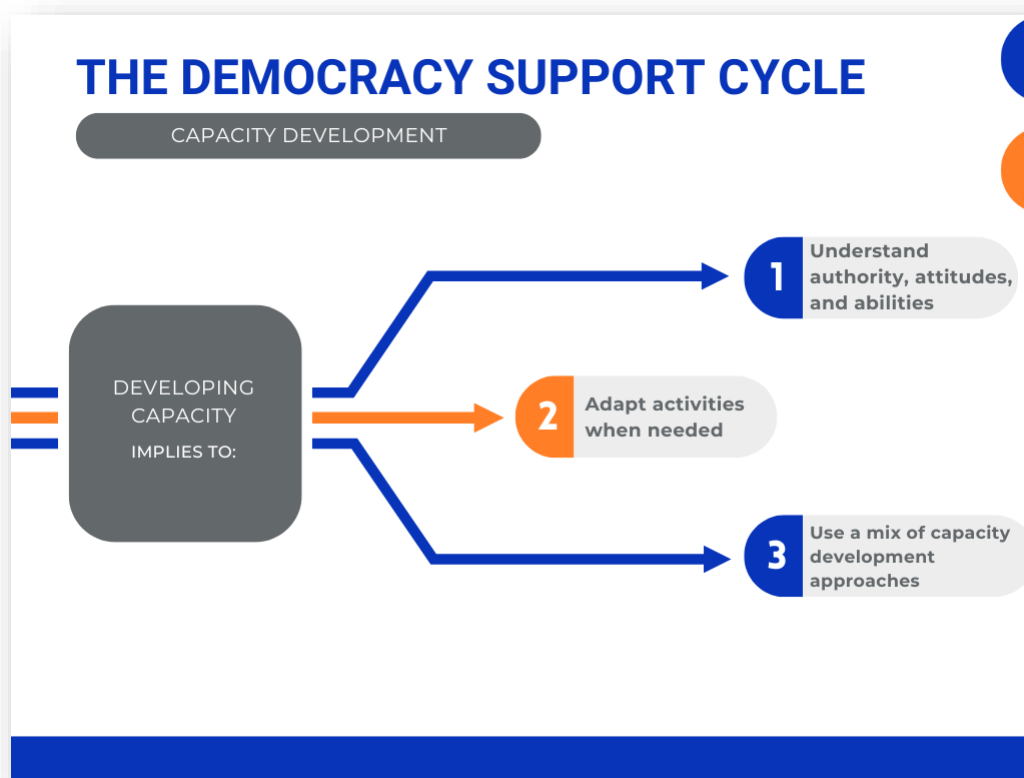
Critical elements that contribute to change in parliamentary institutions include:

- Building the capacity of parliamentary staff is extremely important and so is engaging them in bringing about institutional change.
- Attention to sensitizing and engaging parliamentary leaders – both from the Secretariat and Members of Parliament – in political leadership roles, improves outcomes.

These learnings correspond well to what International IDEA has learned from implementing and evaluating other projects. For International IDEA these learnings imply that:

- Projects must take its departure from an understanding the types of authority, attitudes and abilities that exist.
- **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.
- Projects should combine a mix of capacity development approaches as outlined in International IDEA's results framework.

Figure 5. Developing capacity. Summary.



2.1.2. Lessons learned from evaluations in Bhutan and the Philippines

Key lesson learned: Capacity development projects should use mixed approaches to learning and not rely on trainings only. Such approaches may include e.g. on-the-job trainings, mentoring, and peer to peer learning.

Over the last few years, the Budget and Programme Performance Team (BPP) at International IDEA has undertaken evaluations in Bhutan and the Philippines which have generated the following lessons learned on capacity development:

- In Bhutan the evaluation concluded that one-off trainings were not sufficient for strengthening skills and changing behaviours, which indicates that **the effectiveness of trainings can be improved if they are complemented with alternative approaches to capacity development such as on-the-job trainings and mentoring.**

- In Bhutan international trainers trained local boundary partners to provide trainings to peers: for example, local journalists were trained to provide trainings 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 both able to tailor the training to the local stakeholders' needs and to strengthen their own knowledge and skills on the topics of the trainings.
- In Bhutan trainings to CSOs on advocacy were complemented with opportunities for sub-grants for advocacy projects. This proved to be an excellent approach that enhanced insights gained from trainings and generated tangible outcomes both locally and nationally.
- In the Philippines a project aimed at strengthening indigenous peoples' rights **provided both duty-bearers¹ and right-holders² 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.
- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, trainings in the Philippines had to be undertaken in hybrid format. Participants were in agreement that this hampered learning, and that **face-to-face learning is more effective**.

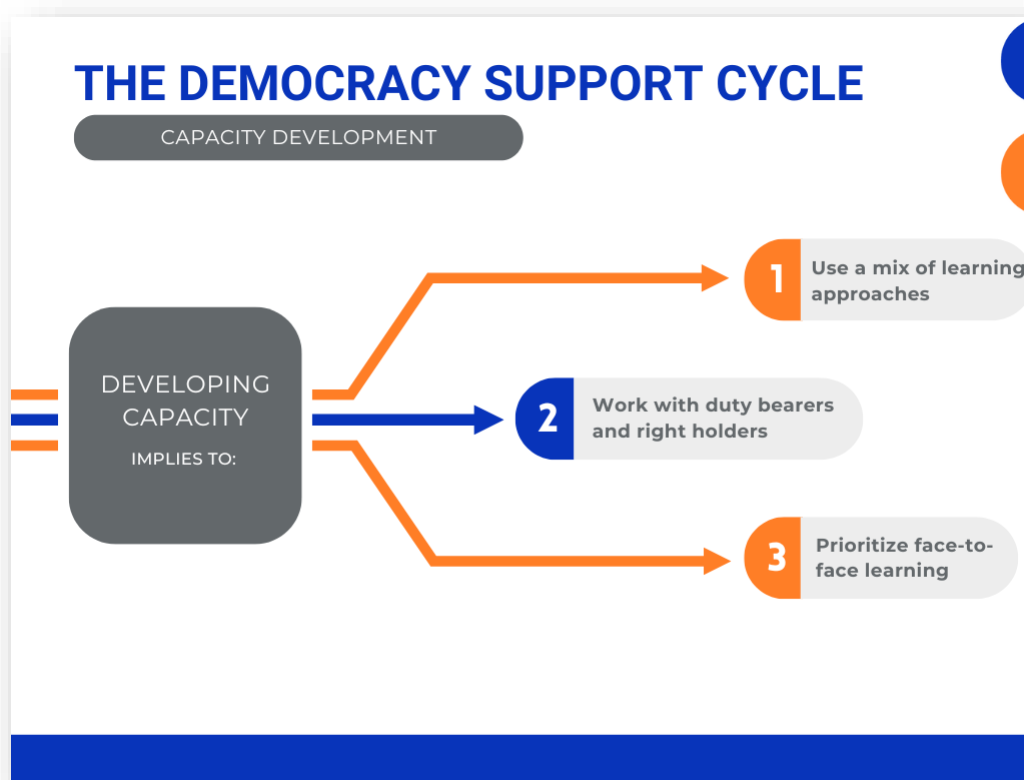
These learnings correspond well to what International IDEA has learned from implementing and evaluating other projects. For International IDEA these global learnings imply that:

- Capacity development projects should use mixed approaches to learning and not rely on trainings only. Such approaches may include e.g., on-the-job trainings, mentoring, and peer to peer learning.
- Projects shall ideally work on duty bearers and right holders in parallel and attempt to strength the interaction between these groups.
- Face-to-face learning should be the default option as it seems to be more effective than e-learning.

¹ 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 commonly used to refer to State actors, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers.

² Rights-holders are individuals or social groups that have entitlements in relation to duty-bearers.

Figure 6. Developing capacity. Summary.



2.1.3 Lessons from the knowledge product on Special Voting Arrangements

Key lesson learned: Good practices must be tailored to boundary partners specific needs and requests in a particular context.

The Covid-19 pandemic spurred International IDEA's commitment to consolidate expertise on Special Voting Arrangements (SVA) in response to the seeming incompatibility between in-person voting and social distancing public health requirements. A rich learning journey on the future of in-person elections led to the launch of the SVA handbook in November 2023, now available as a global public resource.

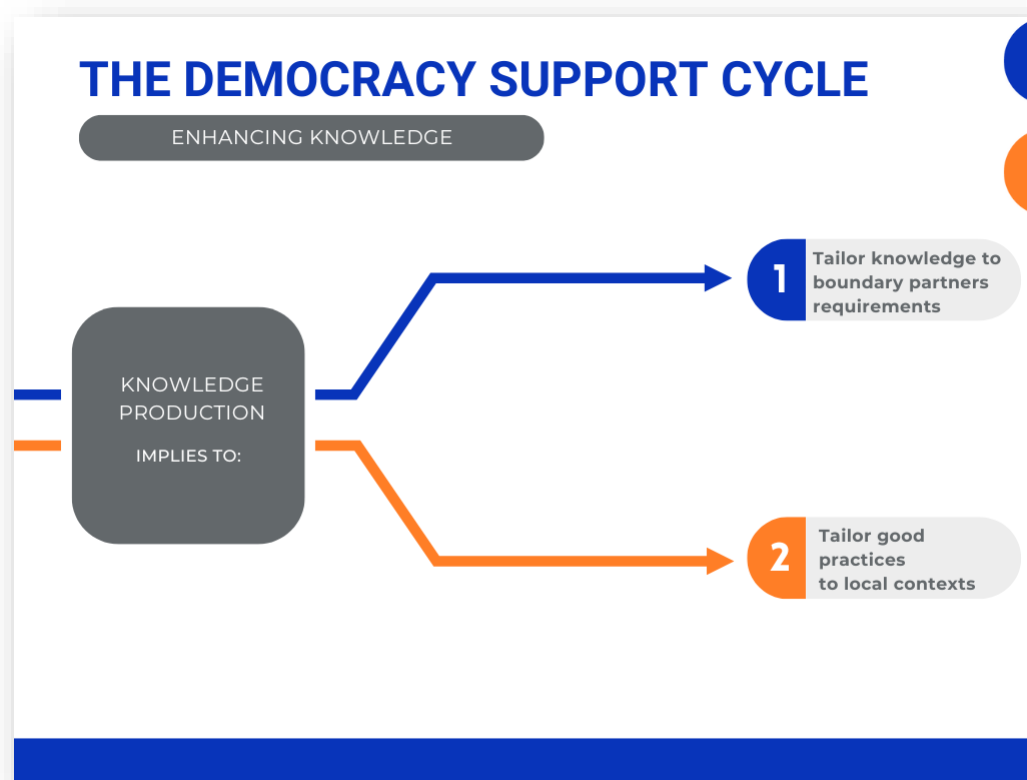
What we learned was:

- The value of a mixed-methods approach and locally anchored networks for understandings of ‘what works?’ and ‘what doesn’t work’ on the ground. These **practice-anchored perspectives are valued by practitioners** with choice points on when and how to scale up alternative voting methods.
- Election-day polling station voting remains a ‘gold standard’ because it is a controlled environment with established practices and safeguards to secure the secrecy of the ballot, accountability, accuracy, and transparency. The book then systematically reviews how we best balance the benefits of SVA in terms of inclusion and franchise with the risks of an uncontrolled environment – and the risks that any absence of control will be used and misused by those wanting to undermine the election result.
- Boundary partners need different levels of granularity and types of information, contextualized advice, and different modalities for receiving the information. Academics want robust and accessible global datasets for their research, electoral assistance projects and EMB professional development units prefer information packaged as workshops or training packages. Policy makers prefer high level guidelines and targeted briefs.

These learnings correspond well with what International IDEA has learned from working with knowledge production and implies that:

- Different boundary partners have different requirements. Support shall be tailored to boundary partners specific needs and requests.
- Good practices need to be tailored to local contexts – to ‘what works?’ and ‘what doesn’t work’ on the ground.

Figure 7. Knowledge production. Summary.



2.2. How do we leverage and combine all of International IDEA's approaches effectively to drive improved outcomes?

Key lesson learned: Combining capacity development, convening of dialogues, knowledge and advocacy is effective. Building alliances with local partners in these processes is key to success.

2.2.1 A combination of approaches resulted in a record number of women elected to the Paraguayan Parliament

Over the last few years International IDEA has implemented a project in Paraguay, funded by the EU, which among other things has aimed at increasing women's political participation. Over the course of the project the Institute has:

- convened key stakeholders to build political alliances;
- developed and implemented advocacy campaigns and;
- developed women's capacity to participate in politics.

The combination of approaches eventually yielded results. In the five elections conducted in 2023, 33 per cent of the candidacies were women and 23.5 percent of elected congresswomen were women. This is a record number of women elected to the Paraguayan Parliament.

In the project International IDEA and the Equity and Gender Commission of the Senate have used their joint convening power to build political alliances to advocate for a gender parity law and a law intended to protect women who engage politically from gender-based violence. One of the cornerstones of this work has been to strengthen cooperation and trust between politicians, CSOs and institutions that work for greater political equality. This work has been channelled through the Democratic Parity Driving Group (GIPD) and is carried out with International IDEA's technical assistance.

GIPD brought together women with different political views and agendas, but with a common interest in promoting gender equality in politics. International IDEA has provided the group with facts, arguments and tools to conduct effective advocacy. Among other things, experts from Mexico and Argentina have been invited to share experiences from their countries, and statistics and other facts from the region have been compiled and packaged into clear political messages. Furthermore, International IDEA has enlisted the help of legal experts to produce legislative proposals that have been discussed in GIPD.

To build political support for the bills, International IDEA helped the group to develop an advocacy plan aimed at convincing the senate to pass the law on violence against women in politics. As part of this plan, the group has identified the political profile of, and tailored an advocacy plan for, each senator. In this way, it has been possible to both convince sceptical senators to vote for the bills and to ensure at least some male senators actively support the campaign. In parallel with this political work, International IDEA has also supported women's groups within civil society to develop advocacy strategies. Part of this work involved providing

CSOs with facts and arguments, but International IDEA also offered them help to build stronger networks and alliances.

To enable women to run as candidates International IDEA and the Gender Policy Unit at the Superior Tribunal for Electoral Justice (TSJE) developed the Political School for Women Leaders (EFPML), as well as other initiatives to strengthen women's leadership and political empowerment. In recent years, the TSJE and International IDEA organized ten editions of the EFPML, as well as courses for pre-candidates and candidates. Through these initiatives, 668 women leaders have received training. Beyond the numbers, these programmes have given visibility to women in the political debate.

2.2.2 Nurturing the next generation of female political leaders in Zimbabwe

Using funding from International IDEA's Women's Political Participation programme, funded by Sweden, International IDEA's local partners in Zimbabwe have combined approaches to increase women's political participation.

One of the Institute's local partners—Padare—convened a platform to discuss what the main political parties in Zimbabwe will do to ensure that there are more women candidates for electoral positions and influential party positions. The meetings established strategies on how political parties can improve women's meaningful political participation and influence political party leaderships to publicly speak out on violence against women during electoral and political processes.

Padare has also taken a pioneering approach by engaging men in communities to support women's participation in politics. Through discussion forums in Hwange District, Padare initiated open dialogue around the issue, encouraging leaders to seriously consider women for leadership positions. Over time, the ripple effect of Padare's advocacy expanded throughout Hwange District. Women are beginning to gain confidence, realizing that their voices matter and that they have the right to be leaders. Together with men who have joined their cause, women are beginning to actively participate in community meetings, political campaigns, and grassroots initiatives.

In a parallel approach, Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) has supported women leaders to take advantage of new opportunities. One participant in these activities, Beauty

Musasa from Murewa district, a small township 86km from Harare, bears witness to how important such trainings can be: 'Growing up, we were taught to only vote for male leaders and to shun women in politics. The training was mind transforming as my perspective on women leaders changed and I began to understand that women have equal rights with men. I no longer allow anyone to undermine me, and I accredit this newfound knowledge and confidence to WLSA'. **Beauty, as well as other women, has engaged in politics as a result of a combination of trainings and a more enabling environment for women in politics.**

2.3. How do we adapt programmes during their implementation to reflect ongoing learning?

2.3.1 Adopting a learning-based management approach



Key lesson learned: As democracy assistance aims to change complex power dynamics monitoring and evaluation of democracy assistance projects should be aimed at understanding how power dynamics – in terms of relationships, behaviours, and practices – change throughout a project.

Over the last few years, the Budget and Programme Performance Team (BPP) at International IDEA has undertaken evaluations which have concluded that donors have had a tendency to push for results-based management practices which: i) prioritize what can be measured easily; ii) pursue the purpose of accountability at the expense of learning and policy direction; and iii) become bureaucratic and rigid. Some of these challenges derive from a rigid application of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA).

The learning-based management (LBM) approach adopted by International IDEA is underpinned by the understanding that:

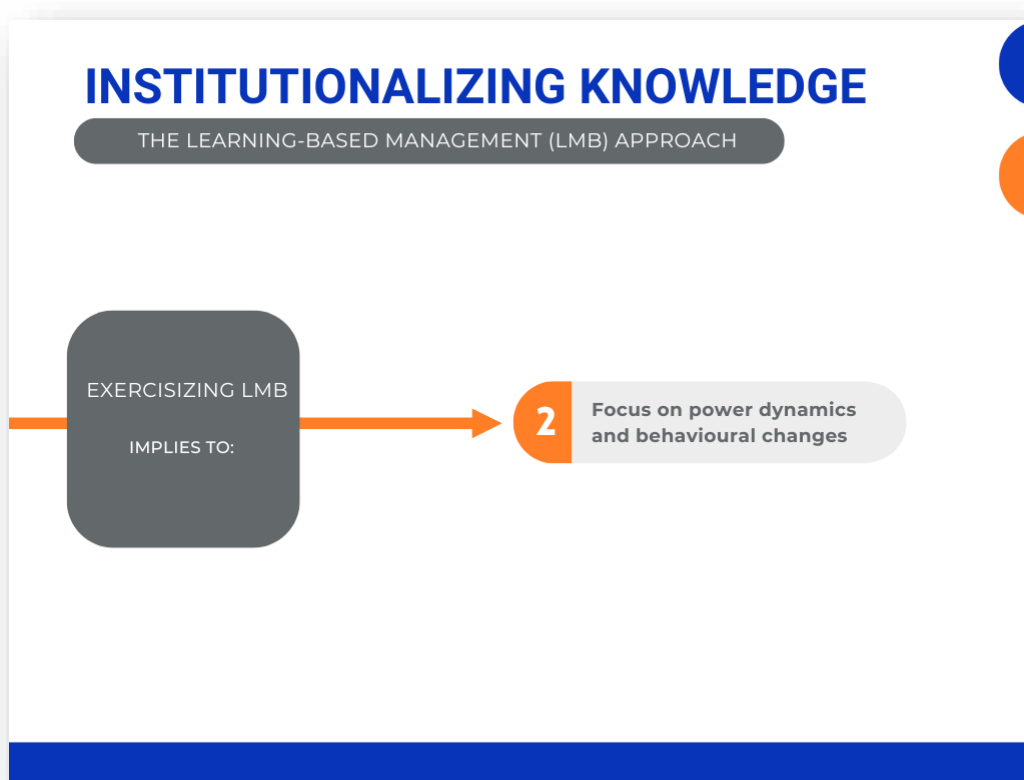
- As democracy assistance aims to change complex power dynamics monitoring and evaluation of democracy assistance projects should be aimed at understanding how power dynamics change throughout a project. This means that **the focus of monitoring and evaluation of democracy assistance lies on tracking and analyzing the web of changes in behaviours, relationships and practices that evolve during a project.**

- Insights and learnings from monitoring and evaluation shall continuously inform project implementation through cycles of planning, action, reflection and adaptation.
- A learning-based approach of this nature is quite different from some practices in development cooperation where results 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.

For International IDEA this implies that:

- International IDEA needs to persuade donors that behavioural-changed focused monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) practices is the right approach for democracy assistance.

Figure 8. Exercising learning-based management. Summary.



3. Lessons learned on Connecting and Institutionalizing Knowledge

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?

As the Learning Agenda was developed during 2023 and adopted by the Council of Member States as late as December 2023 International IDEA has not yet developed a systematized approach to learn for all aspects of the Agenda. Hence this Learning Report summarizes lessons that have emerged from the existing approaches to learning. This question is an important issue for the Institute to address and will take time to develop an effective approach to address. Part of the answer will be in development of needs driven knowledge curation underpinned by IT enablers. This is a significant project that is part of the new draft IT Strategy. There is also a significant communications element to ensure that Staff members and other relevant stakeholders are aware of the knowledge, once curated, and understand how to access it in the most effective manner.

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

3.2.1 Communities of Practice, brown-bag lunches and internal evaluations



Key lesson learned: Even if International IDEA has introduced organizational learning platforms such as Communities of Practices, brown bag lunches and internal evaluation over the last couple of years it is unclear to what extent learning shall be organized to inspire organizational change and to what extent these fora are effective in this regard.

International IDEA has 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 2023 the CoP for project managers met four

times and the CoP for finance and administration three times. The meetings are virtual and typically 20-30 staff members participate in the meetings.

These CoPs are used, *intra alia*, to communicate key learnings including an understanding of what works where and how, or what was challenging by the Heads of Programmes where evaluations have been completed. Topics may 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 to tease out challenges experienced in project implementation and develop solutions.

The Institute has also started to organize virtual brown-bag lunches (BBLs) on a regular basis to share experiences and get input from external actors. In 2023 20 BBLs were conducted. They included topics such as climate change and democracy, democratic backsliding, UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change, the transition to democracy in Chile and the lessons that can be drawn from it, and the challenges for liberal democracy. External guests included but were not limited to: International IDEA Board Member, Eva Maria Belser; Ina Parvanova, Director of Communications and Engagement at UN Climate Change; Oleg Didenko, Chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Ukraine; Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, Director of the V-Dem Institute; Cas Mudde, Stanley Wade Shelton UGAF Professor of International Affairs and Distinguished University Professor, University of Georgia, USA; and Daniel Lindvall and Mikael Karlsson of the Climate Change Leadership Unit at Uppsala University's Department of Earth Sciences.

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 the Budget and Programme Performance Team (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. For example, a number of evaluations in Africa have been carried out in cooperation with the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at AWA's regional office and to improve learning across regions she has also participated in an evaluation of a project in the Philippines.

The evaluations are shared with the donors and are thus a tool for honest and evidence-based discussions on our observations, doubts, and challenges. They are also made available on the intranet for all Staff Members. In 2023 BPP finalized internal evaluations in Mozambique, Bhutan, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone.

Even if Communities of Practices and evaluations are appreciated tools for learning for individuals it is at this point less evident that these learnings are translated into new ways of working. Rather, the take-up of evaluation recommendations seem to be rather weak and it is unclear to what extent good practices shared in Communities of Practices are picked up in other projects. As International IDEA moves forward with the Learning Agenda the Institute needs to further explore how learning shall be organized to inspire organizational change.

3.3. How does our learning impact our project design and implementation?



Key lesson learned: Political and institutional resistance to change cannot be overcome by technical assistance or capacity development initiatives. Instead, it requires an approach where International IDEA think and work politically.

The Budget and Programme Performance Team (BPP) at International IDEA has undertaken four evaluations of similar electoral assistance programmes in Myanmar, Paraguay, Sudan, and Mozambique. Based on the findings and conclusions from these evaluations BPP notes that some similar patterns emerge. These patterns lead to the following lessons learned:

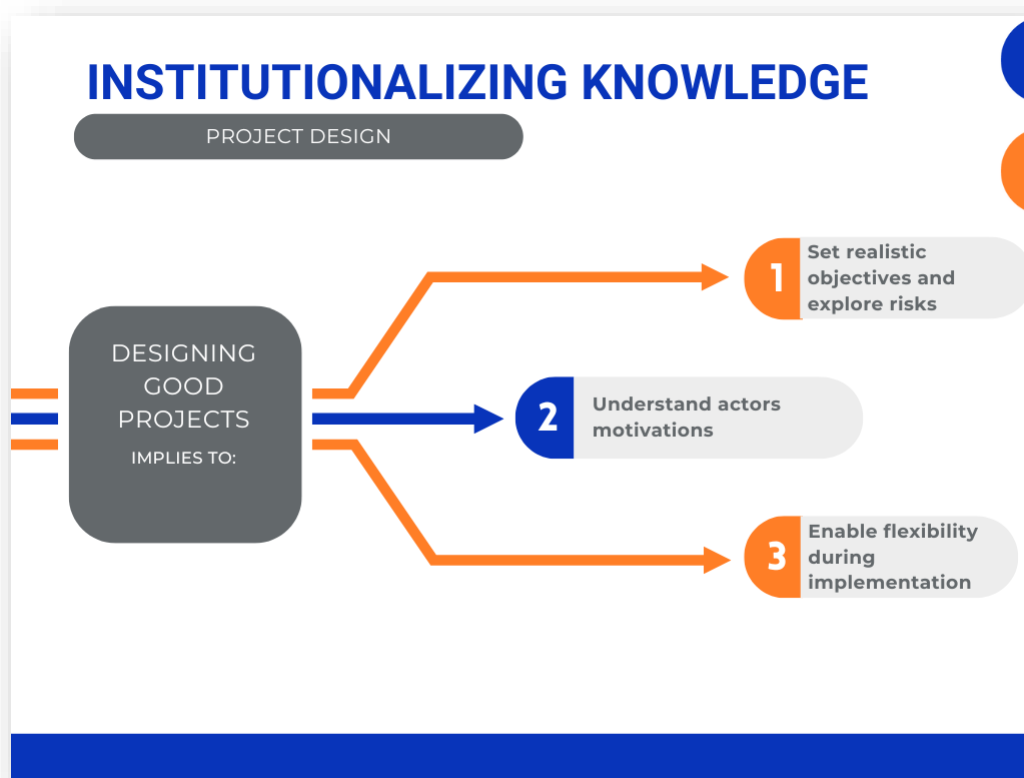
- Project objectives are often very ambitious or unrealistic.
- Political and institutional resistance to change cannot be overcome by technical assistance or capacity development initiatives. Instead, it requires an approach where International IDEA think and work politically.

For International IDEA this implies that:

- Projects' theories of change need to be realistic and ensure that outcome objectives are achievable through the planned activities. **More attention must be given to exploring the assumptions and risks underpinning the Theories of Change.**

- Political work is complex and requires both patience and continuous adaptation to the ever-changing power dynamics. **It implies understanding what interests motivate actors in the context the Institute operates in, including actors with very powerful vested interests**, such as the militaries in Myanmar and Sudan. Keen awareness of these interests is key to shape the content and the pace of the reforms.
- Thinking and working politically in a flexible manner is challenging to plan in accordance with the rules and regulations that underpin development projects, so International IDEA needs to agree with its donors on how this work should be planned and reported in a flexible but accountable manner.

Figure 9. Designing good projects. Summary.



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

2023 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.

The Executive Division regularly update 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 Finance and Audit Committee.

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 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 feasibility of projects. In 2023 the templates for concept notes and project proposals were updated. These updates were based both on feedback from Staff Members – who were consulted in a reference group – and donors' feedback on previous proposals. BPP also reviewed a number of donor templates for concept notes and project proposals to ensure that International IDEA's template was aligned with their requirements.

We have also observed that coordination at an early stage of the resource mobilization and project design process is not ideal. Hence International IDEA has both introduced a Customer Relationship Management system and included a pre-award module in its ERP system. This allows HQ to keep track of all resource mobilization processes undertaken by the Institute. To coordinate support functions BPP facilitates weekly meetings where the key actors within the Institute meet and go through the status of the on-going resource mobilization processes.

Further in response to a concern that project management and delivery was not always as effective as was desired a training called Finance for Non Financial Managers was developed and delivered in 10 sessions to more than 100 Project Managers and similar Staff members in 2023. This training is tailored specifically for International IDEA and takes as its point of departure that the project Manager is responsible for all aspects of project management, including the finances of the project and that financial information can provide insights into project delivery that will enable corrective action to be taken in a timely fashion.

The following significant policies, procedures, user guides and templates were reviewed in 2023.

- Delegation of Authority – this was approved in March 2023.
- Travel Policy – this was approved in May 2023
- Staff Rules and Regulations – a first draft review was completed along with the Staff Association Executive Committee consultation.
- Procurement and Individual Consultants Policies and related procedures – further revisions were completed, pending approval in the first quarter of 2024.
- The Accounting and Financial Procedures Manual – was reviewed and revised.
- User guides - to support the accounting for fixed price contracts and the change in accounting policy for in kind contributions were prepared.
- Promotions, Direct Appointments and Establishment / Disestablishment of Posts Procedures - reviewed and revised.
- Cyber Risk Review Procedure – this was drafted and was approved.
- User guide for, inter alia, a new project management dashboard - created.
- Asset Transfer and Write Off procedure - including relevant templates was approved.
- Conflict of Interest procedure – updated to reflect the new annual disclosure.

Annex A: 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.	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.	30 June 2024	Regional Directors to develop regional/context-sensitive approaches. BPP to support, e.g. provide options and consider if/how to leverage outside guidance.

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
	--Information is shared occasionally across the Institute through Community of Practice events.	Dedicate at least two Community of Practice meetings to sharing learning across the Institute on working in specific contexts.	31 Dec 2024	BPP in collaboration with project leads working in relevant contexts
		Reinstitute Political Landscape Analysis meetings – at least 1x/year per region, with an invite to Institute to participate.	31 Dec 2024	Regional Directors
		Learning about relevant context is included as a learning objective in two restricted and two core projects across Institute.	31 Dec 2024	Project leads (with consultation from BPP as needed).
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.	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.	First report 31 March 2024 and then annually	BPP

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
	--Evaluations are shared with project Staff Members, donor and posted on intranet. --Findings are shared across Institute through Community of Practice events.	Conduct at least one learning session with Member States, external stakeholders and donors in targeted contexts to share learnings.	31 Dec 2024	Project leads starting with: --the NL partnership and learnings on unconstitutional changes of government -Maurice, Sumit --Learnings from Myanmar project – Marcus, Nathalie 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.	31 Dec 2024	Heads of Team responsible for scheduling BPP to deliver
		Include learning objectives in majority of new restricted projects.	31 Dec 2024	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.	31 Dec 2024	Regional Directors & Staff Members
2.2. How do we leverage and combine all of International IDEA's approaches effectively to drive improved outcomes?	--IDEA's established results framework with standardized theories of change, goals and objectives reflects capacity development, knowledge building and inspiring approaches to developing outcome objectives but the framework is not fully utilized by all Teams.	Develop advocacy guidelines	31 Mar 2024	SGO in collaboration with REP and DC offices
		Articulate advocacy outcomes more clearly by utilizing our results framework and LBM approach.	30 June 2024	BPP in collaboration with all programmes.

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
	--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.	31 Dec 2024	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.	31 Dec 2025	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.	31 Dec 2025	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.	31 December 2024	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.	31 Dec 2024	All Heads of Programme
		Map solutions to systematize, organize and store learning (e.g. knowledge management tools and systems)	30 June 2025	BPP
		Locate and organize proposals & concept notes for sharing as examples across the Institute.	31 Dec 2024	SGO & IT
3.2. How do we strengthen and enhance our learning across programmes and teams and share	--Within small teams there is good learning via WhatsApp groups, weekly calls.	During the planning process, help Teams utilize the existing tools for project design to encourage co-design processes.	31 March 2025	BPP

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
with Member States, donors and partners?	--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.	31 March 2025	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	By 30 June 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	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	Starting in spring 2024	ED, REP, SGO
3.3. How can we integrate our institutional learnings into project design and project implementation?	--Project evaluations (including learnings) are published on intranet and	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

Learning Question	Status Analysis – Current Situation	Work plan		
		What	By When	Who
	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	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.	30 June 2025 and then ongoing annually	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.	Annually	ED