

**The Asia Foundation  
Elections 2001 Workplan  
Cooperative Agreement No: 388-A-00-00-000056-00**

**Introduction**

The Asia Foundation has received funding from USAID to develop a strategic framework for Elections 2001 activities. This framework includes three complementary sets of activities focused on poll monitoring and observation during the period leading up to and including election day. Specifically, USAID funds will provide initial support to an expanded monitoring network that will coordinate monitoring activities and ensure broad national coverage using standardized monitoring techniques. Second, locally recruited international observers will support and reinforce the efforts of local monitors and provide independent assessments of conditions in all six divisions of Bangladesh during the weeks leading up to election day. Third, the current grant includes modest funds for voter education to build the public's commitment to the election process by developing a limited number of specific messages to be adopted by various organizations and broadcast over various media outlets for blanket coverage. Within the voter education activity, the Foundation will conduct a workshop with radio, television and print journalists designed to improve election coverage.

The Foundation will seek additional resources from the donor consortium to fully support the primary activities included in the framework. Using this strategic framework as a starting point, The Asia Foundation will develop a more comprehensive program for the election period including long-term domestic monitoring, advocacy for increased women's political participation and for modification of the current rules governing election observation, training for women candidates, a voter education baseline survey, a survey to test the accuracy of the voter list, development of an Elections 2001 website, and support to the Asian Network for Free Elections for a small international monitoring mission. Funds for the complementary activities will also be sought from the donor consortium.

**A. Domestic Monitoring Network**

An emerging coalition of leading NGOs and civil society organizations has embraced the goal of a comprehensive civil society election monitoring program for the 2001 elections that will achieve 100% coverage of polling units on election day. Key to the effectiveness of the strategy will be increasing the number of individuals and organizations involved in monitoring, developing a common monitoring methodology, and a system for sharing information between

organizations. The Asia Foundation will facilitate meetings and discussions among these groups to assist them in formulating a methodology and plan of action for comprehensive domestic monitoring. These meetings will bring together large NGOs with a national presence, small- and medium-sized NGOs with domestic monitoring experience, apex organizations such as ADAB, the Chambers of Commerce, Rotary and Lions Clubs and others interested in fielding volunteers on election day. Through programming, technical assistance, and coordination efforts the Foundation will encourage smaller community-based NGOs across the country to participate in election monitoring in their area. These NGOs will be reached through the district- and constituency-level coordination committees.

Technical assistance from The Asia Foundation will include guidance on adapting a proven methodology for comprehensive, civil society-driven election monitoring, used successfully in Cambodia and Indonesia, to the Bangladeshi context. This methodology, developed first in Cambodia and modified in Indonesia with the assistance of The Asia Foundation's Election Advisor, reflects internationally accepted standards for election monitoring. Certain laws and practices currently existing in Bangladesh do not conform to international standards on election monitoring and should be changed to allow effective monitoring by civil society. The Asia Foundation will assist its partners to advocate for the relevant changes. In a separate activity, The Asia Foundation will provide information to the international community to assist them in raising these issues, and the need for change, at the diplomatic level. The changes that are needed in the Bangladeshi system are described in Section D in the "Diplomatic Dialogue" activity.

The objectives of the domestic monitoring network will be to accomplish the following:

- To ensure that network monitors cover 100% of the polling stations throughout the nation by monitoring network members;
- To ensure the use of a common monitoring methodology and standardized reporting and evaluation forms and procedures by the different monitoring organizations;
- To report on election results for each polling station and constituency in a way that allows the identification of specific polling stations or constituencies where the validity of the election is problematic;
- To actively involve a sufficient number of civil society organizations, coalitions, apex organizations, etc. of different types in the monitoring network so that the monitoring reports will have credibility and will not be viewed as politically bias;
- To issue timely and thorough reports on the election process; and
- To build the capacity of organizations in Bangladesh to develop and manage large-scale domestic monitoring that is effective, cost-effective and sustainable with declining foreign funding.

To accomplish these objectives, The Asia Foundation will work with civil society groups to build and enhance their capacity to undertake the following activities through a structure that is cost-effective and sustainable. The activities include:

- Meeting with various civil society organizations to test political will/assess broad structure for a broader civil society monitoring effort;
- Mobilizing a national monitoring coordinating committee;

- Developing a temporary working structure at the national, district and constituency levels that is simple, decentralized, un-bureaucratic, and non-coercive, in order to take full advantage of the strengths of the various groups involved;
- Preparing and printing standardized manual, observation form and reporting format to enable aggregation of results at the constituency, district and national level;
- Recruiting and training volunteers from the various participating organizations to observe the polls on election day;
- Translating manual and form into English for use by international monitoring groups;
- Providing and managing grants to organizations with administrative roles in the national monitoring coordination committee and to organizations responsible for data collection and reporting;
- Increasing the capacity and reliability of monitoring and reporting through quality control by the broad-based monitoring coalition.

Members of the Domestic Monitoring Network – to date, the following organizations have expressed interest in participating in the domestic monitoring network: FEMA, BRAC, Proshika, ASA, ADAB, Rotary Club, Lions Club, CCHRB, members of the Governance Coalition, and the Chambers of Commerce. These organizations represent the core of the coalition as they have a wide presence throughout the country. In order to generate greater diversity in the coalition, The Asia Foundation has been meeting with small- and medium-sized election-related NGOs, human rights organizations and other groups in Dhaka to assess their interest in contributing volunteers and expertise to the coalition. NGOs outside Dhaka will be brought into the coalition at the district and constituency level.

#### **B. Locally-Recruited Long-Term International Observers**

The positive contribution of international election observers has been demonstrated in a large number of elections. International election observers have become a common, useful and often essential element for assuring the credibility of election results in transitional democracies. Domestic monitors play an important role, but international observers can usually speak more freely than local organizations, and often provide useful cover for their local colleagues. The presence of international observers can also help discourage violations of the election process because the international monitors are less subject to intimidation or coercion than domestic monitors.

Although international observers serve a useful role, costs for international transportation and maintenance during their mission are so high that the missions themselves are often shorter than is desirable. To overcome this difficulty, and ensure there is an international monitoring presence during the crucial period prior to election day, the Foundation will locally recruit, train and deploy twelve long-term international election observers six weeks before the election. USAID funds cover most of the costs needed for six monitors and additional funds are needed for the

remaining six monitors. The number of observers and/or length of deployment may be expanded, depending on the availability of additional resources.

The objectives of the long-term locally-recruited international monitoring mission are:

- To document the pre-election environment in all six divisions and provide objective information to civil society, political parties, the media, and the international community;
- To report on the degree of preparedness for the election at the local level;
- To report on the level of violence, intimidation and fraud in selected areas of the country; and
- To gather critical background information for the domestic and international election-day monitors.

To accomplish these objectives, The Asia Foundation will:

- Develop a monitoring methodology, training materials and reporting forms for long-term environmental monitoring;
- Recruit international monitors from the expatriate population in Bangladesh;
- Train the monitors in environmental observation;
- Deploy international monitors to all six divisions of Bangladesh;
- Compile weekly reports for distribution to civil society, political parties, the media, and the international community based on reporting forms from the international monitors; and
- Hold a “lessons learned” workshop with the monitors immediately following the election.

### **C. Voter Education Clearing House and Media Workshop**

Encouraging understanding and respect for democratic values will be important in deterring violence and intimidation prior to the election, and helping ensure that those charged with administering the election do so in a free and fair manner. The Foundation will support this effort by sponsoring or hosting meetings for NGOs to develop coordinated messages and an accompanying strategy for mass distribution. The Foundation will also encourage NGOs to share the materials they develop in an effort to avoid needless duplication and make maximum use of available resources.

An international media consultant will spend two weeks in Bangladesh, working directly with radio, television and print journalists to improve election coverage, in terms of both quantity and quality. This consultant will address issues related to election processes; the role of the media in monitoring pre-election events at the local level; the challenge of reporting on parties and candidates in a way that is both topical and objective; and how to identify and cover the issues that are most critical to voters rather than those that the political parties prefer to focus on.

The objectives of the voter education clearinghouse and media consultant project are:

- To identify three to five key election messages that are critical to the success of this election,

- To make the messages and materials available to all interested organizations and institutions;
- To facilitate nationwide distribution, broadcast, and publication of the messages in all forms of election related media; and
- To sensitize radio, television and print journalists on the critical role the media plays during an election.

To meet these objectives, the Foundation will:

- Facilitate monthly meetings with organizations interested in voter education to share information and identify key messages;
- Provide technical assistance to the organizations in developing a coordinated plan to develop and distribute voter education materials;
- Provide and manage grants to assist organizations with the production of printed materials and electronic messages;
- Assist the organizations to request free or very low cost spots in radio and television broadcasts for the voter education messages; and
- Organize a workshop on election reporting for radio, television and print journalists.

Potential Partners: The Foundation will work with NGOs working on voter education, such as ADAB, ASK, Banchte Shekha, BRAC, Centre for Development Services, Democracy Watch, Manobadikhar Samonnoy Parishad, MSS, Rupantar and Uttaran, and communication firms with the expertise to develop targeted messages, such as BCCP and Adcomm. These organizations have been active in the coordination meetings held thus far. This coordinated approach enables NGOs to provide expert opinions on content and communication firms to develop effective materials and approaches. NGOs will use their networks to distribute the materials throughout the country. If additional funding becomes available, The Asia Foundation will work with one or two organizations with prior experience in electronic educational media to develop TV and radio spots and an educational television and radio serial.

Radio, television and print journalists and editors will be invited to the media workshop. The Foundation will also draw on the expertise of organizations such as the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) who has developed a handbook on election reporting.

### **Conclusion**

By developing this strategic framework, The Asia Foundation seeks to develop the foundation needed to ensure a conducive environment to free and fair elections. USAID support enables the Foundation to engage in exploratory meetings with civil society groups interested in election-day domestic monitoring and voter education and work with its partners to develop a new framework of cooperation and coordination for election-related activities. USAID funding will cover printing costs for a manual and observation form, a portion of training and logistical costs associated with the comprehensive election-day monitoring effort, and printing of a selected number of posters, leaflets and flyers for voter education. In order to complete all the activities outlined above and to engage in a comprehensive program for the upcoming election, additional funding will be required. This additional funding will be sought from the donor consortium

through a global plan and budget. If no other resources are available, The Asia Foundation will discuss with USAID whether any changes in the current workplan will be required to further maximize the activities given the existing funding.

In the period leading up to the election, The Asia Foundation is providing a critical service in facilitating information sharing and coordination among civil society groups and serving as a link between civil society and the donor community to ensure maximum communication and prevent duplication of effort and resources. The Asia Foundation is also assisting in promoting a process that better meets international standards by providing the international community with talking points on key issues such as election observation to be raised with the Government of Bangladesh. The Asia Foundation is also able to assist international observation groups in linking with local observer groups and ensuring that the international monitors have access to current and comprehensive background information.

## Proposed Time-Line

### A. Domestic Monitoring

Activity	Time Frame
Domestic Monitoring Coordination Meetings	September 2000 - ongoing
Establish National Coordinating Committee	October 2000 - November 2000
Establish Local Coordinating Committees	December 2000 - February 2001
Receive and review proposals from partners	January 2001 - March 2001
Award grants to partners	March 2001
Develop Monitoring Communication Network and Reporting Mechanism	November 2000 - ongoing
Develop Training Manual and Form	November 2000 - ongoing
Print Training Manual and Form	Caretaker Government Month 1
Recruit and Train Volunteer Monitors	Caretaker Government Month 1 + 2
Deploy Monitors	Election Day
Aggregate Election Day results	Election Day
Prepare and distribute monitoring reports	Election Day +10
"Lessons Learned" meeting	Election Day + 30

### B. Long-Term International Monitoring

Activity	Time Frame
Recruit international monitors	February 2001 - April 2001
Train international monitors	Caretaker Government Month 1
Deploy international monitors	Caretaker Government Month 2 and 3
Produce and distribute weekly observation reports	Caretaker Government Month 2 and 3
Produce and distribute final observation report	Election Day + 30
"Lessons Learned" meeting	Election Day + 30

### **C. Voter Education Clearinghouse and Media Workshop**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Pre-Election Period</b>
Coordination Meetings with voter education clearinghouse members	September 2000 - ongoing
Develop targeted voter education messages	October 2000 - ongoing
Receive and review proposals from partners	October 2000 - December 2000
Meet with media outlets to request free/low cost space for voter education messages	November 2000 - December 2000
Distribute grants for production of posters, leaflets, electronic media messages	January 2001 - ongoing
Media Consultant and media workshop for radio, television and print journalists	May 2001 - June 2001
Coordinate distribution of voter education materials and media broadcasting	January 2001 - ongoing (periodic in pre-caretaker government and intensive during caretaker government)