

Elections 2001
Cooperative Agreement 388-A-00-00-00056-00
Quarterly Report
January 1 - March 31, 2001

Summary

Over the quarter, civil society organizations solidified their commitment to the election-day monitoring effort. In early March, The Asia Foundation hosted a workshop on election-day monitoring facilitated by Tim Meisburger, The Asia Foundation's Election Advisor. Organizations participating in this meeting decided to hold bi-monthly coordination meetings with a rotating chairperson. Their first meeting was held on March 27.

During this past quarter the Democracy Watch voter slogan contest ended the first phase of implementation with over 3,300 submissions from throughout Bangladesh and abroad. Overall quality and originality were very high. A panel of judges selected the top five slogans in the three categories (women's political participation; violence and intimidation; and the importance of voting independently and according to one's conscience). The top fifteen slogans will be field-tested to yield a winning slogan in each category next quarter.

Following extensive consultations with civil society organizations and donor agencies, The Asia Foundation completed and distributed to donor agencies a comprehensive proposal for election-related activities. The comprehensive proposal includes election-day monitoring, long-term monitoring, information campaigns and voter awareness through print and electronic media and capacity building for women candidates and journalists and leverages the initial grant provided by USAID to establish a strategic framework for election-related activities. Donors have responded positively to the comprehensive proposal, but non-USAID donors have not yet confirmed their level of contribution to this effort.

In February 2001 The Asia Foundation jointly hosted a meeting of the Local Consultative Group with UNDP. Karen Casper and Valeria Laitinen, The Asia Foundation's Representative and Elections Consultant, respectively, presented the comprehensive program for election-related activities to participants from bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. The Asia Foundation's Power Point presentation can be found on the UNDP website.

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Project Activity: January 1 - March 31, 2001

1. Election-Day Monitoring

The Asia Foundation facilitated continued coordination among organizations participating in the election-day monitoring effort. In early March, The Asia Foundation hosted a workshop on election-day monitoring facilitated by Tim Meisburger, The Asia Foundation's Election Advisor. Representatives from Bangladesh Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, CCHRB, Democracy Watch, FEMA, Khan Foundation, Mass Line Media Centre, Naripokko, Odhikar, Prip Trust, Rotary District 3280, and SEHD participated in the workshop.

Participating organizations identified coordination among the various groups as critical to the success of election-day monitoring in Bangladesh and agreed to work together on a variety of areas. The workshop focused on the preparations necessary for coordinated election-day monitoring including the development of a manual, observation form, training methodology and aggregation system, identification of polling stations and coordination of deployment and advocacy requirements. Organizations participating in this meeting decided to hold bi-monthly coordination meetings with a rotating chairperson and held their first meeting of the Election Monitoring Working Group on March 27, 2001.

The first meeting of the Election Monitoring Working Group was held at The Asia Foundation, chaired by CCHRB and attended by representatives from Bangladesh Human Rights Commission, CCHRB, BMSP, Democracy Watch, FEMA, Khan Foundation, Mass Line Media Centre, Odhikar, Rotary District 3280, SEHD, Jatiya Nirbachon Porjobhekshan Parishad (JNPP), and Action on Disability and Development (ADD). During the meeting, participants further refined the list of changes to the election procedures and general election-related environment required to ensure a successful, safe and productive election monitoring effort. The group agreed to act collectively as a pressure group and plan to visit the Chief Election Commission to discuss the list of required changes.

In addition, participants discussed access to polling stations for the disabled and the need to increase the involvement of disabled people as voters and monitors. A representative from the Dhaka office of UK-based Action on Disability and Development presented a case study from the most recent national election in Ghana which was monitored by 77 persons of varying disabilities. With funding from the International Foundation for Election Systems, ADD plans to advocate for greater access to polling stations for the disabled and to monitor the elections with a group of disabled persons. Participants strongly endorsed ADD's recommendations and included the disabled issue in their list of required changes. The next meeting of the Election Monitoring Working Group will be held in April.

2. Long-term International Observers

This quarter, The Asia Foundation developed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the long-term expatriate observers and shared that TOR with USAID. The Terms of Reference describe several areas on which the expatriate monitors will be requested to report, including:

- political campaigns and the pre-election environment,
- the extent and effectiveness of NGO and Election Commission voter education,
- the effectiveness of election administration at the district and local levels,

- the extent and effectiveness of domestic monitoring activities,
- the polling and counting processes, and
- the post-election environment.

The Asia Foundation will begin recruiting the long-term expatriate observers next quarter.

3. Voter Education Clearinghouse

Preliminary selections of the slogans in Democracy Watch's voter slogan contest concluded at the end of March. More than 3,300 submissions were received from all 64 districts.

Submissions were also received from Bangladeshis in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia who saw the contest announcement in Bangla language paper, either via the internet or in print. Many submissions contained slogans in all three categories. The contest announcement was run in for two weeks in two daily and two weekly Bangla newspapers.

The panel of judges included a journalist from the weekly paper Jai Jai Din, a senior executive from Interspeed, an advertising firm, a research fellow from the Multidisciplinary Action Research Centre, a representative from The Asia Foundation and three representatives from Democracy Watch. The judges met nine times to review all the slogans and select the five best slogans in each of the three categories. These fifteen slogans will be field tested to determine the best one in the beginning of next quarter. The author of the winning slogan will be presented with a cash prize and the authors of the remaining four slogans in each category will receive an honorable mention certificate. The award ceremony will take place next quarter.

Once the winning slogans have been selected, The Asia Foundation will select a partner to develop posters and flyers based on these slogans. These will be distributed throughout the country to ensure that all voters receive the same message. Other organizations who plan develop voter education materials will also be encouraged to use the winning slogans to reinforce the messages - both in print and electronic media.

4. Training for Journalists

No activities this quarter.

5. Coordination

In February 2001 The Asia Foundation jointly hosted a meeting of the Local Consultative Group with UNDP. Karen Casper and Valeria Laitinen, The Asia Foundation's Representative and Elections Consultant, respectively, presented the comprehensive program for election-related activities to participants from bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. The Asia Foundation's Power Point presentation can be found on the UNDP website.

Activities Next Quarter

1. Election Day Monitoring

- Grants to monitoring organizations to begin preparations on election-day monitoring activities

2. International Long-Term Monitoring

- Recruit locally-based expatriate long-term monitors

3. Voter Education Clearinghouse

- Democracy Watch field test to determine top slogan in each category
- Award ceremony for winning slogans
- Receipt of final project report from Democracy Watch

4. Training for Journalists

- Recruit media specialist
- Develop and conduct training program

5. Coordination

- Periodic meetings with civil society organizations on domestic monitoring and voter education
- Periodic meetings with donors to share information