

Cheyenne:

DRG Center at USAID. Over to you Joe.

Joseph Taggart:

Good morning and thank you. I want to thank everyone for participating in today's event. I am Joe Taggart, I'm the division chief for the DRG Center's democratic elections and political processes team. And it's great to be here today for the launch of our Electoral Assessment Framework. Very happy to see the turnout. Today we're going to briefly present the Electoral Assessment Framework, and its toolkit and highlight what's new about the framework.

We're really excited about our team and in the center, because this is what we consider one of what we call our foundational documents. This is one that really lays the foundation for our field missions and work with our partners, that we then build out a lot of our other work. We want to leave plenty of time for discussions and questions, so I encourage you to participate actively. But before we go into the framework, I'm pleased to be able to welcome USAID's new Deputy Assistant Administrator for the DDI Bureau, covering DRG, Johnny Walsh. He'll give our opening remarks.

We are very fortunate and great to see and receive DAA Walsh, hit the ground, being able to hit the ground running in his first month at USAID. He was most recently a senior expert at the United States Institute of Peace from 2017 to 2021. Before that he served in the government in a range of foreign policy roles, including his US mission to the United Nations, where he served while Ambassador Power was the ambassador of the UN. And so it's good to have that connection with her as he joins us here and she joins us as USAID's administrator.

He was also a senior policy advisor for the Middle East and South Asia. He did two stints at the State Department lead advisor on Afghanistan's peace processes and tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well. He has extensive additional policy experience on Pakistan, Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula in North Africa. He earned his master's degree in the Middle Eastern Studies and a bachelors in international history, both from Harvard University. Johnny, thanks again for joining us, and I'm happy to turn it over to you for welcoming comments.

John Walsh:

Well thank you Joe. Thank you Cheyenne. And thanks to the amazingly large crowd for joining today's event. I'm so excited that there's such enthusiasm for the rollout of this product, which really is a cornerstone for us. Just a word about me, I can't overstate what an honor it is to be here, certainly at aid, but really at the DRG Center in particular. Throughout my time in government, the expertise here has been legendary.

I think it is coming into a huge moment, I feel lucky to arrive when it is. I don't have to tell this crowd, what an important moment it is for democracy in the world, and we all know the statistics about democratic decline since 2006, the authoritarianism rising seemingly everywhere, the new threats like disinformation and digital repression, that maybe weren't as front of mind the last time we took hard looks at how we assess elections and other pillars of democracy. But I think that that's the negative side.

At the same time, I really feel I'm entering the world of democracy to support a genuinely singular moment of opportunity. Because, to me the very same factors that have so undercut democracy in recent years, they've also created this global appetite to protect it. I don't know, every time I come into a new assignment and try and think, "What are my assets here? What tools do we all have to work with?" That's a long list. The things that make the moment singular, like we have a new president who mentions democracy in his first sentence, every time he discusses foreign policy.

That is not an everyday occurrence. I think that we have allies and partners around the world who are eager to join the US in a major new push to reinvigorate democratic practices that bind us together, because they're looking at the same trends we are and they see the urgency of doing something to try to help, to try and slow or reverse the trend. We also see, by some measures, an unprecedented number of protests around the world, I think more against corruption and support of democracy, more I think than at the end of the Cold War, or the height of the Arab Spring even.

I can't help adding that we have a new USAID administrator who is already one of the world's most prominent democracy human rights advocates, and who now sits on the National Security Council, which is just if you're going into the bureaucratic wonkery of how to get stuff done here, that's an enormous asset. I would add that when administrator Power talks about her top priorities in this job, protecting and promoting democracy is always top three, right up there at the level of vaccinating the world, tackling climate change.

So I think the moment is ripe for a major new push. And the democracy summit that President Biden has discussed many times, is a rare and very useful hook to hopefully try some ambitious things. We in government still need to do a lot of our own thinking on what that means, how we'll hopefully rise to meet the moment, we know we'll hear from this crowd about it and we should. This is one crowd we hope not to disappoint. So in all of that context, it seems appropriate to me that my first public or at least public remarks in this job would be to launch the Electoral Assessment Framework and the companion toolkit.

That is itself an enormous undertaking, it almost entirely proceeds my tenure here and I cannot claim any credit for it in good faith. But I expect that we'll be using this for years to come. It's a really rigorous analytic tool. It's a guide to help design better strategies that promote democratic legitimate elections and political processes. We certainly hope it has tangible value to all of you from USAID's the DRG Global Cowdray, our inter agency colleagues are implementing partners, in addition to our own internal use, and it will be central to that.

So, elections generally ... it goes without saying supporting elections, inclusive, accountable, transparent political processes have been core elements of our work for decades. Everyone here is aware of that. In the past several years, the global environment around elections specifically has changed quite a lot. In your less democratic environments, we see incumbents using really sophisticated and getting more so strategies to tilt the playing field well in advance of election day, sometimes also on election day. Many can manipulate legislative judicial processes, they can restrict competition, they can abuse state resources, they can muzzle independent voices, curb basic rights.

The rise of technology of course, introduces new challenges. Technology in elections has created huge cybersecurity risks for all the election management bodies around the world, parties can be vulnerable, civil society of course can be, the observers themselves can be, disinformation is a whole other bucket. Supercharged in many cases by social media, it gets more intense all the time, it probably will get more intense in the years to come, though we will all try and do our part to play defense and go on offense against it.

Then at this moment, and for a while still to come the pandemic is a whole challenge of its own. So, even in the best of circumstances, I think that election management bodies have had to really quickly adapt to this huge onslaught of new challenges within the bounds of existing law, which often wasn't tailor made for the problems that we're talking about. Election managers still have to be trying to maximize participation and inclusion, even when many of these factors militate against it. Then that's where there's good faith. In less democratic environments, all of those problems persist.

But governments are also of course, using COVID-19 as a sometimes egregious excuse to impose emergency powers, restrict rights and freedoms. One of many resulting harms is that this can tilt elections in their favor. This is of course not new, but women and marginalized populations, ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, continue to face just enormous barriers as they seek to engage in elections and politics. That is true all over the world, it always has been, many of the challenges I listed, disproportionately target these populations.

So I would say USAID's electoral assistance, always a priority for us, but it needs to continually evolve to keep pace with a world that keeps making the challenge harder. Starting in 2018, my amazing colleagues saw the need to develop a really rigorous systematic resource to help USAID missions, all of our partners assess in a more structured way the political and electoral context in a given country, and then design electoral assistance strategies that made sense for that in a very tailored way for that environment. In particular, they saw that we needed a tool not only to diagnose the long standing challenges that have always been true of election assistance, but all the new stuff.

And this product they're rolling out today, the Electoral Assessment Framework, represents all of the team's best thinking on how to do that. So, I will leave the details of the framework to the authors themselves, who's expertise dwarfs my own and whose big reveals I don't want to give away in the first place. But I will say that ... as I said before, the framework is sure to be a cornerstone of our own elections worked for years into the future, even as the challenges we face continue to evolve, and we know that they will.

But I think this is meant to be flexible enough to accommodate that to point us in the right direction. And then to take a fresh look at changes as they come. It already incorporates 35 years of electoral assistance, lessons learned at USAID, lessons that the practitioners, the donor community, people on this call have shared with us over the years. And it tries to bring all these pieces together into a multi dimensional analysis of the electoral process. So our hope is that all of you will find it useful anytime you are designing or adjusting electoral programs, whether you're working with us or not.

Before I ... shut up, I'd like to introduce the co authors of this new resource, Carol Sahley and Michael McNulty from the DRG Center's democratic elections and political processes team. Already two stalwarts of the group who have spent a lot of time with, been tremendously impressed by Assia Ivantcheva, who was on our elections team while drafting the guide, but now works with our friends at the National Endowment for Democracy, which was a devastating setback to us, and I'm sorry I didn't overlap with her. But I'm glad we get to hear from her today.

Democracy and governance expert Ellen Seats, who was contracted by Cloudburst. So we'd like to thank Cloudburst, who carried out the contract for developing this resource under our Learning, Evaluation, and Research mechanism. And we think many of you in this meeting who as I said, I know provided irreplaceable, invaluable input as we pulled this together. So, I'll be quiet now as promised. I hope to meet many of you, I'm sure I will in smaller settings in the months to years to come. I'm so excited at how much I really believe we can do together to support democracy when it's most needed.

So thank you again for joining us, and I'll turn it back over to Joe.

Joseph Taggart:

Thank you, DAA Walsh. I know since you're just a month in, there's a lot of stuff going on, and we appreciate you spending the time with us this morning. Now we're going to turn it over to the authors that DAA Walsh has already introduced Carol and Michael. They will walk us through the framework and the different ways that it can be used, and then we hope that we have a very robust discussion and look forward to taking your questions and comments. Carol, over to you.

Carol Sahley:

Good morning everyone, and welcome. So pleased you were able to join us this morning for the launch of this publication. Very excited to see so many familiar names and faces on this call. The DRG Center is really pleased to share with you this publication that we do consider to be a foundational document for our elections and political process's sub sector work. The Electoral Assessment Framework outlines a method for helping us systematically assess the electoral context in a country, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the needs, the challenges and of course, the opportunities that may exist.

The assessment framework walks you through a four step process for conducting an assessment. Now you will have seen that we've also shared with you a companion toolkit. And what this toolkit does is it extracts from the framework many of the tools, the list of questions into a more concise document. So it's important to recognize that it is not an executive summary per se, because it does not summarize the entire assessment framework. But rather, it is a short document that the team can print and carry with them in the field with the tools.

Basically, it's what you want to have in your back pocket when you're out in the field. So, as we're working on this, I remember conducting my first pre election assessment. It was in the summer of 2005. And we traveled to Colombia. I joined a top notch team on this trip. The team is staffed by experts, each with unique specialty. One was an election administration specialist, who was in fact a former Election Commissioner himself, he had an incredible depth of practical knowledge. One was a voter education expert, the other focus on the legal framework and so on.

I was new to the elections field, I was in learning mode, trying to keep up with these amazing experts and ... frankly trying not to be overwhelmed by the complexity of all these interlocking overlapping issues. This team looked at each of the aspects of the election in great depth and a good part of the analysis focused on a technical capacity perspective, trying to identify areas where capacity building interventions could help adjust challenges. So in the years since, I and my fellow election team colleagues have regularly been called upon to conduct these pre and post election assessments.

Now, we all looked at the same core components of the election of course, we all had a slightly different approach. As USAID do not have a formal assessment framework for understanding electoral processes. That is until now. So what is new about the framework? So there are three big takeaways that I want to highlight for you about this framework. First, it reflects an updated understanding of elections in light of the new challenges we face. As we heard earlier from our new DAA Johnny Walsh, backsliding is one of the most significant challenges that we face.

Now looking back at the early days of democracy promotion, many of the countries we worked in were undergoing democratic transition. Often, not always, but often we were working environments with positive political will and commitment, and many of the key problems that we were facing stem from institutional weaknesses and deficiencies. So many election management bodies, and other electoral actors such as political parties, civil society organizations, they were lacking in basic capacity. Now, arguably, in many countries or even most countries, institutional capacity gaps are no longer the most significant gaps.

Now we know that often, the most significant threat to elections around the world are political actors who are actively seeking to undermine or manipulate an electoral process. So we see incumbents tilting the playing field in advance of election day, we also see other political actors trying to manipulate an electoral process for political gain. Now, added to that is a growing problem of malign foreign influence interference in electoral processes. And add to that, there's also the new challenges posed by technology.

The rise of digital technology raises new questions about privacy, cyber security, technology and social media moreover intensifies the problems of mis and disinformation. So when you take all of this into consideration, we recognize that we are in a more complex and challenging environment for electoral programming. So, the time was right to formalize an assessment framework, and to find ways that we ensure that we better understand these different and complex challenges. The second point I'd like to highlight about the framework, is that it is multi dimensional, in that it incorporates different analytical lenses and approaches.

Michael will talk about those in detail a bit later. But the main takeaway here is that there are different ways to look at the electrical environment, and we do on many different existing approaches, as we develop this framework. The third important and related point is that the framework is integrative. So the framework provides a look at the technical institutional components on the one hand, with various analytical approaches on the other and combines those into a single framework.

These analytical approaches are not new, they've been around for a while, many of you have worked on them. But we're bringing them together formally and in a systematic way. So for example, previously, if you wanted to think about political economy analysis, one might have dusted off the PA handbook and determined, how do we apply this to specific electoral processes or political parties? Or, if you're interested in understanding the election violence risk and how it relates to our other parts of the electoral process, you might have referred to our election security handbook.

Which has a lot of really great information in it. But what we've tried to do is pull from all of these and bring them together in such a way they can allow missions and other practitioners to come to a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the electoral environment. So, let's dive in. Next slide please. This slide shows the first part of the framework, and I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that there are two main parts to this. When you look at the framework, one part is the sequential process of implementation. The framework contains a four step process.

So, like many other assessments, we start in step one, with a broader country context. We look at the broader questions about regime type, country characteristics, international dynamics. After that, we move to step two, and that's where we narrow in and we do a deep dive on the components of the electoral process. We identified nine categories or technical components. This part is fairly self explanatory, so I won't spend time walking us through this part of the framework. I do want to draw your attention to the second, and perhaps most important part, which is the three analytical lenses at the top of the screen.

These analytical lenses are applied to both step one and step two. These lenses are the democratic principles and obligations, the rules of the game and power dynamics, and the electoral cycle. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that the strength of the framework lies in the fact that it is integrative. So throughout the assessment document, we encourage assessors to develop questions and perspectives based on each of these three lenses. We've developed questions against each of these three, and we applied them to both step one and step two, which means each of the electrical components we look at from these three perspectives.

Next, we'll take a closer look at these analytical perspectives and how they're applied. And for that, I'll turn it over to Michael. So Michael, over to you.

Michael McNulty:

All right, thanks Carol. And hello everybody. So yeah, let's take a deeper look at the three analytical approaches that Carol just mentioned. Like she said, these are not new, these are familiar to many of you. But we really tried to integrate these into the framework. So, let's look at the democratic principles

and obligations first. This is basically providing a measuring stick for us to help decide to find what are the standards for assessing credibility of elections as we try to identify the gaps, the weaknesses, the challenges and the strengths.

With this lens, what we did was we drew on existing international principles and obligations, the main international and regional human rights instruments, when you take these together, outline the fundamental rights, right [inaudible 00:22:17] assembly, speech, association, freedom from discrimination, and then also the norms of accountability, genuine competition, transparency, accountability, that we all talk about with electoral integrity. When we apply these throughout the framework, it gives us clear benchmarks for what the ultimate goal of our electoral programming should be.

Then of course it also helps us identify where the significant electoral integrity threats are, and the gaps are in the country. So as we move through these steps, in step one in two, the country electoral assessment, we are referring back to these principles consistently, right? So as an example, let's take the principle of inclusion. So you might look at those nine technical components that Carol showed you and say, "Well, where's a component on gender? Where's the focus on gender in this framework?"

What we did is actually rather than separating it out and siloing it, what we did is we took this principle and we apply it throughout, right? We basically integrated the focus of gender inclusion throughout the guide. So for example in foundational factors in the country context, we have several questions and inquiries related to existing gender norms in the country, barriers related to women, gender-based violence considerations. And then in each of those nine technical components of the elections, there are also a number of questions related to gender barriers, women's participation ... for example, you look at the political party section and there's a number of questions related to, to what extent do parties take proactive measures to ensure equal opportunity for women as candidates, as leaders, as staff, as activists?

What incentives are there for parties to either achieve or not achieve this equal opportunity? To what extent the parties conduct meaningful outreach to women and respond to their concerns? So, that's an example of how we've woven these principles throughout the guide. And we did the similar approach with other marginalized populations throughout the framework to make sure that the inclusion for principle is woven throughout. Okay, so the second lens, we call it the rules of the game and power dynamics. And again, like Carol said, this is in a way doing political economy analysis.

Looking at the informal rules of the game, how things really work in politics and elections, not just what's on paper. So we always talk about political well being a lot more important than resource deficits, capacity deficits. But we need to unpack the black box of the political world, right? So this framework helps us do that. As we're doing the assessment, we're wanting to ask things like, "Who are the main actors involved in this part of the election? What are their motivations? What are their incentives for engaging in politics? Who is likely to undermine the election? What tactics could they use?"

This this is woven again throughout the guide, right? So for example, we look at political finance. In the party section, we're not just looking at the legal, technical side of political finance, we're looking at how it really works in practice. Is there organized crime involved? Are there oligarchs involved? Where are the hidden sources of funding? What incentives do parties and candidates have for taking that illicit money? And how do we address those issues? So let's look at the third approach, which is the electoral cycle.

I think everyone on this call is well familiar with the electoral cycle that you see here, thanks to international ideas graphic. But I think the idea here is it's not just saying elections are a process, it's

more than just election day. This helps us emphasize how the different pieces interrelate. And as we're looking at each component of the election, how does that impact other parts of the process? It also reminds us when we're thinking about programming, that the later we are in the electoral cycle, as we're trying to design programs, the less options we have.

So obviously, doing things early doing these assessments earlier, the better the more options we have. So we're constantly referring back to this as we do the assessment. For example, when we look at introducing technology in elections, we have questions throughout the guide and the legal framework, what does that mean for the legal framework? What does it mean for voter education? What does it mean for other aspects? And how do these things need to be sequenced? So that's how we've ... example how we've woven that into the to the cycle. Now, Carol mentioned the first two steps, country assessment, electoral assessment.

These are the the second two steps or the final two steps. Step three is really essentially, once you've done the assessment, helping to sort through and prioritize all of the challenges, the needs, the opportunities that were identified in the assessment, to come up with some realistic, achievable objectives, for EPP programming. And this has a number of components you can see here, it helps you prioritize problems. There's a worksheet for prioritizing the potential biggest threats and risks to the electoral process, mapping other donors, what they're doing, considering what other US government programs are happening on the ground.

Looking at your timing and resource constraints and available resources. Then of course, narrowing this down to say, "Okay, what are our core problems? What are the objectives we should put forward to address those challenges?" Then step four, identifying program options. We have a fairly long section on that. But I just want to caution folks, this is not meant to be a comprehensive programmatic guide, a how-to handbook on how to do all programs related to EPP, this is really a starting point. We have descriptions about different types of programs. At the end of each section, there's a chart that has the common objectives related to each component, and maybe some common activities.

But it's again, not exhaustive. All of you have written more detailed guides on these different aspects of election programming that can be used to further flesh those out, but this is a starting point for that. Okay, so let's look at now how can the framework be used in practice? So the main target audience of the framework is really for USAID missions. But we do think I worked on the implementing partner side for a long time, we do think that implementing partners can put this to use in a variety of ways and hopefully, maybe even academics as well. So, for USAID missions, we design this tool to be very flexible. We designed it so that can be used for a variety of purposes, depending on your purpose, available time and resources.

For example, if you're looking a couple years before an election, you want to design a more comprehensive portfolio of EPP programming. You can do a more full comprehensive assessment. Our adept team can work with you on putting together a team ... that really does a full look using all these different steps and components, that can take three to four months from scope of work to final report, but then, if you have less time or you want to zoom in on specific components, because you already know for example, the information space and election management body are your two crucial issues, this can be used as a pick and choose type of framework.

You can pick those two topics, it allows you to zoom in on them in more robust ways, you could have a smaller team do it. Even let's say rapid political changes are happening in your country, and you might need to adjust or consider adjusting programming, well, it can be used in-house by a mission to at least get a lay of the land of how you might adapt your strategy and your programming. So for implementing partners, again, we would love to get your input on ways you might be able to use this.

But, some ways potentially could be using it in very similar ways, but probably you would be using it in a more zoomed in way.

You might again, pick certain components that ... or programs that you're either working on or planning to design, and using those components to help zoom in on things. So, I would just offer those as some ideas, but again, we welcome your thoughts during the discussion. So, we've talked about how it can be used in theory but, we actually can look at how it has been used in practice. We had the very first use of this framework in Nepal a few months ago. And we're now joined by Renne Traicova from our elections team, as well as Ramesh Adhikari from USA/Nepal. They can actually tell you how they used it in Nepal to give you a concrete sense of how this can be used. So over to your Renne.

Renne Traicova:

Thanks Michael. Okay, so Nepal was the first country where we applied this tool, only partially. So the technical assistance we provided to the Nepal mission was a bit broader in scope, as it meant to support the design and planning for a broader follow on program to an existing political processes activity. So it wasn't just an electoral assessment. We also hadn't yet launched the assessment framework. But [inaudible 00:31:37] in any case, it was the first time we used this tool to help us structure the analysis of the context and then come up with recommendations for the mission.

So we had three team members from Washington, myself from the [inaudible 00:31:52] deputy elections team who focused on electoral processes. Two other colleagues from USAID [inaudible 00:31:58] children focus more on the legislative part and the analysis of the complex political dynamics in Nepal. We also have several colleagues from our USAID mission in Nepal for local political processes experts. So we reviewed the Nepal legal framework program, just the number of documents, and most importantly also, we conducted 23 remote interviews and a number of focus groups this last February.

And at the end, we provided a desk review and a summary of context analysis, and most importantly, recommendations that will help the mission with the actual activity design, which will begin very shortly. So we don't have the time here to go over all of the recommendations, but the key point to emphasize is that in utilizing the assessment framework, it was particularly helpful to have a structured and integrated analytical tool to guide us through our assessment in a very consistent manner, in a systematic manner.

So in our interview for example, it was very useful to have sample questions for each of the nine categories of the electoral process that we were assessing. By using the political economy analysis embedded in the tool, we identify that democracy gains in the power fragile, as we saw alarming evidence of backsliding. Our assessment also concluded that pervasive corruption is the single biggest and most complex underlying challenge for all political development, and has the cross cutting broadly felt impact not only for political processes, but across the all mission portfolios.

Again, to get to this point, we looked at some of the informal rules of the game, and power dynamics that Michael discussed earlier, not just the actual legal framework. This is why all of our recommendations, including those under electoral processes, focused on addressing the central challenge of corruption. So we recommended continuing to work with the election commission [inaudible 00:34:06] For example when institutionalizing their democratic electoral practices, but we'd focus on increasing the independence and accountability of the election commission, parties and the elected officials, party campaign, finance reform, et cetera.

For this and other recommendations following the framework structure, we continue to be guided effortlessly back to the key democratic principles conveniently outlined in the framework and discussed by Michael and Carol. Our recommendations for expanded civil society and media support and

civic education for example, focused on fostering one of those democratic principles and that is, accountability, namely the accountability of political parties and elected officials during the entire electoral cycle. In this way, even if this is not a standalone anti corruption activity, an electoral processes activity can feed into and complement a greater mission effort to address the endemic corruption challenge in the country.

We continue to go back to the key democratic principle of inclusion in every single one of the nine electoral categories we examined, and in the initial political economy analysis we conducted. For example, we asked how corruption and high cost of elections is affecting women, political participation, and what programs can we design of course to address that. The legal framework seem more or less perfect, and yet, it was examining the informal rules of the game that was able to answer many of the questions we asked. So it may seem obvious, even for election experts. But even even for election experts amongst us, it is extremely useful to continue to look back at the electoral cycle, and use that approach as we make our recommendations.

For example, we recommended a broader civic education program throughout the electoral cycle, to address general trend of backsliding by working to cultivate democratic values and the principles outlined in the framework. We also asked how corruption and malign foreign and domestic actors can impact each component of the electoral cycle in our programming intervention interventions. Ramesh was a key team member of this process and will share with you now a bit more of the specifics about how we used the framework in Nepal. Ramesh, over to you.

Ramesh Adhikari:

Thank you. Thank you Renne. I'm excited and happy to be here to share a case from the Nepal, particular under [inaudible 00:36:55]. Let me start from the context between the '96 and [inaudible 00:37:01] Nepal [inaudible 00:37:01] 2006. Internal conflict between the Nepal government and the Communist Party generally known as the Maoist, left over 13,000 people data and the 1300 [inaudible 00:37:15] missing, after that, by signing the Comprehensive Peace Accord by the two party, that's the Nepal government and the Maoist, put an inch to the Maoist insurgency and conclude the decade of the Civil War.

It was the [inaudible 00:37:31] line in the context and political background. And later on that Maoist committed to drafting a new consciousness through the [inaudible 00:37:39] which was one of the Maoist key demand during the war, under the Constituent Assembly finally able to come up with the new constitution that was 2015. And interestingly, in the 2008, early 2008, the Constituent Assembly, formally put into the monarchy in the 240 years of the Royal rule, and Nepal officially become a federal democratic republic. And the election, the last election after the federal democratic republic, it was held in the 2017.

The 2017 seems a little inclusive, credible, free and fair, totally embraced the voter turnout which was 70%, of the [inaudible 00:38:26] of the government, that's a former federal, provincial and local, this is a new practice for Nepal, under the election the basically created essentially a foundation for a new restructure of the future of the government. It was a really excited voter participations, the larger political consensus between the major different political post hearing the Nepal and that was basically supported to establish peace in Nepal.

It showed how elections could play as a connector with different forces bringing a former assessment essential for the future election and political process. Into the political process in this background, I think though ... why was the country context assessment essentially for the future, political process program here in the Nepal, and Nepal is a very long standing partner of the Nepal government in the area of the election and political process. We are supporting USAID/Nepal is

supporting across the three interrelated programmatic area that are working with the electoral management body that is Electoral Commission supporting Nepal legislative [inaudible 00:39:42] Parliament as well as empowering the political parties.

Next slide please. All current activities will conclude in the next year, sometimes in the summer '22. So we requested to the DRC Center, people including the NA for the technical assistant in the defining and prioritizing ongoing challenges, and not [inaudible 00:40:08] challenge [inaudible 00:40:09] to the political process. The importance of the free and fair elections for maintaining the future peace to the Nepal's democracy is still very first well and on a stable. The main challenge is Nepal to mention the peace through the election and manage the people demand to make a very accountable government.

We determined corruption is a major issue in Nepal. The EPP gap analysis and report came up with the practical set of recommendations, as well as the very user friendly recommendation [inaudible 00:40:44] related to the electoral of [inaudible 00:40:46] body for [inaudible 00:40:47] and the provincial parliament, then the civil society and [inaudible 00:40:51] water and the civic educations and the fostering political party's accountability, which were mentioned by the remain [inaudible 00:41:00] presenters and [inaudible 00:41:01] people.

On the Nepal missions would be extremely for the Nepal mission, it would be extremely helpful to support the three, fear and inclusive election, maintaining the future peace. I'll turn it back over to Carol, please.

Carol Sahley:

Thank you very much Renne for that very interesting explanation of how the tool was used in the field and how it led you to the recommendations that you ultimately came up with for the mission. So with that, we would like to turn and use our remaining time to answer any questions that you may have. So we see that we have some questions already in the chat box. We would encourage you to please put your questions in the chat, questions or comments would be welcome. I will try to group these, and we will try to answer them for you. So to start, I see that we have a few questions already, that are really focusing on how the assessment tool is going to be used in practice.

So, we have a question about whether this serves as a companion tool, or a component of DRG or conflict assessments. So why don't we start with that? Michael, do you want to take that one?

Michael McNulty:

Yeah, sure. It's a great question. So as people know, we have there's this broader DRG assessment framework, which is holistic across the sub sector, there's the conflict analysis framework. We tried to use a similar approach and framework as the DRG assessment framework when we designed this so that it fits in within that DRG framework. So, I think if you look at it as ... if you've already done a DRG assessment framework in the mission, that's great. That actually already covers step one of our framework, which is the country context assessment.

It can really help you move more quickly or skip over that. And then dive straight into step two, which is really taking a deeper dive in the elections and political processes space. So you can think of this as a way to take a deeper dive from the DRG assessment framework into the election arena. Now the conflict assessment, we also have the conflict lens applied throughout, there's a whole subsection on it in the country context section. There's also a section on it in the election context section.

So I think yes, you could do it if you have a more conflict affected country, absolutely. It's critical to do a more holistic conflict assessment. But, if it's a country that isn't dramatically affected by conflict,

you could actually use our assessment framework for the elections, and it will still integrate a lot of those considerations. So that's it for me I think.

Carol Sahley:

Thanks, Michael. So we'll turn to another question about implementing the framework. So ask, is the framework prescriptive and data collection methods i.e. interviews, desk review, surveys, or is that left up to the team administering it? So, I'll take a start in answering that question, and my colleagues can jump in. One of the key points about the framework is that, we went to this with the mindset that we understand that not all missions will have the time the resources to be able to do the full robust implementation. If you do this assessment framework in its most robust way, you would have a team of three or four people getting on a plane, going in a country and doing your really in depth analysis.

We understand that sometimes missions don't have the time or the resources to be able to do that, they might want to do it in-house with their own staff. It might be that admission has questions more specifically about one or two or three of those components, rather than doing a review of the full nine. So the way we've written it, we think that these tools can be used flexibly. And that the main takeaways are that there are these three lenses, these three different ways to look at an electoral process. Then as you're defining the questions that you want to ask, that you need to remember to be using questions that refer back to all three of these, and just adding a nod to the DRG assessment framework, which we just spoke about, in the previous question.

If we harken back to the very original DRG assessment framework, when the DRG Center was set up, quite some time ago at the core of that framework was this question about the informal rules of the game, is it's not just what's on paper, but what is really happening in terms of the political dynamics. So it's really the spirit of those three questions and they can be asked in different ways, depending on your time and your resources available. I don't know if my colleagues have anything to add, why don't we continue to another question?

On implementation. So Michael [inaudible 00:46:34] is asking about how the DRG Center plans to socialize the assessment framework with mission colleagues? And will the assessment be required or encouraged to some matter of practice? So my Michael, maybe you can take this one?

Michael McNulty:

Yeah, that's a great question. Thank you. So, it will not be 100% required, we might want it to be and like it to be. But as of now, there's no intention of having this be required. However, we absolutely 100% encourage all missions with upcoming elections two, three years out to take a look at the framework, we're going to be in touch directly with missions who do have upcoming elections, to help them think through how they might be able to use this framework. Now some missions, for a variety of reasons may decide they're going to at least use it in-house to inform their thinking, other missions with larger programs with a need to really take a new look at their portfolio, or even start up a new portfolio, may want to do a full assessment.

So again, variety of ways it can be used. But absolutely, we encourage all missions to at least use it in some way. And again, we'll be following up directly with folks on that. But thanks for that question.

Carol Sahley:

Thank you, Michael. I see a lot of really good questions flooding in here. We do have a question about how it was used in Nepal. From Stefan Durnoff, and he says, great product, [inaudible 00:48:00] a blueprint yet highly flexible. So question regarding Nepal case, how long did it take until the report was

ready? In some cases, missions are very eager to receive a readout from the team. So without briefs be offered to the mission. So why don't I turn it over to Renne or Ramesh to talk a little bit about that?

Renne Traicova:

Okay, thank you. Again, this can vary, because the question is specifically relates to Nepal. There I think it took maybe about three months. We started in December, but we really focused on it starting January and February, and then by March, we already had the report. So about three months, and then we had an out brief for the mission. So again this can be done in two months or in four months, depends. We looked at broader political processes. So it wasn't just looking at electoral assessment.

It took a little bit longer. So if Ramesh, you want to add on to that?

Ramesh Adhikari:

Thank you Renne, you really well coverage. It was three plus month, but the Nepal [inaudible 00:49:19] constantly the data our time to the DRG central colleagues, I think that they gave up a really good product within the three month. Yeah.

Carol Sahley:

Excellent. Thanks for that. So we have a question from one of our DRG Center colleagues, who asks, would you be able to give us a sense of how the framework takes into account the evolving more sophisticated tactics that authoritarians are using to manipulate elections, as well as some of the new technological challenges such as cyber threats, social media manipulations, advances in AI, et cetera? Thanks. So I see Michael nodding, do you want to start answering that question, and maybe I can jump in afterwards?

Michael McNulty:

Sure. That sounds great. Thanks, Josh. Yeah, what you just highlighted is actually one of the main drivers of why we thought it was so crucial to develop this framework. After the last 15, 20 years of these new threats emerging, it's crucial that we take all of these into account as we assess the elections. [inaudible 00:50:28] I see us on this call one of the co authors, she can speak to that as well. So yes, it was a main driver, we put a lot of emphasis on the pre election period. That's why the election cycle's in there, thinking about all the different ways that elections are manipulated well in advance of election day.

So that's woven throughout. I think the rules of the game approach really allows us to take a fine tooth comb to analyze, what are the real ways that people are manipulating processes, when you think about like election reform processes for example? If you look at it from a purely technical standpoint, and say, "Okay, they're reforming their election law, and they're trying to do it in line with international standards." But instead taking a look politically at what are the actual motivations and tactics of the actors involved in election reform?

Are they truly doing it for the right reasons? Or the wrong reasons? So, that lens helps look at each process with this new lens of sophisticated ways of manipulating. We have this broader information ecosystem section that takes a more ... I see Richard's question on that, but that helps look at the disinformation challenge in a much bigger way than we previously did, and more focused way than we previously did. I would also flag when you get the guide at the end, to take a look at step three, I think on page 65, we have a worksheet that helps you prioritize, what are the biggest electoral integrity threats and risks?

And breaks that down into different categories. I think takes a very ... a bit more of a robust, systematic view of breaking down these different threats that are new and emerging. So I would stop there but maybe Carol, you have things to add to that.

Carol Sahley:

I think you have it well covered. I think it is important to point out as you just have, that step three really walks teams through the process of honing in on what the key challenges are, and also risks and threats. So even though we spent much of our discussion here today on steps one and two in the analytical approaches, this step three that really tries to whittle down and identify the clearest risks to undermining electoral integrity is an important part of this as well.

Renne Traicova:

If I may jump in just to say that in Nepal case, it's very useful the structure, the interview is because the interview is actually under the media ecosystem part, they specifically guide you to address some of these new technological challenges, like the new cyber threats, social media manipulations, et cetera. So we did use those. And in fact, in the Nepal case, we even found out when we had interference, and specifically we even had actors like China actually officially offering assistance for the Election Commission.

So, together with USAID, we had other foreign donors, in some cases malign actors who were not there to support the actual democratic process, but perhaps had other motivations.

Carol Sahley:

Thanks for that, Renne. I think we have time for at least one, maybe two more questions. So, we have questions about implementation. Maybe we can combine two of these. So one question is from Pat Malo asking, how far out from election day do you see missions applying the framework? And how often should they revisit it, including looking beyond election day for supporting reform processes? And we have another question as well. That is about, how important is it for the assessment to include USAID staff, noting that drgs and conflict assessments are conducted by independent consultant teams.

How important is it for this assessment to include USAID staff? So Michael, if you kick us off, then I'll add a few points.

Michael McNulty:

Yeah, I can take the first one, and maybe you can take the second one. Yeah. So thanks Pat for the question, and I'm glad you raised it. Definitely the earlier the better in terms of when would be the best time to use this framework? We would say two or three years in advance of an election, even more if possible, because as we talked about with the election cycle, doing this assessment then leads to a potential procurement design or other things that take quite a while. And then you finally have the ability to start implementing partners on the ground and working on these things.

That takes years. So I think if you're thinking about this using this a year before an election, there's very few options that are left at that point, by the time this would inform things. Now, in terms of the frequency. Yeah, we would certainly encourage any change in the political context, anything that maybe changes the underlying assumptions behind the program or activity, it's a good time to revisit aspects of the framework as it's relevant to the program. But again, if you're doing it late or closer to the election day, it can still be used, I would just say ... there's very few options left at that point.

So the earlier the better. Carol, I turn it over to you for the second question [inaudible 00:55:51].

Carol Sahley:

So the question was, how important is it for the assessment to include USAID staff? And I would say that we are not prescriptive on how this tool should be used. This tool could be used by fully independent consultant team, if that's what the mission would like. It could be a mixed team, I've always found that there's a lot of value in mixed teams and doing assessments. It could be done entirely in-house, either by the mission staff or by folks coming from the Washington DRG Center out to the field.

So it's totally flexible on that front. So we are now approaching time. I think we're going to wrap up with that question. I will turn it over to Michael to wrap it up.

Michael McNulty:

Okay, thank you Carol. And thanks everyone for joining a little bit over time here. I just want to again acknowledge the several people here, we have our co authors joining myself and Carol, Assia Ivantcheva who's on the call from the Ned and Ellen Seats who really played a crucial role in doing the whole initial draft that we worked with for the past year or so. So thanks to everyone. We think the Cloudburst team, particularly Aleta Starosta who was managing this whole contract, and Maya Martin who did the design the layout, which we really were happy with.

Then Blair King from the DRG Center, thank you for all your work on this as the COR. And we also want to give a special thanks to Jeff Fisher, who everyone probably on this call knows, longtime, well respected election expert over many decades, gave a lot of technical input to the draft at various stages. So, put some extra time. Now, there's probably 20 or 30 other people on this call who gave peer reviews and other inputs. So, we really appreciate everybody's input on this. So, just want to note, please fill out the survey, there's a link being put in the chat.

We also are putting the links to the actual assessment framework, and the companion toolkit on there. The toolkit just pulls out tools that are in the framework. So it's not new content, it's just making easier to use different tools that are in the framework. Then like I said, we're going to follow up with some specific missions with upcoming elections on this. Afterwards, feel free to contact us with any additional input. We're sorry we couldn't answer all the questions. But we certainly are welcome to any feedback, input and questions, you want to email our way after this.

So just thanks everybody again, for your participation and we hope to hear from you soon. We'll wrap it up here. Thanks.

Renne Traicova:

Thank you.

Carol Sahley:

Thanks, everyone.