

Organizational Background

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a nonprofit organization established in 1983, conducts nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions. NDI programs are supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Agency for International Development and private donations.



NDI Program Activities

Over the past several years, NDI has conducted a number of activities involving Saudi municipal councilors and journalists. In December 2006, seven municipal councilors attended a workshop in Kuwait in which they engaged with 21 counterparts from Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. In 2007, Saudi journalists and local councilors attended separate, but concurrent initiatives in Washington, DC. While the journalists focused on the role of the media in reporting on political issues, 10 municipal councilors from the Gulf examined comparative models of international and domestic associations as well as different

forms of local government. Building on the positive momentum created by these activities, 28 Saudi municipal councilors and journalists participated in an April workshop in Sharjah, UAE, which focused on the roles and responsibilities of councilors and communication skills for constituent outreach. Finally, NDI conducted a one-week exchange to Spain in July. Activities exposed 18 Saudi councilors to best practices in local governance and engaging citizens in local policy-making practices; improving service delivery; and implementing state policies.

NDI Future Program Activities

NDI plans to conduct program activities that will facilitate interaction and encourage communication among municipal and emirate councils. In coordination with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, activities will impart councilors with skills to navigate through the local government system, develop and monitor budgets, communicate with the citizens through the media and organize public forums to better understand local priorities. The program is designed to help Saudi Arabia in the country's effort to: "improve the efficiency of the public sector, promote regional and local development and curb corruption." To open channels of stronger communication among the councilors,

activities will promote a strong bond between participants. While members of emirate councils may not be close to the public and their local priorities, municipal councilors are accountable to the citizenry. Increased collaboration among municipal and emirate councils will benefit both institutions and improve community service delivery.

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