

Civic Update

Taking Advantage of Political Entry Points to Improve Meaningful Engagement

Citizen Participation Team | May 2014

Over the years, NDI has learned that helping local groups think and act more strategically is a critical element in fostering active and sustained political engagement. A large part of this involves identifying “entry points” that allow them to influence political processes and outcomes. Groups also need to learn what is politically viable at a given point in time and be selective when considering the entry points. Likewise, NDI must have an acute awareness of what will work under different circumstances and support meaningful political organizing and activism that has a chance of resulting in positive changes.

Entry points are essentially opportunities where citizens and CSOs can meaningfully begin expressing their political voice. As illustrated in this Update, viable entry points can exist on the local, national, and international level. Elections, for example, are an easy entry point to identify and can be used as an opportunity to organize many different types of engagement, from voter education to monitoring to candidate forums. The lawmaking process and



Yemeni community leaders contribute to the national dialogue process

budgeting processes are also potential entry points for advocacy and monitoring, and a government obligation to adhere to an international agreement might create an opportunity for shadow reporting. Of course, this list is not exhaustive and it is also worth remembering that different entry points may be context specific, like a country working toward European Union (EU) accession or a country engaged in a reform process. What is possible and practical will often be different from one country to the next. NDI can help local partners identify the politically viable entry points that allow them to gain traction and build momentum. This is a first step when it comes to planning an effective political engagement strategy.

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When attempting to take advantage of a politically viable entry point, there are a number of questions to consider:

- What political processes are taking place (e.g., elections, budget making, constitutional reform, development planning)?
- What issues are dominating the political agenda (e.g., EU accession, extractive industry oversight)?
- What issues do citizens care most about (e.g., public health, water and sanitation, education)?
- Are there existing mechanisms for citizen input (e.g., townhall meetings, constituency dialogues, public hearings)?
- What are government's commitments and obligations (e.g., ratified Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Open Government Partnership member)?
- Who are champions in government when it comes to citizen engagement (e.g, certain ministries or parliamentary committee might be more open to citizen engagement)?

The following program examples – from Yemen, Mexico, Nigeria, Colombia, Liberia, and Albania – illustrate approaches that helped our partners effectively utilize viable entry points.

YEMEN'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Yemen's 2011 revolution which forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign from office ushered in a multi-year political transition process designed to transform the country into a more open and democratic society after 33 years of authoritarian rule. As a key benchmark in the transition process, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) brought together 565 delegates comprised of political party members, civil society, independent youth and women, Southern and tribal leaders, and other key stakeholders to discuss Yemen's future as a more open and

democratic society. Designed to be a participatory process, the NDC envisioned outreach by its nine issue-specific working groups to broad segments of civil society.

Despite attempts by some working groups to conduct outreach, actual engagement by the NDC remained limited. However, public interest in the transition process and a desire to participate in transition discussions drove civic engagement outside formal venues. For several months, parallel "informal" dialogues led by civil society groups and independent activists both complemented the formal process and provided a substitute for what some saw as the lack of NDC outreach. As part of NDI's multi-sectoral assistance to the broader transition process, the Institute utilized its relationships with transition leaders and civil society partners to bridge the formal and informal processes.

Recognizing the gap between transition leaders and civil society, NDI hosted twenty forums—five for each thematic topic—on issues central to the National Dialogue process including national reconciliation, state building, judiciary reform and local governance. To the extent possible, each forum targeted one particular constituency group drawn from leaders in civil society, media, political parties, tribal leaders, religious leaders, women and youth. During these forums, participants discussed avenues through which they could constructively engage in the National Dialogue and subsequent transition phases, including their roles in soliciting input from and communicating with the constituencies they represent. Following the sessions, NDI facilitated a joint session for each issue area where a subset of selected participants from the initial forums developed consensus recommendations and a position paper that laid out their views. Once drafted, NDI facilitated meetings with key NDC working group chairs

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Community leaders attend a forum hosted by a local NDI partner, the Advocates for Women's Rights Coalition, to discuss issues relating to women's participation in the transition process

and transition leaders for the forum participants to present their position papers and experience in the process. As a result of the presentations and discussions facilitated by NDI between NDC delegates and representatives from civil society, substantial sections of the position paper on national reconciliation were incorporated into the relevant working group report.

In addition to this grassroots approach to the national issues forums, NDI conducted a small grants program with ten CSO partners that focused on gathering citizen input from areas of Yemen that had limited exposure and engagement with the transition process. NDI provided these CSOs with technical assistance on conducting community forums and effectively collecting and compiling citizen input. The CSOs employed a variety of outreach tools, including evening discussion groups during Ramadan, workshops on transition issues, and a questionnaire distributed to the public. When the CSO-led citizen outreach efforts concluded, NDI assisted the organizations with the analysis of the input gathered from the discussion groups, workshops, and questionnaires to identify trends and priorities of their constituencies. NDI also coordinated meetings for the CSOs with delegates of the relevant working groups and other key transition leaders, including the NDC Secretary General and the chair of the Community Participation unit. This enabled CSOs to help NDC delegates understand key citizen concerns during the transition process and provided a level of citizen input not evident during formal outreach efforts.

Through both of these programs, NDI assisted citizens in providing input to an ongoing transition process in which civic engagement is critical. NDI's work with various stakeholder groups (tribal sheiks, civil society, women, political parties, southerners) during the National Dialogue has resulted in various requests from stakeholders to continue the discussion and dialogue on an informal basis, to encourage discussion, and the ability to reach consensus and create a shared vision on some of the critical issues facing the country, especially across the north-south divide. By connecting these citizen voices to the entry point provided by the NDC, the Institute helped foster meaningful political engagement and create a foundation for more robust citizen participation in the transition process going forward.



Activists from the 2% and More movement submit recommendations to the Federal Electoral Institute

IMPLEMENTING EXISTING LAWS IN MEXICO

During the past several years, political parties in Mexico have made significant progress towards internal reform, but have struggled to provide adequate opportunities for women to serve in leadership positions. In order to identify an entry point to address this democratic deficit, NDI conducted surveys and held discussions with organizations advocating for increased women's political participation, government officials, and political party members to identify existing barriers. One prevalent barrier identified through this process was the phenomenon of "Juanitas." These were women who were elected following gender quotas laws that mandated 40% of congressional candidates be women, but who would immediately resign, so that ultimately a male politician would hold the seat. This issue gained public attention when a number of women stepped down right after the 2009 election. Another identified barrier to women candidates competing on an equal level with their male counterparts was inadequate funding for candidate training. NDI's civic partners expressed that more resources for training could empower women candidates and prevent future "Juanitas." Mexico already had a law stating that 2% of federal political funding must go to women's leadership training, but it was not clearly defined or consistently implemented. Many parties used the earmarked funds for expenses like cleaning services and party supplies. This existing law, as well as the broad public discussion around this phenomenon follow-

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ing the 2009 elections, provided an entry point for activists to call for reforms.

In response, NDI supported the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) to organize the “2% and more Women in Politics” movement. The movement brought together representatives from all major political parties, civil society, and government institutions. NDI facilitated a series of meetings with INMUJERES and partners in the movement to discuss and evaluate various proposals, in order to reach consensus on a package of reforms to present to the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) which had the authority to oversee implementation of the law earmarking funds for women’s leadership training. Additionally, NDI facilitated sessions on crafting a unified strategic communications plan that included a social media campaign and online petition targeting the IFE. As a result of the “2% and More” campaign, the IFE unanimously adopted the proposed reforms that set clear guidelines for how parties could and could not spend training funds designated for women candidates.

The program’s success was predicated on widespread public interest surrounding the “Juanitas” phenomenon and an existing law that created an entry point to address a prevalent barrier to women’s political participation. Following the program, NDI and INMUJERES produced a manual outlining this strategy, which highlights the effectiveness of targeting implementation of current laws and the importance of advocating for a concrete set of reforms rather than vague calls for more equitable representation of men and women in political life (see Additional Resources, page 7).



BUDGET AND PROCUREMENT OVERSIGHT IN NIGERIA

The Bayelsa State House of Assembly in the southern delta region of Nigeria enacted public procurement and fiscal responsibility legislation in 2009 to harmonize policies and practices that monitor public contracts and procurements, but lacked capacity to implement them or include citizens’ voices in the process. In 2013, NDI was invited to



provide technical assistance to the executive and legislative branches to provide examples of best practices for creating and monitoring a budget. Simultaneously, NDI assisted the Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organization

Forum (BANGOF), a coalition of 40 CSOs, in monitoring the new budgeting and procurement processes. This dual approach aimed to address the historical lack of interaction between the legislature and civil society.

In order to prepare BANGOF members for these interactions, NDI organized workshops on how the Bayelsa State House of Assembly functions, how to engage with officials, and the mechanics of the new procurement and budgeting process. NDI also assisted BANGOF members in preparing testimony while at the same time assisting the legislature in organizing hearings for the budgeting process. These hearings represented the first instance of an open hearing in the state’s House of Assembly since the state was formed in 1996, and it was also the first time that information about the budget was shared publically.

In this case, citizens did not need to demand the right to monitor the budget process due to the opening that legislation provided. While NDI trained the government on how to create transparent and accountable budgets, the Institute also ensured that CSOs had the capacity to effectively occupy the new political space. The BANGOF members built on the skills they received in NDI trainings and effectively used the space in a way that made government value and desire their participation. Their efforts on budget and procurement monitoring left a positive impression with the House of Assembly members, who indicated an interest in reaching out to CSOs for input in the future on other issues.



Conference on women’s political participation highlighting proposed reforms of the 2% and More movement

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LEGAL REFORM IN COLOMBIA

Mining extraction permits and practices have been a festering issue in the Choco department of Colombia, where land rights of local, predominantly Afro-Colombian communities are routinely violated. In 2011, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled that the existing law on mining extraction was unconstitutional due to the lack of consultation with affected communities prior to passage of the law. The Court gave a two-year deadline for Congress to introduce a new mining code following the proper consultative procedure. This raised the issue on the political agenda to the point that President Santos visited the region.



The imperative to draft a new law provided an entry point for citizens to organize and voice their opinions. The Court's decision required a series of roundtables (*mesas*

consultivas) in affected communities in which citizens would be able to provide input on the drafting process, but in practice the government did not establish the appropriate procedures for organizing these roundtables. Despite their interest, citizens in the region were not prepared to demand the organization of the mandated consultations due to a general lack of information about the current mining law, the proposed changes, or general issues regarding mining that would help them make informed decisions about what reforms would be favorable to them. Communities lacked forums for discussion and had little experience in coming to consensus on issues. As a result, they missed the opportunity to participate meaningfully in roundtable discussions with officials.



Proposal development session in Quidbo, Choco



Community forum on mining issues in Pacurita, Choco

However, there still existed the possibility of informing the legislative debates. In order to assist citizens in taking advantage of the entry point provided by the redrafting process, NDI helped organize a series of informational forums to provide a space for citizens to come together and discuss the mining code and their ideas for the new law. These forums were not meant to supplant the constitutionally required consultations, but rather aimed to position citizens to take part more effectively in the legislative drafting process. Community members expressed a strong interest in the issue, but conversations around mining reforms were often complicated by a lack of access to information about the mining code and the polarizing economic, social, and environmental nature of the mining debate in regions with both traditional/indigenous mining and large-scale, industrial mining. Through the forums and the participation of national and international experts on mining, NDI facilitated discussion and increased understanding of the issue and helped identify areas of consensus. As a result, community members drafted a document outlining concrete proposals for reforming the mining code. NDI then took community representatives to Bogota to present the reform proposals to the appropriate members of Congress.

This approach enabled meaningful participation because it focused on the entry point provided by the Constitutional Court decision and connected the input received from the citizen discussion groups to the relevant decisionmakers. Although the government ultimately voted to reinstate a previous version of the law, the increased knowledge about the mining code in the affected communities and the experience with consensus building techniques provided citizens with the necessary tools to continue to organize around the issue.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTERESTS DRIVE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY IN LIBERIA

In Liberia, there are numerous barriers preventing citizens from engaging with the legislature. CSOs lack knowledge about the legislature and its process, leaders and activists lack the skills and capacity to carry out citizen centered advocacy, and the legislature does not provide formal mechanisms through which citizens can regularly engage with legislators and senior professional staff. In 2013, NDI began a program that addresses these barriers through combined support to the legislature and CSOs interested in conducting legislative advocacy. The legislative support includes capacity development on organizing public committee hearings and investigative missions on legislative policy issues. In turn, CSOs are supported with technical and financial assistance aimed at organizing issue-advocacy campaigns.

NDI is supporting three organizations in launching advocacy campaigns targeting the legislature. In selecting partners, NDI sought out groups that could demonstrate how their issue was relevant or would be relevant given the current political calendar so that they could get traction. Through a semi-competitive process, NDI selected groups focused on: water, sanitation, and hygiene; women's rights and gender equality; and management of natural resources. As part of the initial support to these groups, NDI assisted a local research organization to conduct focus group research in order to deepen local partners' understanding of priorities among the general population relating to their issue areas to ensure their policy positions

resonated with citizens. This process helped partners identify aspects of their previous proposals that could be refocused to garner wider public support. NDI is providing ongoing skills-building sessions and coaching for the groups as they design strategic advocacy campaigns and begin engaging lawmakers and other political actors on their respective issues. NDI's support is emphasizing actions that utilize emerging entry points in the legislative and budget process, such as pending bills and scheduled hearings and investigative missions. For example, the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Network supported an investigative mission by elected officials to a water sanitation plant in an effort to examine issues regarding public health and sanitation.

As this support continues, NDI's approach focuses on working with organizations to ensure their efforts target the appropriate openings in the legislative process so that they are more likely to influence the process and outcomes.

LEVERAGING EUROPE IN ALBANIA

Prior to the 2013 parliamentary elections in Albania, politics was divided and characterized by political stalemates and boycotts of parliament that prevented the debate and passage of legislation. While political polarization remains a primary feature of Albanian politics, the 2013 elections brought a clear ruling coalition into power. This altered the previous dynamic and created the possibility of a functioning parliament. Simultaneously, the European Union accession process, which enjoys broad political support in Albania, requires the passage of a large number of reforms. After the four-year delay resulting from the previous deadlock in parliament, the ruling coalition has renewed energy and political will to begin the process of passing legislation to meet these EU requirements. Citizen input into the process is crucial and encouraged by EU institutions, providing an entry point for CSOs to engage with parliament on the legislative process.

In order to support more robust citizen engagement with the legislature and take advantage of this entry point, NDI supported nine CSOs in conducting legislative advocacy through five distinct initiatives. When choosing partners, NDI required that organizations clearly define an issue, demonstrate a track record of engagement on that issue, and explain how their issue would lend itself to a national



The WASH Network leads members of the Liberian legislature on a site visit to a water sanitation facility

campaign targeting the legislature. The partners chosen for the program focus on areas such as: environmental regulations, road safety, women's rights, LGBT rights, and transparency in political party financing. NDI has provided technical assistance to the partner CSOs to strengthen their legislative advocacy skills which included: strategic planning exercises that analyzed how EU accession priorities impact their issue, mapping the openings for engaging on their issue in parliament both with political parties and the public, and identifying appropriate targets among existing MPs and committees.

Many of the partners, most notably the LGBT groups, have tied their issues to the EU accession process, while others have cited "European standards" to enhance their credibility. This demonstrates an example of maximizing the entry point provided by EU accession and leveraging the influence that this process has on Albanian domestic politics.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ◆ [2% and More Women in Politics: An Advocacy Experience to Share](#)
 - ◆ Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/2-percent-toolkit>



The Albanian and EU flags outside a government building in Tirana

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