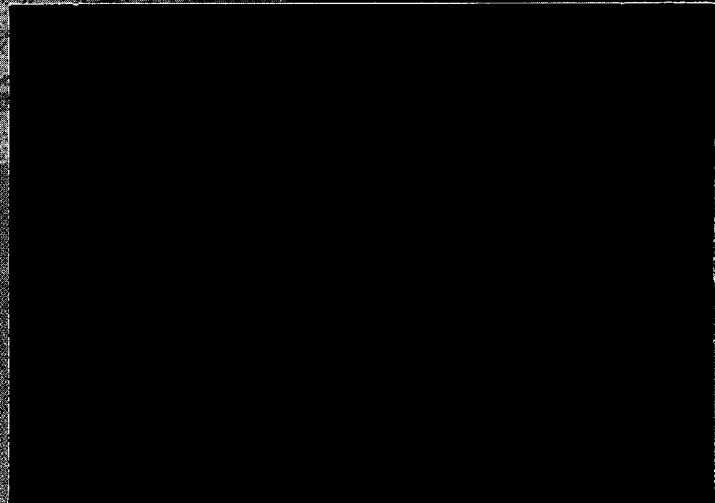




*National Democratic
Institute for
International
Affairs*



**Strengthening Political Participation:
Political Party Training and
Grassroots Input**

BENIN, 1994

Debriefing and Analysis

National Democratic Institute For International Affairs

conducting nonpartisan international programs to help promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions



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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) was established in 1983. By working with political parties and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions in new and emerging democracies. The Institute is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and has a staff of 120 with field offices in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the former Soviet Union.

NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in more than 60 countries. Programs focus on six major areas:

Political Party Training: NDI conducts multipartisan training seminars in political development with a broad spectrum of democratic parties. NDI draws international experts to forums where members of fledgling parties learn first-hand the techniques of organization, communication and constituent contact.

Election Processes: NDI provides technical assistance for political parties and nonpartisan associations to conduct voter and civic education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. The Institute has also organized more than 25 major international observer delegations.

Strengthening Legislatures: NDI organizes seminars focusing on legislative procedures, staffing, research information, constituent services, committee structures and the function and role of party caucuses. NDI programs also seek to promote access to the legislative process by citizen groups and the public at large.

Local Government: NDI provides technical assistance on a range of topics related to the processes of local governance, including division of responsibility between mayors and municipal councils, and between local and national authorities. NDI programs also promote enhanced communication between local officials and their constituents.

Civic Organization: NDI supports and advises nonpartisan groups and political parties engaged in civic and voter education programs. NDI programs work with civic organizations to enhance their organizational capabilities.

Civil-Military Relations: NDI brings together military and political leaders to promote dialogue and establish mechanisms for improving civil-military relations.

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STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BENIN: POLITICAL PARTY TRAINING AND GRASSROOTS INPUT

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NDI PROGRAMMING IN BENIN

NDI first worked with political activists in Benin when it organized a three-day election observer training seminar in Cotonou, Benin in November 1991. The seminar was held in cooperation with the Benin-based Study and Research Group on Democracy and Economic and Social Development (GERDDES). Approximately 100 participants from 12 countries in the region attended the seminar. The seminar provided practical information to organizations interested in promoting fair elections, but unfamiliar with the basic techniques used to enhance confidence and participation in the electoral process. Workshop sessions focused on such issues as pollwatching, independent vote count systems and voter education programs.

The success of that program encouraged NDI to utilize members of GERDDES-Benin as trainers in its programs in other African countries. NDI further provided a sub-grant to GERDDES-Afrique to conduct election-related activities in the region. NDI has kept in close contact with other Beninese political and civic figures who have participated in many NDI programs, serving as members of assessment missions and observer delegations as well as trainers for domestic election monitors.

Following a survey mission in early 1993, NDI and GERDDES-Benin co-sponsored a seminar entitled "Political Parties: the Building Blocks of Democracy", which took place from March 26 to 28. The seminar took place in Cotonou and was attended by 60 Beninese drawn from the parliament, political parties, civic organizations and the media. The seminar focused on the development of party structures that facilitate electoral and parliamentary functions at the national level as well as on the management of resources to sustain these structures. Communication strategies that promote accountability and efficient flow of information within the party and participation at the grassroots level were also discussed. Other issues addressed in workshops included constituency service, regionalism and decentralization, policy development, media relations, the role of a loyal opposition and interparty relations in a parliamentary context.

From May 5 to 7, 1994 NDI participated actively in a GERDDES-sponsored seminar designed to review the conduct of competitive elections in Africa since the beginning of the democratization process and the creation of GERDDES-Afrique in 1990. Approximately 100 participants from 16 African countries attended, including leaders of various country chapters of the organization, as well as political party representatives and several election administrators.



Political Party Development

Since September 1994, NDI has been involved in a political party development program in Benin. NDI's recent political party training program was based in part on needs and interests identified as a result of the March 1993 program. In response to requests for technical assistance from party leaders, NDI designed a program to expose political parties to organizational methods and practices that can help increase their effectiveness and representativeness at the grassroots level. The seminars were aimed at helping political parties prepare for legislative elections planned for February 1995. The program is especially important given the relatively early state of development of the multiparty system in Benin. Moreover, most of Beninese political parties suffer from concomitant weaknesses in areas relating to party organization and message development.

In order to prepare for the seminars, NDI placed a field representative in Benin. The field representative held on-going consultations with party leaders and activists, civic leaders and government officials to provide information on political party development and to address specific topics suitable to the groups' needs. The first seminar was conducted in Cotonou from September 16 to 18, and addressed structural issues including how parties can be organized in order to facilitate the participation of local activists in party activities, bottom-up as well as top-down internal party communications and resource development. The second seminar was held from October 25 to 29 in Parakou, a city in north central Benin. The seminar was designed to emphasize the importance of information gathering methodologies including how to solicit the views of party activists and citizens at the grassroots level. The seminar addressed party platform and message development through the use of polling or focus group research. The final seminar held in Lokossa from December 8 to 10, provided technical assistance to political parties as they prepare themselves for the February 1995 legislative elections. Election-related issues addressed in the workshops included candidate selection, constituency mobilization and grassroots organizing.

Election-Related Training

Benin is scheduled to hold legislative elections in March 1995. These elections are crucial for Benin's future political development and that of the region in that they will be a test of whether Benin's nascent democratic system will provide the necessary checks and balances to ensure a meaningful electoral exercise of the franchise. The Beninese have expressed concern about the state of preparations for the elections as reflected in prolonged debates over major electoral issues. While Benin's first elections took place against a backdrop of a broad national commitment to ensuring that the transition process resulted in legitimate elections, the current elections will take place in a more contentious political environment. There are no transitional institutions in place. Rather, democratically elected deputies will face the

electorate as incumbents at a time when the institutions of election administration are still in their infancy.

Acting on requests from the Beninese election authorities, political parties and civic groups, NDI plans to organize a series of election-related training programs for Beninese election officials, political party representatives and civic organization monitors. The training would be designed to familiarize those involved in overseeing the electoral process with information about how to best ensure the legitimacy of the process. NDI would also utilize the presence of an elections expert, in addition to its field representative, to monitor the pre-election environment and to make recommendations, as appropriate, on methods by which confidence in the electoral process could be increased.

The proposed project is based upon the principle of close cooperation between NDI and Beninese civic organizations. NDI has had extensive experience with GERDDES-Benin and would work closely with that group as it develops and implements its election-related programming in Benin. In recognition of the need to help engage actively other civic groups in election-related activities, NDI would include other groups in program activities such as consultations on the pre-election environment, national elections training seminar and regional trainings in-country. The follow-up training seminars planned to take place across the country have been designed to provide opportunities for further dissemination of information about the election process to local administrators, political party representatives and civic organizers.

This program is designed to support Beninese efforts to ensure and verify the legitimacy of the elections, rather than relying upon an international imprimatur. Most important, it would use the elections as a vehicle to help political parties and civic groups further develop organizational skills that would promote their longer-term contribution to the development of Benin's democratic system.

Programming Ideas for the Future

It is NDI's intention to stay engaged in Benin following these elections. NDI has established good relations with virtually all of the political parties and would like to keep open the possibility of continuing to work with them. NDI would be interested in the possibility of working with the newly-elected legislature particularly on issues related to constitutional reform. Regardless of the type of programming, there are strong arguments to be made for NDI to maintain a continuous ground presence in the country. NDI would also propose long-term programming to further support democratization efforts in Benin.

Presidential elections are scheduled to take place in the first quarter of 1996 and NDI may be called upon in the future to provide assistance to that process. Continued attention needs to be paid to the on-going democratization process in Benin to avoid any set back to the process in Benin which would invariably have negative repercussions to the process in other countries in the sub-region. Because of NDI's expertise and experience in Benin, the institution is well-positioned to provide support to the democratization process in Benin. With appropriate funding NDI could also consider expanding its program to include other

Section 2



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DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE POLITICAL PARTY: WHAT ROLES FOR THE GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS?

Hotel GL
Cotonou, Benin
September 16-18, 1994

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

- Beninois Trainers Arrive
- 10:00 Briefing by Michael Smith, NDI Field Representative in Benin: Hotel GL
- 20:00 Reception at Hotel GL

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

- 8:30 Participants Arrival and Registration
- 8:45 **Opening Ceremonies**
Welcoming Remarks: Michael Smith, NDI Field Representative in Benin
- Speakers:** Grace Adamon d'Almeida, President of the Association of Women Jurists of Benin; Sherry Suggs, Representative of the USAID Director; Alan Tousignant, Representative of the US Ambassador to Benin;
- 9:00 **Keynote Address:** "After the HCR, where are we now?" Maurice Ahanhanzo Glele, Director of Human Rights League of Benin
- Location: Main Conference Room
- 9:30 **Discussion of methodology** (Dialogue format, participant-oriented). You have decided the agenda. In this seminar, we will provide examples of very different and similar experiences in democracy. It will be asked to apply these experiences to your situation where applicable. It will be a time of mutual learning and understanding, as our trainers take back the information they too have learned here and see how it can benefit their efforts to help the process of



democracy.

Moderator: Michael Smith

10:00 **Opening Plenary:** Overview of Party Structures: "Roles and Rationales in the Reinforcement of Democratic Party Structures and Decision-making"

Speakers: The Honorable Laszlo Rajk, Alliance of Free Democrats (Hungary)
Paul Langa, National Coordinator A.N.C. (South Africa)
Abraham Voglozin, Education Decade of Human Rights (Benin)
Paul Ayemonna, Centre Afrika Obota (Benin)

Location: Main Conference Room

10:45 Discussion

11:00 Coffee Break

11:15 **Workshop Session 1 (Topics I and II will take place simultaneously)**

Topic I: "Party Organization and Management"

Discussion Items: Structure, National and Local; Party Administration; Internal Communication; Defining Jobs and Responsibilities of Volunteers; Candidate Recruitment and Training; Leadership Training; Coordination Role of Party Headquarters.

Topic I: Group A in Room 201 (Rajk)
Group B in Room 203 (Griffith)

Topic II: "Local Party Structures - Are We Getting the Most from Our Local Organizations?"

Discussion Items: Role of the Local Office and Activists within the Party Plan; Neighborhood Offices; Incorporating Civic Education into Voter Contact.

Topic II: Group C in Room 204 (Langa)
Group D in Room 209 (Reynaers)

12:30 Lunch at Hotel GL

13:45 **Workshop Session 2 (Same format as the morning)**

Topic I: Group C in Room 201 (Rajk)
Group D in Room 203 (Griffith)

Topic II: Group A in Room 204 (Langa)
Group B in Room 209 (Reynaers)

14:45 Coffee Break

15:00 **Role Playing Exercise**

(N.B. As you go through each activity, you will be building and adding to the elements of your party. At the end of the day, the other parties will report on their progress. Be sure to take careful notes because you will be looking for possible coalition parties at the end of the seminar.)

Facilitator: To Be Determined

Location: Individual Workshop Rooms

16:00 Coffee Break

16:15 **Role Playing Exercise cont'd; Preparation of group reports**

17:30 **Full Group Reports before assembled Conference (each group will be allotted 15 minutes)**

18:30 Per Diem issued to Participants

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

8:30 **Plenary Session: "Message Development"**

Discussion Items: The Art of Compromise and Consensus - especially in attracting potential activists; The elements of an effective party message - an insider's view (party member) and outsider's (press) point of view; including the woman's point of view in development of party message.

Speakers: Ismael Soumanou, La Gazette du Golfe
Maxine Griffith; New York City Planning Commission (U.S.A.)
The Honorable Laszlo Rajk, Alliance of Free Democrats (Hungary)

9:30 **Workshop Session 3 (Topics III and IV will take place simultaneously)**

Topic III: "Defining and Communicating Your Message Within the Party"

Discussion Items: Issue Research; Identifying and Prioritizing the Party Message; Understanding Voter Attitudes; Development of the Party Message; Defining Your Differences from the Other Parties.

Topic III: Group A in Room 203 (Griffith)
Group B in Room 209 (Reynaers)

Topic IV: "Getting the Message Out to the Public"

Discussion Items: How to Get That Message Out - Radio, Free Press Opportunities; Press Releases/Conferences; How to Write Press Releases That Will Get Published; Creative Ways to Get Message Out-Traditional Methods of Communication.

Topic IV: Group C in Room 204 (Langa)
Group D in Room 201 (Rajk)

10:45 Coffee Break

11:15 **Workshop Session 4: (Same format as earlier Sessions)**

Topic III: Group C in Room 203 (Griffith)
Group D in Room 209 (Reynaers)

Topic IV: Group A in Room 204 (Langa)
Group B in Room 201 (Rajk)

12:45 Lunch at Hotel GL

14:00 **Individual Consultations (facilitators to be determined)**

Location: To Be Announced

15:30 Coffee Break

15:45 **Role Playing Exercise**

17:00 **Full Group Reports (each group has 15 minutes to summarize their results)**

20:00 Dinner at Bodega Restaurant (all conference participants); Bus will leave the Hotel GL at 19:50

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

8:30 **Plenary Session: "Resource Development - Volunteer and Financial"**
Discussion Items: Need of political parties for outside, independent, multiple means for acquiring financial and volunteer resources; Meeting the Volunteers'

Needs for a Party-i.e., defining the obligations of the party to attract volunteers.

Speakers: Jan Reynaers, Development Cooperation Advisor (Belgium)
Maxine Griffith; New York City Planning Commission (U.S.A.)
The Honorable Laszlo Rajk, Alliance of Free Democrats (Hungary)
Florentin Nangbe, G.R.D. (Benin)
Abraham Voglozin, Education Decade of Human Rights (Benin)

Topic: Expanding Volunteer Resource Base, Creating Financial Self-Sufficiency for the Party

Location: Main Conference Room

9:30 **Workshop Session 5 (Topics V and VI will take place simultaneously)**

Topic V: "Identifying and Using Resources"

Discussion Items: Planning for Financial Contributions - How to Get Them and What to Do Once You Have Them(follow-up); Budgeting; Identifying Resources - Volunteers, Supplies; Targeting Resources for More Efficient Use.

Topic V: Group A in Room 203 (Griffith)
Group B in Room 201 (Rajk)

Topic VI: "Recruitment of Volunteers and Supporters: Contact, Outreach, Persuasion"

Discussion Items: How to Attract Interest Groups; Visibility, Opinion Leader Recruitment; Rallies; Door to Door; Local Offices; Interest Group Research.

Topic VI: Group C in Room 209 (Reynaers)
Group D in Room 204 (Langa)

Topic: Maximizing Planning and Use of Volunteers and Contributions

Location: Individual Workshop Rooms

11:00 Coffee break

11:15 **Workshop Session 6 (Topics V and VI will take place simultaneously)**

Topic V: Group C in Room 203 (Griffith)
Group D in Room 201 (Rajk)

Topic VI: Group A in Room 209 (Reynaers)

Group B in Room 204 (Langa)

Location: Individual Conference Rooms

12:45 Lunch at hotel

14:00 **Role Playing Exercise**

Location: Individual Workshop Rooms

15:30 Coffee Break

15:45 **Coalition Exercise.** (Background: Your party has made tremendous strides in its organizational efforts. You are well-represented in every region of the country. However, your reading of the situation shows that you are well behind your traditional competitors, the MPP. The only way to gain adequate representation in the Legislature is to form a coalition. With which of the other two parties will you form a coalition?). A decision needs to be rapidly made in Executive Session. Be prepared to state the reasons before an urgently called meeting of your mid-level activists that you have called to get their active support for this decision.

Topic: Decision-making Exercise, Coalition Building

Facilitators: To Be Determined

Location: Individual Workshop Rooms

16:45 Coffee Break

17:00 **Full group reports on coalition efforts (15 minutes for each group/party)**

Location: Main Conference Room

18:30 **Closing Ceremonies/Return Evaluations**

Location: Main Conference Room



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Hotel GL
Cotonou, Benin
September 16-18, 1994

INTERNATIONAL FACULTY

Maxine Griffith is currently the Planning Commissioner for the City of New York. She has worked extensively on campaigning for the Democratic Party. Included in her campaign work has been the elections of New York State Senator David Paterson and Mayor David Dinkins. She has also worked with GOTV campaigns and Democratic National Conventions.

Laszlo Rajk is a member of the Hungarian Parliament. He has worked with many of NDI's political party programs including Niger. He has expertise in party and grassroots organizations.

Jan Reynaers is currently a Counselor to the Belgian Secretary of State for Development and Cooperation. She has worked extensively with message development and political party organizing.

Paul Langa is the National Coordinator for the African National Congress. He has worked in grassroots organizing and has expertise in civic education.





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SEMINAR FINAL REPORT

I. OVERVIEW

From September 16-18, 1994, NDI sponsored a political party grassroots training seminar in Cotonou, Benin. Attended by approximately 60 mid- to top-level activists from more than 15 political parties, the seminar focused on the role of grassroots activists in political parties. The seminar was designed to provide practical information and technical advice to Beninese political parties on subjects such as party organization, democratic party structures, local fundraising and party communications.

The seminar was composed of plenary sessions, which involved all participants, and workshops, which divided the larger group into working groups of approximately 15 participants (see attached agenda). A role-playing exercise was incorporated into the agenda to provide a forum for participants to implement skills learned in the workshops with, due to the extremely fractious nature of political parties in Benin, an emphasis on coalition building.

At the invitation of NDI, four international trainers - Maxine Griffith, Planning Commissioner for the City of New York; Paul Langa, National Coordinator for the African National Congress; Laszlo Rajk, Member of the Hungarian Parliament; and Jan Reynaers, Counselor to the Belgian Secretary of State for Development and Cooperation - addressed the seminar's primary themes and led workshop sessions. These trainers have all been involved extensively in political party organization in their respective countries.

Representatives from a broad range of Beninese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also participated as topic presenters and workshop facilitators: Abraham Voglozin, Decade for Human Rights Education; Paul Ayemonna and Dominique Adjahouinou, Centre Afrika Obota; Adolphe Memevegni, Institute of Training and Decentralized Cooperation; Florentin Nangbe and Bernard Togonou, Research and Development Group; and Isidore Houngbedji and Appolinaire China, Association for Youth and Development.



The seminar was organized by Michael Smith, NDI Field Representative in Benin. Present from NDI's Washington office were Carol Smetana, Senior Program Officer; Tim McCoy, Program Officer; and Palmer Kiperman, Program Assistant.

II. PROGRAM

The seminar program was broken down into a series of plenary and workshop sessions. Each international trainer was responsible for addressing one of the following themes: Reinforcement of Democratic Party and Decision-making Structures; Message Development; and Development of Volunteer and Financial Resources. Following the plenary sessions, workshop sessions explored in more detail themes presented during the plenary sessions. A role playing exercise was incorporated into the seminar, with each workshop group forming a fictitious political party. These "parties" were then tasked with working through a scenario developed by NDI staff that required participants to employ skills acquired during the plenaries and workshops. The final exercise, conducted as part of the role play, focused on coalition building.

Judging from comments received from the participants, seminar topics and methodology were found to be interesting and directly relevant to Beninese political developments. One person said he was pleasantly surprised to discover that participants would not be sitting and listening to an educator speak for hours on end.

Since Beninese were involved in setting up the agenda through an earlier-conducted needs assessment, the program was well prepared to address local needs. This meant that discussions were lively and participants took both the session topics and the role playing exercise very seriously. Beninese participants repeatedly commented that they were amazed at the high level of participation throughout the seminar. This was especially significant given the fact that the seminar was held on a weekend and in Cotonou, where people are often called away by work or other obligations. Many said it was the first time they had seen that level of sustained interest in a seminar.

The design of the seminar allowed maximum participation and input by Beninese party activists. Program goals of strengthening parties' grassroots capacities and facilitating the development of publicly-accountable party structures were therefore more easily attained. The fact that some of the participants were mid-level activists who will be providing reports on their participation signals that NDI has also advanced the goal of fixing a role for the activist in improving "bottom-up" communications. Participants were also given some lively examples of how to expand their financial and volunteer base.

Participants mentioned both verbally and in writing (evaluations were distributed) their appreciation for the professional nature and breadth of documents prepared for the seminar. The comment most often heard from participants was that the chance to meet with the other parties, the methodology and the material and topic preparation made it possible to increase the knowledge of the functioning of parties, generally, and, specifically, within Benin.

There were few problems related to parties not wanting to open up with their competitors present. This had been a source of concern before the seminar. Additionally, following an initial explanation of the agenda, parties adapted well to the interactive methodology. There were a few technical problems as the role playing exercise began. International trainers and Beninese facilitators working with the smaller groups were instrumental in helping overcome confusion. Once participants realized that they were in control of the progression of the exercise, it evolved in a highly creative manner. The fact that the roles were loosely defined allowed each group to evolve according to the personalities of the group. The most interesting aspect was how much each of the individually prepared reports, which were presented at the end of each day's work, resembled each other in technical content.

The role playing exercise succeeded because of its originality and the fact that it addressed, in a neutral forum, many problems confronting Beninese party activists. The overall evaluation was that the role playing methodology served to eliminate individual party identities and enabled participants to interact freely as members of their fictitious political party. Some Beninese had expressed concerns before the seminar that individual political issues and differences of the parties would get in the way of a real discussion. Participants were therefore pleased with the level of cohesion shown in the workshops and during the role playing exercises. By the end of the coalition building exercise, three parties had formed a coalition, leaving only one unable to do so.

Finally, the choice of international facilitators was universally praised by participants. Paul Langa and Maxine Griffith, even though they do not speak French, were especially popular, given their African background and relative ease in relating to Beninese culture and society. An outstanding team of translators also facilitated communications between these trainers and the Beninese. Laszlo Rajk established an excellent rapport with groups as they rotated through workshop and role playing sessions. Jan Reynaers preferred a more hands-off approach to his role playing group and was eager to encourage women to become more involved in the political process. Langa's personal training/empowerment style, as well as the message of "...stop dividing yourselves. When you are at home, speak about personal problems or problems relating to individual ethnic groups, but when you are dealing with national political issues, deal with truly national issue first.." captivated the seminar's participants.

III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND A LOOK AHEAD

Participants appeared to possess a relatively good level of political understanding and sophistication. However, there is a need for more imaginative activities for the party activists (the American and South African models of political participation are very appropriate).

Judging from observations made during the seminar, the two primary needs of the activists are to:

- Recognize the worth of local responses to local problems. While accepting that the

international community can provide direction and assistance to the democratization process within Benin, there is much work to be done to empower the activists, to help them realize that the answer to all their problems is not money; and

- Reduce the distance between the position of the decision-maker and activist (implementor). The activist often feels isolated and manipulated as s/he is asked to implement policies s/he is capable of helping develop but was not asked to do so.

Activists are looking for ways to bring the leader into a real communication with the party rank and file. Currently, there is a very clear difference between the leader (I finance and therefore make the decisions) and the activist (I give money, time and/or commitment and therefore you implement my ideas).

A vexing challenge to political party programming in Benin is the role money, or "payoffs", plays in fostering political allegiance. Leaders provide essential financing to parties or individuals, but this money is provided for a service, which comes either in the form of a vote or political activism. Simply put, most parties lack genuine political agendas, and the buying and selling of votes tends to be more accepted than voting for someone for his stand on the issues. Beninese say that the leader who comes to a village without cash is "zero" and will find no followers.

Solutions to this problem can be provided by non-Beninese. Indeed, there is the unfortunate tendency that feasible solutions more relevant to Beninese realities are not valued simply because they are local. For example, the idea that organizing meals for weddings or funerals, examples of community activities that can be used to create a loyal local base, was rejected. Therefore, activists often spend valuable resources for outside solutions, such as donor money, when appropriate and effective approaches could be readily available locally.

Work needs to be done to build respect for "local responses to local problems." Holding party leaders-only seminar may be a creative way to address some of these and other similar issues. This was reinforced in the evaluations, some of which mentioned that it would be very useful to bring together the leaders of the parties for a similar seminar. The issue is to provide leaders with models and examples of how to delegate authority without instilling the fear that they may lose all control of the direction their parties follow. An increased delegation of authority would certainly be appreciated by the grassroots members. Emphasis would have to be put on the fact that more training and authority given to the activists would increase the leader's own effectiveness and leadership. At the same time, empowered activists would increase their importance in providing an active leadership role within the party.

IV. EVALUATION

This was the first seminar conducted under the current Benin program, which envisions two more seminars. Judging from evaluation forms, comments and other feedback, the success of this program is a harbinger of better things to come in subsequent programming. Of course,

any appropriate lessons should be drawn from this first step and applied to future programming. Outlined below are points identified by NDI staff, international trainers and Beninese participants as areas for improvement before the next seminar.

Role Playing Exercise/Agenda - The role playing exercises could have been made more instructional by linking them more tightly with session topics, given more advance planning. As for the agenda, it was very tight. This was underscored by some participants who stated that it allowed them to hear the expertise of the international facilitators on a wide variety of topics. Most people noted at the same time that the full agenda did not allow enough time to respond to all their questions or explore each topic in detail. Of course, such seminars sometimes raise more questions than answers. NDI will work with Beninese to identify answers in follow-up meetings, which can also provide a basis for determining future programming and evaluation purposes.

The agenda itself would have ideally been prepared and finessed further in advance to make sure that all agenda items were confirmed and in place. Owing to the fact that the agenda was finalized at a late date, some of the international and local trainers were unable to see the agenda before the seminar began. This at times created some confusion as to the exact manner in which the program would proceed.

Role of Beninese Facilitators - More input by the local facilitators had been envisioned. Their roles were reduced due primarily to the fact that it was not possible to conduct a detailed joint briefing with the international trainers before the seminar and by the dense nature of the schedule. Therefore, the Beninese (and the internationals) were not as clear as one would have preferred concerning their respective roles in the workshops and on their respective approaches to the seminar's main themes. Due to the tight schedule, input by all trainers during the plenary sessions had to be reduced. The Beninese trainers, for example, were asked to curtail their remarks to give more time to the international trainers who had been invited by NDI. A couple of participants and trainers had stated that, even if they appreciated the input from the internationals, they would have liked to have seen more of a mixture of ideas and approaches in the activities.

African NGOs have a crucial role to can play in NDI programming. The participation of the Beninese NGOs in the seminar, even as observers, is helpful for increasing the effectiveness of future interventions with political parties on a more personalized level. These NGOs saw and heard the information that was exchanged during the plenary sessions, workshops and role playing exercises. When doing follow-up work with the parties, domestic NGOs can serve as cultural interpreters in searching for answers to the questions raised in the seminar.

Supporting Documentation/Resource Materials - Documentation that was given to participants was generally well received. Not surprisingly, participants sometimes wanted more than we had available. On an internal level, more documents could have been available and prepared with more advanced notice and communication with the Washington office. Even though the Beninese mentioned that they were pleased with the documentation, in the future attention should

be paid to providing participants with more materials adapted to their particular situation. Now that the program is functioning, these documents should be attainable with good, timely communication between Washington and the field.

Logistics - The seminar was held at the GL, a locally-owned hotel that is located in a residential section in the eastern part of Cotonou. NDI had opted for this hotel, as opposed to the Sheraton, in light of the grassroots nature of the program and the desire to avoid sending the "wrong message" by holding the seminar in a world-class hotel. Some Beninese had advocated the GL as being "more Beninese" and a location where participants would feel more comfortable.

Initial concerns on the part of the NDI-Washington team related to the location, size of facilities and ability of the hotel to accommodate a conference of approximately 80 participants. The hotel, about a 20 to 30 minute drive from NDI offices, was accessible only by unpaved roads, which became very messy during rains that occurred during two days of the seminar. As is the case in many similar settings across Africa, private "security forces," who demanded to see passports and asked for money, were active at night near the hotel. International trainers and Beninese participants alike complained that the workshop rooms were too small and, in those where air conditioning did not work well, easily became too hot. All four international trainers indicated that the program could have been enhanced by improved facilities. Lodging rooms had small, uncomfortable beds and a penchant for attracting mosquitoes.

After considerable discussion, NDI decided to lodge the international trainers in another hotel, the PLM, which was located about 10 minutes from the GL. While the PLM was an improvement over the GL, for the international trainers lodged there and for NDI staff as well, the PLM was found to be uncomfortable and awkward. For example, transportation to and from the GL had to be hastily arranged and coordinated on a daily basis. A perceived laxness in security at the PLM, which was noted during a 1993 NDI program in Cotonou, was remarked upon again this year.

The GL could, in the end, accommodate the conference (as it had previously done with other, non-NDI events) without any major problems. However, the hotel set-up allowed for little to no margin for error. NDI staff, therefore, were required to check and re-check facility readiness, which imposed an unnecessary burden on an already heavy schedule. As for the Beninese impression of the place, at least two participants said that the GL, like the Sheraton, was a facility that they could not afford and had not previously visited.

In retrospect, NDI-Washington staff present for the seminar believed that the Sheraton would have, on balance, better hosted the conference. While there are precedents in NDI programming for choosing lower-scale facilities, this has primarily been a function of nothing else being available, or prices being too exorbitant. The Sheraton is expensive, but NDI has previously negotiated acceptable prices for rooms and meeting facilities. Furthermore, NDI offices are located nearby, facilities in the hotel are of international quality and could, therefore, have housed both Beninese and international trainers.