

CONSTITUENCY HANDBOOK

For Members of Parliament



An overview of NDI's constituency outreach training program in Malawi,
December 1995 to October 1996.

NDI MALAWI

NDI MALAWI CONSTITUENCY OUTREACH PROJECT

This booklet has been produced to give NDI staff members and other interested individuals an overview of the first phase of NDI's constituency outreach project for Members of Parliament in Malawi. The booklet contains several memos describing the development of the program and an abridged version of the Constituency Handbook that has been distributed to all MPs.

Focus group research carried out by NDI Malawi during the two years after the 1994 general elections indicated a strong desire on the part of rural Malawians to play an active role in the political development of their country and to have close interaction with their elected officials. → The research also revealed that many Malawians felt cut off from the political process because they did not have regular contact with their Members of Parliament. In order to overcome the widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of MPs and to increase the influence of citizens in national political decision making, NDI offered to work with the Speaker and Members of Parliament to improve the performance of MPs in their constituencies.

NDI produced a draft program proposal and made a formal offer of assistance to the Speaker in late 1995. The Speaker accepted the offer and NDI met a short time later with a small group of MPs who had been identified by the Speaker and leaders of the three parliamentary political parties as being active and engaged in their constituencies. This group would become the core of the Constituency Outreach Supervisory Committee that would guide the development of the rest of the program. NDI's original proposal called for much of the program to be carried out by the three party caucuses in parliament. The Supervisory Committee insisted from the beginning that the outreach program be a nonpartisan parliamentary effort.

After a few initial changes, the current membership of the Supervisory Committee was established, with two MPs from each party represented in parliament. The Committee is a mixture of personalities, with several nationally prominent figures and several relatively obscure back bench MPs who spend most of their time at home in the village. During the first meeting of the Committee, the members identified two major constraints to their constituency outreach work: lack of resources, especially constituency offices, and; lack of information. To address the first constraint, the Committee members drafted a proposal for the creation of government-funded constituency offices for MPs (the proposal is included in Section 1 of the Handbook). Committee members have since developed a program of lobbying fellow MPs, Ministers and parliamentary committees to ensure that the proposal is funded. Much of this work has been done with very little guidance from NDI. There is now a broad consensus among MPs that the proposal should be a priority, and it appears that funding for constituency offices will be included in the 1997 government budget. The second constraint has been addressed through the creation of the Constituency Handbook and outreach training program.

The Constituency Handbook

During the first six months of 1996, the Supervisory Committee developed an extensive handbook to help their fellow MPs improve their constituency outreach techniques. The Committee initially outlined the elements that they thought should be included in the handbook, then NDI created a draft for review by the committee. After several rounds of review and editing, a final version was created in May 1996. An abridged version of the Handbook is

included in this booklet. From the beginning, the Handbook was designed to be a practical tool, rather than containing a lot of written material. The Handbook contains a wealth of important national contact information that MPs have not had access to previously, and work sheets designed to help MPs gather information about their own constituency. It also contains the first comprehensive list of sources of small-scale development funding and loans in Malawi, as well as application forms. The first section of the handbook is a short description of constituency outreach techniques and the reasons why constituency work is important. This section is very Malawi-specific and draws on examples given by the members of the Supervisory Committee themselves.

The original version of the Handbook is bound in a large three-ring binder with tabbed sections and different colored paper marking the different forms within each section. Using a binder will allow MPs to customize their handbooks and to insert updated contact information. Copies of the original Handbook are available for review in the Johannesburg and Washington DC offices.

Handbook Distribution and Training

In June 1996, NDI and the Supervisory Committee held a two-day seminar for a group of 13 MPs in Zomba. The seminar was intended to introduce the Handbook to a larger group of MPs who would eventually distribute the Handbook and provide training to the rest of parliament. A detailed memo describing the June seminar is included in this booklet. It was originally hoped that the distribution of the Handbook and training sessions would take place during the July session of parliament. However, an ongoing dispute compelled the opposition AFORD and MCP parties to walk out of parliament before the Handbook could be distributed. The Supervisory Committee decided to wait for the October session of parliament to distribute the Handbook.

In early October, the Committee and NDI met to discuss the training and distribution plans. As the dispute that caused the walkout in June had not been resolved and the opposition parties were stating publicly that they would not go back to parliament, the Committee decided to hold three regional workshops to distribute the Handbook before the scheduled opening of parliament. These meetings will be held before the end of October. The Supervisory Committee members and the other MPs who attended the June seminar will distribute and introduce the Handbook to small groups of MPs and discuss various outreach techniques.

The Future of the Program

The Committee members are eager to continue their work and have asked NDI to support their efforts. Future work may concentrate on turning over many of the responsibilities NDI has assumed so far to the Clerk's office in parliament, including compiling and updating contact information for the Handbook. The Committee also hopes to start producing an outreach newsletter for MPs that would highlight the outreach efforts of Malawian MPs. If the constituency office proposal is funded, much work will have to be done to establish accounting structures and to train MPs and staff members on office set-up and operation. NDI Malawi's two-year grant extension includes support for constituency outreach efforts.

Lessons Learned

Many of the lessons learned during the outreach support program are outlined in the memo describing the Constituency Outreach seminar included in this booklet.

By far the most important factor in the success of the outreach program to date has been the use of a Supervisory Committee of committed and active MPs. From the beginning, NDI has allowed the Committee members to set the agenda and determine the structure of the program. The Committee has subsequently taken control of the program and has ensured that the program is relevant and well received by other MPs. The Committee members have brought many good ideas to the project, as well as a great deal of commitment and enthusiasm.

Another important attribute of NDI's assistance has been an emphasis on practicality. NDI Malawi's outreach support efforts have not produced voluminous reports or lengthy essays on the merits of servicing one's constituents. Instead, the primary product of the program - the Constituency Handbook - aims to provide practical tools that MPs will be able to use right away. By providing a concise overview of constituency outreach techniques, extensive contact information and a structured method of collecting information about the MP's own constituency, the Handbook will hopefully spur inactive MPs to action and make MPs who are already committed to the development of their constituencies even more effective.

The members of the Supervisory Committee have expressed their willingness to support and learn from constituency outreach efforts in other countries. NDI staff who are looking for trainers or international participants for outreach support projects are encouraged to contact the NDI Malawi office. If you would like more information on NDI Malawi's efforts, please contact Chris Gomes in Washington or Brent Preston in Malawi (e-mail: 104264.3031@compuserve.com).

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Hon. R.T.C. Munyenyembe, MP
cc. All members of supervisory group
FROM: Brent Preston, NDI Malawi
DATE: 4 December 1995
RE: Constituent Outreach Programme

The National Democratic Institute recently made a formal offer to the Speaker of Parliament to support a constituent outreach training programme for Members of Parliament. The Speaker accepted the offer, and all three political parties have subsequently indicated their interest in participating in this programme. The outreach programme will be facilitated by Brent Preston of NDI Malawi. The following MPs have agreed to help design and oversee the programme:

Hon. R.T.C. Munyenyembe, M.P.
Mr. L.C. Chaziya, M.P. (please note that Mr. Chaziya has been replaced by Mr. Kangaude)
Ms. C.T. Kainja, M.P.
Mr. F.S. Mphepo, M.P.
Mr. M. Kalele, M.P.
Hon. B.H. Kawonga, M.P.
Mr. J.K. Luwe, M.P.

All of the individuals listed above have received a copy of a draft programme proposal prepared by NDI Malawi. Mr. Preston has met individually with the Speaker and Ms. Kainja, and will meet in the near future with Hon. Kawonga to discuss this programme. On Friday 1 December, Mr. Preston met with Mr. Chaziya, Mr. Mphepo, Mr. Kalele and Mr. Luwe in Blantyre to discuss the programme proposal and to plan the implementation of the proposal. This report is a summary of the discussions that took place during that meeting and during individual meetings with other members of the group.

Constituent Relations: Responsibilities and Constraints

The responsibility of MPs to act as a leader of and catalyst for development was stressed throughout the discussions. The MPs who are currently the most active in their constituencies spend most of their time encouraging and organizing self-help development projects, working with local civil servants to help facilitate and expedite government development initiatives and locating funding for local projects. The group felt that organizing development activities is at least as important, if not more important, than their responsibilities as representatives. The emphasis on development contrasts with many western democracies, where the representative function of elected legislators is emphasised.

The group also agreed that MPs should ensure harmony between supporters of different political parties in their constituencies and work to strengthen their own political party in their areas.

The group noted that constituents are becoming very critical of MPs who are not fulfilling their responsibilities, and that Malawians have very high expectations of the new government and the new democratic political system. The group also complained, however, that there are serious constraints that prevent them from doing their jobs effectively, many of which their constituents are unaware of. All the MPs agreed that the single greatest constraint on their work in their constituencies is the lack of office facilities. Without resources to set up a constituency office, MPs are forced either to work out of their house or to work through political party offices. Neither of these arrangements is acceptable. The group recommended that the Government construct simple offices in each constituency for use by the MP. Each office should have at least one staff member to facilitate communication between the MP and the constituents. The offices would be for the use of the MP, and would not be associated with any political party.

Financial constraints were also mentioned by members of the group. MPs' salaries are very low, and the MK500.00 monthly fuel allowance does not come close to covering the actual costs of moving throughout the constituency. For most MPs, payments to the parliamentary vehicle scheme consume virtually all of their vehicle maintenance allowance, leaving little money for outreach activities.

The group agreed that in addition to designing and supervising the outreach programme, they would work together to draft recommendations to address the major constraints faced by MPs. As a first step in the creation of recommendations, Mr. Luwe agreed to draft a list of normal monthly expenses incurred by MPs during work in their constituencies, and Mr. Mphepo agreed to draft a list of resources and personnel necessary to run a simple constituency office. These drafts will be distributed to the other MPs and discussed during the next meeting of the group in January.

The group also discussed the fundamental principals that contribute to successful work in the constituency. All agreed that MPs must first of all be personally committed to serving their constituency. Without personal commitment, meaningful outreach work is very difficult. The group also agreed that most of an MP's work should be done through non-partisan committees or organizations, rather than through party structures. Existing structures, such as Area Development Committees, can be used, and where these are not functioning MPs can create new structures. The group agreed that as many individuals and groups as possible should be involved in the organizing and implementation of programmes initiated by the MP. The MP must work with all constituents and maintain an image of neutrality and political impartiality.

Methodology

A basic methodology was agreed upon during the meeting. The current all-party group of MPs will work together to develop all materials and design training programmes. In addition to the two MPs from each party in the all-party group, two or three MPs and one party official from each party will be identified to train other members of their caucus. Mr. Preston will contact each of the parties to help identify the additional MPs and party officials. The group felt strongly that the party officials should be members of the national central executive of their party. The larger group of 15 MPs and three party officials will receive training from Malawian and international trainers during intensive training sessions. They will then lead training sessions

for other MPs. The entire programme will be supervised by the Speaker, and the Speaker will be encouraged to participate whenever possible. In future meetings the group will decide what specific activities will be conducted on a party-by-party basis.

The programme proposal developed by NDI calls for the creation of constituency handbooks by members of each party caucus. The group agreed that a handbook would be very useful and effective, but felt that the handbooks should be parliamentary documents, not party documents. The group agreed that as much of the programme as possible should be developed on an all-party basis. The MPs felt that working with all the parties would help entrench good constituent relations practices in Parliament, and would emphasize the position of the MP as an individual representative of a constituency, rather than a member of a political party.

The group was skeptical of creating constituent relations rules for MPs to follow, and felt that guidelines would be more acceptable. Whether these should be Parliamentary guidelines or if each party should create its own guidelines was not discussed.

The group felt strongly that trainers and resource materials should come from other African countries whenever possible to ensure relevance to the Malawi situation. Several of the MPs also suggested traveling to other countries to see outreach activities in action, but the limited NDI budget will probably not allow for this. Ms. Kainja suggested that Malawian resource people be used to train the core MPs (who will train other MPs in their caucus) in training methods. Ms. Kainja suggested a professor at Chancellor College who is an expert in such training methods.



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested NDI staff
FROM: Brent Preston, NDI Malawi
DATE: 19 June 1996
RE: Constituency Outreach Conference

This is a quick memo describing the constituency outreach seminar held last weekend in Zomba. The seminar was attended by 13 Members of Parliament representing all three parliamentary political parties. Five of the MPs at the seminar were members of the supervisory committee assembled by NDI late last year to help design and oversee the outreach program.

The main purpose of the seminar was to introduce the constituency handbook developed by NDI and the supervisory committee to a slightly larger group of MPs, and to provide this group with information and training on outreach techniques. MPs who are already active and engaged in their constituencies were invited to the seminar. NDI used a variety of sources to identify committed MPs, such as political party leaders, Parliament and NDI's own contacts. The main seminar facilitator was Hon. Richard Mdakane, Chief Whip of the Gauteng Provincial Parliament in South Africa. Other facilitators included:

- o Ms. Grace Kaimira, lecturer in communications at the University of Malawi
- o Mr. Charles Mandala, Operations Manager, Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF)
- o Mr. Shyley Kondowe, Director, Malawi Institute for Democratic and Economic Affairs (MIDEA)
- o Mr. Alfred Ntonga, Editor-in-Chief, The Nation newspaper

Each session of the seminar was led by one facilitator and one MP with experience or expertise in the relevant subject area.

The first day of the seminar was used to discuss the development of the outreach program, the purpose and importance of constituency work, and to introduce the participants to the constituency handbook. A significant amount of time was also spent discussing the ways in which the seminar participants could train other MPs in the use of the handbook, in preparation for the training sessions each participant will conduct for their fellow Members next week. A detailed agenda for the training sessions was developed by the seminar participants.

The second day was spent discussing specific issues identified during the development of the outreach program. Hon. Mdakane and the Malawian facilitators covered case work, communication and media relations, working with NGOs and facilitating small-scale development



projects. The Malawian facilitators were chosen for their practical experience in the subject areas covered, and gave the participants many valuable tips and ideas. In the afternoon of the second day, the participants broke into working groups to formulate specific guidelines for MPs to follow when working in their constituencies and recommendations for further programs to increase outreach skills and commitment to constituency work on the part of MPs.

The seminar was very productive and exciting, due in large part to the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants. The large majority of the participants were obviously very committed to servicing their constituencies and had implemented innovative programs, despite very limited resources and little encouragement from their political party leaders or Parliament. Participants would often become very animated and passionate when describing their activities in their constituencies and sought each other out during breaks to discuss each other's activities. The participants who had not been involved in the design of the program were very enthusiastic about the work of NDI and the supervisory committee in preparing for the seminar, and the reaction to the handbook was overwhelmingly positive. "It's in the book!" became the chorus whenever someone asked for information on a certain organization or subject. When discussing topics like "Why should you work in your constituency?" we were definitely preaching to the converted, so the emphasis was placed on developing methods of transferring the experience and enthusiasm of the seminar participants to other MPs during the upcoming training sessions.

Richard Mdakane made a great contribution to the seminar. I was a little worried at first, as he is very quiet and reserved, and speaks with a heavy Zulu accent, but he performed very well during the sessions, despite little preparation. He also had many very funny anecdotes. To introduce the session on case work, he told a story about a white constituent who called him to help find her lost dog. The story was very funny, but illustrated the importance of dealing with individual constituents and taking their concerns seriously, and the ability of case work to build support among communities that traditionally favor one's political rivals.

The Malawian facilitators were all excellent, and the participants gave them all top marks in their written assessments. The representative from MASAF stayed an extra night and participated in several sessions after his own was finished. He was eager to help MPs source funding from MASAF for development projects initiated by their constituents. Alfred Ntonga from the Nation gave some excellent tips on obtaining publicity for constituency work. During the close of the seminar several MPs insisted that they follow Ntonga's advice and write a press release about the seminar. Gillian and I stayed up after the final dinner with a group of participants to draft a release (using the guide from the handbook) that has since been published in several newspapers.

The evaluations filled out by participants at the close of the seminar were very positive, apart from the usual complaints about the size of the per diem. All the participants expressed confidence in their ability to conduct training sessions for other MPs. There was also a strong consensus that the supervisory committee should continue to function, and that NDI should continue to provide assistance in the area of constituency outreach.

NDI will now incorporate the guidelines developed during the seminar into the handbook and print 180 copies over the next week. I will travel to Zomba next week to meet with the

supervisory committee and the Speaker to organize the training sessions (the Speaker has already agreed to set aside one morning during the current session of Parliament for the training sessions). I will also distribute copies of the training session agenda developed during the seminar to the participants. I will then return to Zomba the following week to deliver the handbooks and assist with final preparations for the training sessions.

Copies of the final constituency handbook will be sent to Johannesburg and DC within two weeks. Initially, only 15 extra copies will be printed for NDI use, as the handbooks are very big, very heavy and quite expensive and complicated to produce, but additional copies can be printed if needed. Much of the handbook is very Malawi-specific, but the general concepts of the handbook should be applicable to other countries. I also think that the way the outreach program was developed could be used successfully elsewhere. The creation of a multipartisan supervisory committee of committed MPs was crucial to the success of this program. It ensured that the handbook and seminar responded to the very specific needs of Malawian MPs and were accepted by all Members, regardless of political affiliation. It has also helped build capacity within Parliament and led to spinoff projects, such as the proposal for the funding of constituency offices for MPs created by the supervisory committee.

TRAINING SESSION AGENDA

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONSTITUENCY HANDBOOK AND OUTREACH TECHNIQUES FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

1 Overview of the Outreach Programme

o **Concern of the Electorate.**

The programme was initiated after public opinion research showed that many constituents were unhappy with the performance of their MP and felt that their MP was not active enough in their constituency.

o **Development of the Programme.**

The programme was developed by a multipartisan supervisory committee of six MPs with the assistance of the National Democratic Institute.

o **Purpose of the Programme.**

The handbook and training programme are designed to help MPs better understand their role in their constituencies and motivate them to work hard for their constituents. The handbook also makes it easy for MPs to get to know their constituencies and has valuable contact information for government, NGOs and donors.

o **Constituency Office Proposal.**

The supervisory committee drafted the constituency office proposal, which has been debated by the Conditions of Service Committee and the Budget and Finance Committee, but has not yet been presented to the whole house. The proposal is not finalized, and is still under development.

2 Guidelines for Members of Parliament

o **Explanation of Guidelines.**

Guidelines were created during an outreach seminar by a group of 13 MPs.

o **Purpose of Guidelines.**

The guidelines were developed to help MPs understand what their responsibilities to their constituents are and to help MPs evaluate their own performance.

3 Why Should I Work in My Constituency?

- o **Responsibility.**
It is an MP's job to service his or her constituency. The MP is the only democratically elected representative of his or her constituents, so he or she must be active to represent them effectively.
- o **Personal Satisfaction.**
Working to improve the lives of constituents and bring development to the people who voted for you can be very satisfying and rewarding.
- o **Reelection.**
Working hard in your constituency is one of the best ways to gain support and ensure reelection.
- o **Initiating Development.**
Constituents want development, and MPs are in a position to assist them. MPs have a responsibility to help initiate, facilitate and monitor development activities.
- o **Bridge Between People, the Government and Donors.**
As an elected representative, MPs must help their constituents to communicate with the government and donor organizations to promote development and to solve problems.

4 Introduction to the Handbook

Section 1 -- Methods of Outreach

- o **Facilitating Development Projects.**
Finding funding.
Facilitating self-help projects.
Working with NGOs.
Helping constituents to find loans.
Working with the government.
- o **Working With Committees.**
MPs can create or support non-partisan constituency committees to promote development. It is also very important to work with the DDC and ADC.

- o **Promoting Communication Between the People and Parliament.**
MPs can ask for opinions before going to Parliament and explain government programmes to their constituents (civic education).
- o **Case Work.**
MPs can monitor the services government provides to the constituency and ensure that civil servants are doing their jobs. MPs can also help individual constituents when they have problems with the government.
- o **Media and Publicity.**
MPs can use the newspapers and MBC to publicize their activities in the constituency.

Section 2 -- National Contact Information

- o **Government Contacts.**
MPs can use this information to follow up activities in their constituencies and make sure that national programmes are being implemented in their constituencies.
- o **NGO and Diplomatic Contacts.**
This information can be used to help find funding or support for development activities.
- o **Media Contacts.**
These contacts can be used when seeking publicity.

Section 3 -- District Contacts

- o **Knowing District Officials.**
It is important to know the names and contact information for district level government officials so you can ensure that they are working effectively in your constituency.
- o **Establishing Personal Relationships.**
When filling out the forms for this section, you can begin creating personal relationships with district officials, who will then be more likely to respond to your requests and support your activities.

Section 4 -- Constituency Contacts

- o Knowing Local Leaders.**
It is important to know the leaders in your constituency to gain their support and assistance for your activities.
- o Knowing the Issues and Problems of Your Constituency.**
Filling out the forms in this section can help you discover the opinions of your constituents and identify the major problems facing your constituency.

Section 5 -- Sources of Funding

- o Promoting Development.**
This section can help you find funding for development projects or loans for your constituents. Sample forms have been included.

5 The MP Planning Book

- o The Importance of Planning.**
The Planning Book can help MPs plan their time and manage their activities. It is important for MPs to set goals for themselves.

6 Updating the Handbook

- o Updating the Handbook.**
NDI and Parliament will work together to update the handbook regularly.
- o Correcting Information.**
MPs should correct their address and phone numbers if necessary and point out any mistakes they find in the handbook. There is a form in the back of the handbook for corrections.
- o Improving the Handbook.**
MPs should make suggestions for improving the handbook and expanding the outreach support programme.