



Civic Update

A newsletter of NDI citizen participation programs worldwide

November 2002

WELCOME

Welcome to this issue of the Civic Update, a newsletter of programmatic best practices. This issue focuses on Civic Forum. Civic Forum is a grassroots program that moves citizens from education to political action. The following selections highlight the progress NDI is making in countries where the Civic Forum approach is being applied.

WHAT IS CIVIC FORUM?

NDI has effectively employed its Civic Forum approach to democracy education and citizen action in numerous post-conflict societies, including Albania, Bosnia, Eastern Slavonia, East Timor, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, and West Bank/Gaza. In most instances, NDI has recruited professional community organizers, civic educators and public policy advocates as resident representatives to implement the model.

Civic Forum programs are step-by-step, grassroots initiatives ultimately designed to help citizens organize themselves and participate in political activity. The program is divided into four phases. Each phase centers on work with small citizen groups.

The **first phase** is to hire and train a cadre of local field coordinators. When identifying field coordinators, considerations are given to balancing gender and other demographic variables. After receiving training in adult, community-based education and organizing techniques, the field coordinators begin reaching out to existing associational groups (e.g., youth clubs, pensioners association, women's groups, demobilized soldiers, etc.). From within the ranks of the different citizen associations and organizations, discussion groups comprising 10 to 15 citizens are formed. The process of recruiting and training facilitators and organizing diverse groups normally takes four to six months from the time the program begins.

The **second phase** is to educate the citizens in democratic principles and processes. The curriculum balances theoretical principles with the information and analysis about the actual development of democratic institutions and process in country where the program is being carried out. The education phase (or the foundation building phase) represents an initial investment in the citizens and has required up to 12 months or more to complete satisfactorily.

The **third phase** is to activate the citizens and begin moving them toward organized collective action to address shared challenges in their communities. During this phase, the field coordinators might help citizens conduct a survey of community needs, map the types of decision-making power in the community, organize a candidate forum, solicit information from a government office, or meet with an elected official. Civic Forum

then helps citizens build on these initial activities by developing political strategies for influencing decision-making - an activity that normally is unprecedented in these types of communities.

This begins the **fourth phase** of the program, which is focused on organizing and advocacy. This phase often includes reaching out to other organizations and potential allies, recruiting volunteers, targeting decision-makers, educating citizens and, ultimately, taking direct action to influence political policies and processes. Because of the organizational foundation that Civic Forum helps create, citizens eventually are able to sustain and enlarge these actions without NDI assistance.

Civic Forum takes a longer-term building block approach, where the educational discussions lay the foundation for collective action. In this case, education is a means to an end. Once the foundation is in place, the discussion groups can begin to focus on different community issues that they may like to resolve. The programs go deeper rather than wider. Ultimately, Civic Forum should result in sustainable political organizing practices. In this way, there are local processes for continuous citizen participation. Once organizing is an established practice, it also will serve as a civic education vehicle. In other words, the process of organizing, which includes the recruitment of volunteers and building support in a community, al-

lows more and more citizens to learn about democratic rights and responsibilities, the structure and function of government, issue analysis and many other citizenship competencies through participation in the organizing efforts. For this reason, it is not always necessary for Civic Forum programs to inundate a country with the educational discussion groups. A sprinkling of well-run groups--that then move systematically to organizing--may be a more practical means of promoting long-term citizen participation. Setting a limit on the number of educational discussion groups also makes it easier for NDI to envision an exit strategy. It should be the community organizing practices that are eventually expanded, and not the discussion groups.

Civic Forum, in its entirety is meant to provide the framework for citizen activism. The following successful examples of Civic Forum's implementation reflect the process of strengthening citizen participation. NDI's guided approach to giving citizens the tools to understand democracy in their local context and to change their communities is intended to be self-sustaining well beyond NDI's tenure in the countries where the approach is applied.

CIVIC FORUM SUCCESS STORIES

EAST TIMOR: SCALING MOUNTAINS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

This year East Timor became the world's newest democracy. Existing political institutions are fragile and relatively untested, making this a pivotal period of political development in which it is critical that the East Timorese understand new governmental structures and functions. It is equally important that they understand their role as citizens. To address these issues, NDI's Civic Forum program

began operating in all thirteen districts of East Timor, equipping citizens with the knowledge, skills and guidance needed to be politically active.

Since June 2001, twenty-six Civic Forum field coordinators, working in co-ed teams of two, have conducted more than 2,000 discussion sessions. The Civic Forum model teaches citizens about the principles of democracy using a curriculum based on the East Timorese constitution and transition process. Citizens begin the program by participating in small discussion groups, which provide a "protected environment" for

citizens to discuss diverging opinions about democracy. In East Timor, educational discussions have concluded and citizens are beginning to take guided political action on issues they have identified as important to their community. The expectation is that, upon completion of the program, citizens have the tools they need to continue their political activism.

Through training and support, Civic Forum East Timor has begun to equip ordinary citizens with skills to push for accountability and transparency during the country's constitutional transition. Now citizens are identifying and raising issues with their local officials and engaging members of parliament. Building unprecedented relations with their elected representatives, citizen groups in all thirteen districts of East Timor have brought MPs to local community meetings. Citizens are developing a sense of efficacy as their representatives at several levels to respond to their concerns.

A Success Story for the Thirteenth District:

Bringing the MP of the thirteenth district to a community meeting was a sign of success in its own rite. Field coordinators for the district Ainaro district, Rita & Antonio, spent several months requesting a meeting with an MP from their district with no success. Reneged promises had frustrated both them and the community. Eventually theirs was the only district that had not met with members of the national parliament.

Changing tactics, they formed a delegation to the parliament with other facilitators from neighboring districts, and recorded the district MP's commitment to come. Again the MP accepted. But this time the delegation made follow-up visits over the mountain to Dili and reminded him of his failure to visit in the past. Their persistence paid off: the MP attended and brought the Minister of Education with him. The meeting started just before noon and continued into the evening. Attendance actually increased as the day progressed! Civic Forum

facilitators from neighboring Manufahi district, Joao and Angelina, made a three-hour journey around Mt. Cabalaki to support their colleagues.

The most telling moment at the community meeting was when a young junior high school student named Ilda, asked a question. Standing straight and reading clearly her prepared question, she asked the Vice Minister for Education why her school did not have windows, doors, blackboards or, often, teachers. She also asked why the East Timor Education Department still uses the Indonesian word for high school -SMP. Not a Civic Forum participant, she had still come to the meeting to have her say. She didn't say her age, but she looked about thirteen or fourteen years old--old enough to vote by 2006 in the next election. This interaction demonstrated a clear victory for the Civic Forum field coordinators. A dialogue was established between the people of Ainaro and their representatives, setting a precedent for political involvement by these citizens.

Since June, community members trained by Civic Forum field coordinators have organized twenty-three meetings with members of parliament, now in all thirteen of East Timor's districts, but the statistics only tell part of the story. In democratic terms, the thirteenth district was a milestone. The thirteenth district is remote and could have easily been ignored. Field coordinators Rita & Antonio used their Civic Forum skills to act strategically on behalf of themselves and their community. Their persistence and flexibility to try new tactics brought their member of parliament over the mountains to a forum where he heard his constituents' voice.

Not only did the meeting give the people of Ainaro a voice, it also set a precedent for accountability in their community. The tools the citizens used to interact with representatives and the demands they have made of them to improve communities will

pressure representatives to consider the needs of their constituents. All of the members of parliament were newly elected in 2001, and there is no tradition of leaders talking with citizens. NDI is training citizens to begin this dialogue which will elicit a response from parliamentarians and set precedents for how they deal with constituents in the future. For these reasons, Civic Forum's role in continuing to empower citizens and encouraging their involvement in the political process is as critical as ever.

KOSOVO: YOUTH ACTION CLEANS DECAN

Civic Forum Kosovo was launched in the summer of 2000. Nearly two and a half years later, the program has trained hundreds of citizens in the principles of democracy and helped them become politically active. Selected and trained by NDI's Civic Forum resident director, seventeen Kosovar field coordinators began by organizing community-based discussion groups to educate their compatriots on democratic principles, advocacy and organizing skills. As their fellow citizens became more familiar with these concepts, group participants then started to exercise their newly found skills in guided political action. It is through the guided political action that citizens began engaging public officials on issues critical to their daily lives and ultimately changed the way politics gets done in select communities. Local groups in Kosovo have successfully moved from holding introductory discussions on democracy to identifying community issues, holding town hall meetings, creating advocacy campaigns and interacting with their municipal and national representatives.

Of the nearly 1,700 citizens who have participated in community discussion groups that NDI-trained field coordinators have conducted, a significant number have been young people. Civic Forum youth groups have proven to be some of the most effective in implementing successful community-based actions. Because these young people are interested in having a voice, they have implemented campaigns creating a dialogue between citizens and elected representatives, trans-

forming the power relationships between them. Multiple campaigns implemented by youth have demonstrated their eagerness to understand the role they can play in making the political process responsive to their concerns.

One example is that of the student action group in the town of Decan. With the guidance of Civic Forum field coordinators, these students began to implement a long-term, step-by-step campaign to clean up their community. Building on Earth Day activities where students helped to collect garbage around the city, the group identified environmental clean-

"Civic Forum [Kosovo] worked with dedicated and proactive Kosovars...to accomplish issue specific advocacy programs in Prizren, Peja, Pristina and Gjilan to engage public officials, youth, women, and minorities in the process to identify a challenge and then work toward tangible results to improve the daily lives of the people of Kosovo." —Julie Segal, NDI Civic Forum Kosovo Director

up as a concern they would use to engage their public officials. Using a variety of tools, the students designed a strategy to resolve the community's garbage problem. Their plan included enlisting their public officials' support in their objective to heighten citizen awareness

of needed environmental protection.

They began by targeting the director of a local waste agency called “Higjeno Teknika,” to whom they presented the problem of littering and garbage in their community and requested his agency’s endorsement and financial support of their public education campaign. The students proposed providing every household in Decan with a large plastic garbage bag with the slogan “keeping our community clean.” The group asked the director to donate the bags and pay for the printing of the slogan in return for the group’s delivery of the bags to every household in the community. The group also asked for posters with the same slogan, which they would dis-

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play around town. The director of Higjeno Teknika agreed and provided the students with garbage bags that they then distributed.

Next, the students asked Higjeno Teknika to install small wastebaskets on the telephone poles and to empty the large trash

bins more frequently. Since doing this requires money, the director asked the students to encourage the public to pay their trash collection fees as part of their campaign message. Step by step, the students enlisted the local waste agency to help get the community’s attention and convey the need for citizens to participate in keeping their town clean.

After effectively garnering the support of the waste authority and gaining momentum from their extensive awareness campaign, the students approached the Municipal Assembly with a proposal to introduce legislation to fine people caught throwing garbage on the streets. The youth have now met several times with members of the Municipal Assembly as part of their strategy to gain widespread support for the environmental protection of Decan and to influence future policy decisions.

The student group also persuaded the producer of the local radio station to give them a weekly one-hour spot to educate the public about environmental protection. Guests on the radio show have included the director of Higjeno Teknika, officials from the Municipal Assembly and Municipal Environment Department, and the Kosovo Police Service. By featuring local authorities on the radio show, the group demonstrated the level of political support they had, which helped make the message more persuasive.

Using a variety of tools that were developed with NDI assistance, the students initiated a well-organized campaign that featured awareness-raising, advocacy, and outreach. Their environmental advocacy campaign allowed citizens to play a role in the clean-up efforts, and citizens became engaged on an issue that affects them daily. Through their successes the group began to understand the role they and their fellow citizens play in affecting the political process. The Decan youth group is currently proceeding with its issue-based campaign

continually encouraged by the way they helped their fellow community members become engaged in the political process and by the realization of their own political power as citizens.

“On a field visit to Cornillon, a rural border commune where NDI is the only international organization present, we picked up three people walking on the road with their Civic Forum Manual in hand. Not knowing that we were from NDI they explained that they had walked two and a half hours to attend the session on the Executive branch even though they had already attended the same session the day before closer to home. ‘This information is so important to us,’ they said, ‘We cannot afford to miss a word.’ ” —
Conor Bohan, NDI Haiti Deputy Director

HAITI: INNOVATIVE ORGANIZING BRINGS RESULTS

Civic Forum Haiti began five years ago to help citizens participate in the political process despite a poorly functioning local government that does not meet public demands for services and change. Haiti's local government has largely been unresponsive to citizens' needs as a result of a history of centralized authoritarian government, poorly trained local officials and a dramatic lack of resources. Local officials are unaware of the laws governing local government and their role. Civic Forum's goal is to equip Haitians with the information and support necessary for political involvement and participation in their communities. Thus, the program's motto is: In a democracy, Information + Participation = Power.

Civic Forum Haiti began in four communes southeast of Port-au-Prince in 1997 and later expanded to the Artibonite, South and Southeast regions. Although challenged by low attendance during harvesting season when families are more concerned with getting goods to market, the program now operates year round in seventeen out of 135 communes. It begins with a twelve-unit civic education curriculum followed by an "action" phase where local coalitions called "Initiative Committees," engage their elected officials in areas of common concern. The sixteen local field coordinators help community groups identify non traditional strategies to develop their communities. Some groups have also successfully directed their advocacy toward local NGOs to get financial or technical assistance. Other groups have organized the collective effort of citizens to meet a community need. In every case, citizen groups trained by Civic Forum facilitators work to increase dialogue and political participation in an effort to empower citizens in the political process. Following are a selection of examples that demonstrate citizens' innovative approaches to solving community problems.

In the Morne Babo section of the Leogane province a committee is working with the

government to establish a local clinic. The committee collected dues from the population in order to rehabilitate an unused bakery in the area. Due to funding constraints the work will be done one room at a time. The committee met with Health Ministry officials requesting that they provide a doctor and nurse one day a week, and the community agreed to provide the health workers with lunch. The committee is also researching the possibility of adding a pharmacy to the clinic to stock the most prescribed medicines, the profits from which would be returned to the center. The Initiative Committee also proposed conducting a joint health survey of the region with the Ministry. With the survey results, the Committee will be able to further make a case for more medical services in the region.

In the region of Miragoane, Initiative Committee participants decided that security was of primary concern. They approached their local officials and the national police to ask for a local police station. The local police had no budget for the construction of such a station, but had policemen available. The committee decided to build the local police station with the help of citizens, and the police agreed to send an officer. The construction is thirty percent complete. Although there was no state money available for their project, the committee engaged in collective problem solving and participated in a democratic process which will eventually lead to a local police presence.

The Initiative Committee in Aquin began working with the NGO, Water for Life, to solve an infrastructure problem. Water for Life agreed to build a needed road if the Initiative Committee provided gas for the electric generators and food for the construction workers. In planning to raise revenue for the construction materials and maintenance of the road, the Initiative Committee decided to establish a toll fee of 25 gourdes per truck. Also in Aquin, the Organization for Environmental Rehabilitation donated 23,000 lime seedlings, 13,000 walnut seedlings and 25,000 mango seedlings and offered the services of an agronomist for a reforestation effort organized by the Initiative Committee. Each of these examples reflects the innovative techniques to organize for change that citizens developed in

the face of an unresponsive government.

Under the guidance of Civic Forum field coordinators, Initiative Committee members have demonstrated that they understand the role they can play as active citizens to improve their community. Through collective efforts, citizens trained by NDI engage their local communities on issues of concern. Working through local organizations, public officials, NGOs and businesses, citizens involve many other community

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Vancouver CommunityNet

www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook

Oxfam America

www.oxfamamerica.org/advocacy

The Advocacy Project

www.advocacynet.org/

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

www.publicwork.org

Civnet

www.civnet.org

The Democracy Center

www.democracycctr.org

User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation
www.ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/RED/EVAL/handbook/handbook.htm

members in planned decisions that impact their daily lives. Although Civic Forum participants have not been able to rely on the local government for funding, citizens have used their advocacy skills and understanding of the principles of democracy to identify issues of concern and find solutions to improve them, while establishing their power as citizens. This process of community involvement continues to cultivate leaders in the country and arms them with knowledge and tools they will use to continue to change their communities and their country.

ALBANIA: SURVEY SAYS...WATER!

Initiated in February 2000, Civic Forum Albania has organized over 130 groups and trained nearly 1,500 citizens in three districts of central Albania. The program began in the adjacent districts of Tirana and Durrës and was later extended to the district of Kavajë. The community groups that span these three districts operate under the leadership of 13 local NDI-trained field coordinators. Field coordinators began the program by training the local citizen groups in the principles of democracy, within an Albanian context. Building on this civic education base, the local Albanian field coordinators are now working with many of the groups to identify pertinent community issues and to take political action in support of those issues. The groups that have begun to take action and are slowly changing the face of their local communities through their involvement in the political process.

In the village of Golem, in the Kavajë district, citizens recently applied skills they developed from the Civic Forum program, in an effort to attain drinking water in their homes and to ultimately alter their community's attitude towards political participation. The citizens' activism on behalf of their community transformed their relationship with the local government who until now had been unresponsive. Citizens in the Golem group realized that three years was too long to go without drinking water in their homes, so they decided to develop a campaign to bring water to their village. They developed a strategy that used public opinion to influence local representatives and elicit activism for water provision.

The group spoke with local officials and when they received no answer, they turned to members of the community for help. The group created and implemented a community survey that asked citizens about their water issues and solicited suggestions on how to solve the problem.

Based on the survey findings, the Golem group created a petition to use as a tool to apply pressure to their government representatives. The petition was addressed and sent to the deputy of Kavajë, the local government and the main television station. It was read aloud on television and the

deputy sent a representative to the next local council meeting in Kavajë. At this meeting of local representatives, the Golem group again presented their survey findings and called upon officials to collaborate and support their attempt to provide drinking water in Golem. The local officials responded by saying they hoped to have enough money in the budget to fix the pipes within the next three years. Dissatisfied with such a long amount of time to wait for a vague promise, the group continued to use survey results to influence their local government officials. Finally, the local mayor agreed to arrange for a water truck to visit the village from another area of Kavajë on a weekly basis to provide drinking water for the village inhabitants. Later, the local government committed to placing new pipes as a top priority for the next year's budget.

By organizing the community's voice, the Golem group demonstrated their collective power to influence government decisions. Using the survey as a tool to pressure local government, this group improved the quality and hopefully the frequency of public dialogue in their community. The survey helped create broad-based ownership and investment on behalf of the local community in the public decision to provide fresh water in homes. As local government has responded to the issues articulated by the group, citizens can now feel a sense of progress through their achievement. Through the citizens' desire and initiative to change their predicament and through the tools they learned from their local field coordinators, the decision to provide fresh water achieved.

The Civic Forum approach is designed to provide citizens with the skills and desire needed to organize and remain politically active after they complete the program. The hope is that citizens trained with the Civic Forum model achieve a sense of efficacy and create practices that are sustainable. By organizing their community, the citizen group in Golem channeled their community's power. Their achievement paves the way for the community's ability to push their local councilors further on more critical issues in the future.

CROSS-FERTILIZATION IN THE BALKANS

Civic Forum Kosovo and Civic Forum Albania shared lessons learned during a July retreat. Recognizing the value of peer-to-peer exchange and consultations, Civic Forum staff from the two countries gathered to reflect on their experiences in the past year during a week-long series of discussions. They also received skills-development training, including advanced skills related to media and advocacy. Following the retreat, Julie Segal, Civic Forum director for Kosovo, expressed her satisfaction and excitement about the proven local capacity for democratic participation that NDI has developed in Kosovo and Albania through the expertise of NDI-trained local field coordinators.

WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP CIVIC FORUM 1995-1998: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

To help prepare Palestinians for the historic 1996 elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, NDI developed the first Civic Forum program. The model was designed to train local citizens to organize and educate their fellow community members about democracy and the transition process taking place. NDI-trained local field coordinators used this approach to educate more than 10,000 Palestinians over the course of two and half years.

After successfully moving many local groups from education to activism, NDI-trained Palestinian field coordinators decided to establish Civic Forum as an independent Palestinian-run organization. They believed their efforts to engage citizens in the political process would best be served in this way; *Civic Forum Palestine* is now one of the largest local civic organizations in West Bank/Gaza. The group continues to work for political reform by holding town hall meetings and by cultivating debate around topics critical to the future of democracy for Palestinians and by encouraging citizens to engage in the political process. The Institute also provides follow-on training workshops for Civic Forum graduates who desire further assistance putting Civic Forum concepts into practice.

Veteran Civic Forum participants, armed with an understanding of their civic rights and a new appreciation for petitioning government, have successfully applied Civic Forum concepts. They have called on the Palestinian Authority to improve water and sewer systems, have started schools and sports clubs, built soccer fields and volunteered their time in community efforts. At frequent town hall meetings Palestinians participate in moderated, community-based discussions on democratic principles in a peaceful setting. These meetings enable participants to examine issues of critical importance, while practicing tolerance for dissenting views. The organization recently partnered with the newly formed Bethlehem Emergency Committee to address immediate concerns about the state of crisis in the Bethlehem governorate. Jointly, the groups are holding special town hall meetings entitled "*What do elections mean for Bethlehem?*" This topic was explored by a variety of citizen groups including youth and university students, women, laborers and political factions.

NDI'S NEWEST CIVIC FORUM— SIERRA LEONE

Mary Margaret Dineen and Niall Johnston recently arrived in Freetown where they are kicking off NDI's civic, legislative and parliamentary program. Mary Margaret Dineen who launched the successful Civic Forum Albania in 1999 will be running Civic Forum, the largest of the Sierra Leone programs. Mary Margaret is currently awaiting the construction of her housing in the remote area of Koidu. Civic Forum Sierra Leone (CFSL) will be implemented in the districts of Kono and Kailahun in the Eastern Province, where the war originated and where the most damage and destruction was sustained. Plans are in place to rebuild an office in Kono, and Civic Forum Sierra Leone will recruit and hire staff that live in these two districts.

Mary Margaret has begun meeting with several international and local NGOs with programs in Kono and/or Kailahun to

introduce Civic Forum to the region. Everyone has been very welcoming and helpful. Citizens have indicated that they are eager to participate in Civic Forum, so they can begin to play a larger role in organizing their communities.

Mary Margaret is laying the foundation for the first phase of the program-- the discussion group phase--where citizens will discuss democracy in the Sierra Leonean context. From these groups, the most active and committed citizens will become local field coordinators who will later implement the program throughout the region. The field coordinators will work with ordinary citizens to educate them about the role they can play in a democracy and help move them to guided political activism on issues of concern. Civic Forum Sierra Leone will provide a quality follow-on opportunity for citizens who have participated in two other USAID funded projects in the area, to continue their participation in rebuilding their communities. Hopefully these citizens will prove to be strong participants in Civic Forum and be able to learn and move from education to action quickly.

CIVIC UPDATE

The Civic Update is a quarterly production of NDI's Citizen Participation Team. We ask that you please send any comments or suggestions you may have to Citizen Participation Team Members: Aaron Azelton (Aaron@ndi.org) or Kristin Haffert (kristin.haffert@ndi.org)

Also, we are always looking for insightful articles to include in the newsletter, so please do not hesitate to send us any submissions for future issues.

Thanks and we sincerely hope you found this newsletter of interest.

For back issues of the Civic Update refer to: <http://www.ndi.org/globalp/citpart/citpart.asp>

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