



# CIVIC UPDATE

DECEMBER 2005

A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

www.ndi.org

A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that affects a major life function. *The US Rehabilitation Act of 1973.*



## ACCESSIBLE DEMOCRACY

*Citizen Participation is an opportunity for EVERYONE*

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

This issue features NDI's work to support the political activism of people with disabilities. Over the years, NDI has found itself assisting many different types of marginalized and often impoverished populations with political organizing and activism. These groups have included women, ethnic minorities and young people. The stories found in this Update suggest that NDI can also effectively help people with disabilities that are looking to take political action. In most of the places that NDI works, people with disabilities are often excluded from participation in many aspects of public life, including elections. At the same time, however, people with disabilities are just as often already organized through different types of support groups and networks. NDI has found that moving these existing groups and networks to action is not only possible, but also

serves the two-fold purpose of creating important precedents for collective citizen participation, and of helping people with disabilities advance issues related to equal opportunity and access.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

Aaron Azelton, Director



*GOTV program implemented in part by Equality in Bulgaria*

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*Civic Update* readers may notice the change in font of this issue. Arial 12-point font is used throughout this issue as it is regarded as the easiest to read for people with visual impairments.

## ENABLING ELECTION OBSERVERS IN LIBERIA

Integrating people with disabilities into an existing NDI program can be a rewarding challenge, just ask civic program consultant David Sip who worked with the *National Committee for Election Monitoring* (NACEM) to help the group prepare for Liberia's October 2005 elections. NACEM comprised the Coalition for Democratic Elections (CODEL), the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRCL), and the West African Network for Peace (WANEP). The domestic monitoring work formed part of a larger USAID-funded elections program that also included supporting local groups conducting GOTV and candidate debates.



*NACEM training for election observers*

On short notice, Sip was asked to incorporate 20 representatives from disabled people's organizations (DPOs) into a training-of-trainers for NACEM activists. The request came from IFES as part of their effort to advance the rights and role of the disabled in Liberia's landmark October 2005 elections.

"There was some initial grumbling from the NACEM (*National Committee for Election Monitoring*) members and skepticism that a blind person could not be an election monitor," Sip, a veteran NDI trainer, recalled of the session held last September in Monrovia. Of course, there were physical challenges and prejudices that monitors with disabilities had to overcome, but these were not insurmountable. Sip told the group that the individuals with disabilities would be working as a team (same as international monitors) alongside a person without a disability who could inform them of what they were seeing or hearing, or assist them with their mobility. Each of the teams would then submit one report.

NDI had been working with NACEM since March 2005, so the relationship was strong

enough for NDI to challenge the groups to include the disabled monitors.

While statistics in Liberia are unreliable, anecdotal evidence suggests that decades of war and the resulting collapse of basic government services such as health care have left the country with a higher level of people with disabilities than would be found in a country at peace. The National Election Commission (NEC) in Liberia produced a very progressive election law as far as the rights of people with disabilities are concerned. For example, people with disabilities can be taken to a voting booth with a person of their choice as long as that person is a registered voter.

In the absence of a friend or family member, an election official can assist voters with disabilities. There were voting guides for blind voters and magnifying glasses for people with visual impairments at all polling places.

The elections, however, were not without problems as NACEM noted in their statement: *It was observed at the polling places visited that poll workers provided some assistance to illiterate and disabled registrants. While we appreciated this apparently necessary effort by the poll workers, it was discovered that the attitude became commonplace, and to some extent undermined the provision of secrecy as enshrined in the Elections Guidelines.*

At the NDI training session led by Sip, the venue was upstairs and those in wheelchairs had to be carried. However, the room was big enough to accommodate the extra participants and the agenda proceeded as planned with only minor challenges. "We went through an exercise that was planned on the agenda; a brainstorming session about the characteristics of an ideal monitor. (*Continued on page 3*)

(Continued from page 2)

Rather than do this as one group, as I had planned, I broke them into smaller groups making sure that a disabled person was in each of the break out groups.” Sip recounted how after the requisite time, the groups reported back with a typical set of characteristics such as being alert, responsible, punctual, knowledgeable, diligent, and sober. In his estimation, however, there was also an observable change in attitude once the majority of monitors began to know their counterparts with disabilities, who for the most part had been strangers or outsiders to the NACEM group.

“None of the characteristics they reported back required an observer to be able to see, hear, or have full mobility,” Sip noted. “After the



*Liberian blind man speaks up at an NDI supported candidate debate*

initial grumbling, they were now more accepting that a blind person, a Deaf person, or a wheelchair user could also be an election monitor.”

As Sip described the recent training, the inclusion of blind, Deaf, and wheelchair user participants had an unexpected eye-opening effect. Initially, it challenged the participants and himself as a trainer, but years of experience with NDI in the field have taught him the importance of being flexible. In the end it left them all with a new appreciation of what makes a good election observer.

*For further information on programs in Liberia, contact Monica Clark at [mclark@ndi.org](mailto:mclark@ndi.org).*

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## DEMANDING ACCESS

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*The National Human Rights Association for People with Disabilities, (Equality)*, which works to increase public accessibility for people with disabilities, was one of seven networks involved in an NDI-supported get-out-the-vote (GOTV) coalition in Bulgaria. The coalition came together to increase citizen participation in the 2005 Parliamentary elections by implementing the *Az sam mlad i glasuvam!* (I am young and I vote!) campaign, targeting young, urban voters.

At the same time, NDI provided additional direct support to *Equality* so it could advocate for electoral changes.

As part of their efforts, *Equality* met with representatives from the Central Election Commission (CEC) not only to present the GOTV campaign goals, but also to make various recom-

mendations including: requiring that polling stations be accessible to people with disabilities and using Arial font on the ballots as it is the easiest to read for the visually impaired. Even though the CEC did not accept all of the recommendations suggested, it did accept the recommendation to print the ballots in Arial font.

Besides the national campaign and meeting with the CEC, *Equality* also conducted activities at the local level to bring attention to various issues. In addition to voter education and GOTV activities, *Equality* evaluated over 80 polling stations to ensure that the public could physically enter the polling stations on election day. *Equality* made various recommendations regarding how the stations could be made more accessible to be in compliance with election law.

(Continued on page 5)

## HANDIKOS WORKS WITH POLITICAL PARTY

Political parties have a role to play in helping to advance public policy alternatives. For this reason, advocating to political parties can help civic groups raise awareness among political leaders and advance their issues. In April 2005, NDI facilitated a successful meeting between the NGO *Handikos* and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). *Handikos* works on behalf of people with disabilities and was seeking to persuade the PDK to publicly support some of the group's initiatives.

The war in Kosovo left many citizens with physical disabilities. Since December 1999, 340 people became disabled because of landmines, unexploded cluster bombs, as well as car accidents according to *Handikos*. Halit Ferizi, the president of *Handikos*, has clear vision: "Civil society means taking control of your own life," he says. "We are ready to assume our responsibility. They cannot make democracy without us."



*Halit Ferizi, President of Handikos*

As part of an USAID-funded program, NDI facilitated a meeting between *Handikos* and the PDK to discuss concerns of people with disabilities. This discussion led PDK representatives to raise this issue in the Kosovo Central Assembly, which approved the allocation of over \$14,000 to *Handikos* for the implementation of activities for citizens with disabilities in 2005.

In Obiliq, after an advocacy campaign by *Handikos*, the municipal assembly granted over \$1,700 for programs. As part of their advocacy efforts, *Handikos* also organized a roundtable to discuss "Equal access and inclusion for people with limited abilities (PLA) into decision-making processes." The NDI-supported event informed the public of the need to establish a committee to address the challenges that PLA face as well as the need to generate support and raise funds involving people with disabilities.

*For further information on NDI's work in Kosovo contact Sarah Workman at [sworkman@ndi.org](mailto:sworkman@ndi.org).*

## SPECIAL OUTREACH IN BASRA

It is not unusual for sign-language interpreters to create new signs for concepts that need more clarification or don't have an appropriate hand signal. This was the case in Basra, Iraq



when the *Countryside Women Society* facilitated workshops as a part of NDI's Constitutional Awareness Program, funded by USAID, for 78 Deaf citizens. During these sessions, interpreters had to create new signs to describe theoretical and political terms connected to constitutional issues like 'federalism,' 'rule of law,' and 'checks and balances.'

A wider community outreach was also initiated. Two radio stations used NDI's "Guide to the Constitution" to conduct daily and weekly radio programs which allow for the discussions on the constitution to be more accessible to not only the general public, but also people with disabilities who are unable to attend the sessions.

*For further information on programs in Iraq, contact Anne Steinhauer at [asteinhauer@ndi.org](mailto:asteinhauer@ndi.org).*

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Some of the recommendations were:

- providing parking spaces for people with disabilities,
- providing ramps outside the stations,
- posting signs for alternative entrances available for people with disabilities,
- propping open heavy doors,

- widening doors, and
- lowering the tables in voting booths.

As a result of these suggestions, the number of accessible polling stations among those evaluated increased from 11 to 26 percent.

*For further information on programs in Bulgaria, contact Megan Volk Unangst at [muanagst@ndi.org](mailto:muanagst@ndi.org).*

## NDI ASSISTS PARLIAMENT AND CIVIC GROUPS IN MALAWI

In April 2001, NDI started an “issue-based” program in Malawi to strengthen the interaction between parliament and civil society organizations. NDI worked with both members of parliament (MPs) and civic groups (CSOs) on three main poverty reduction issue areas: health, education, and agriculture.

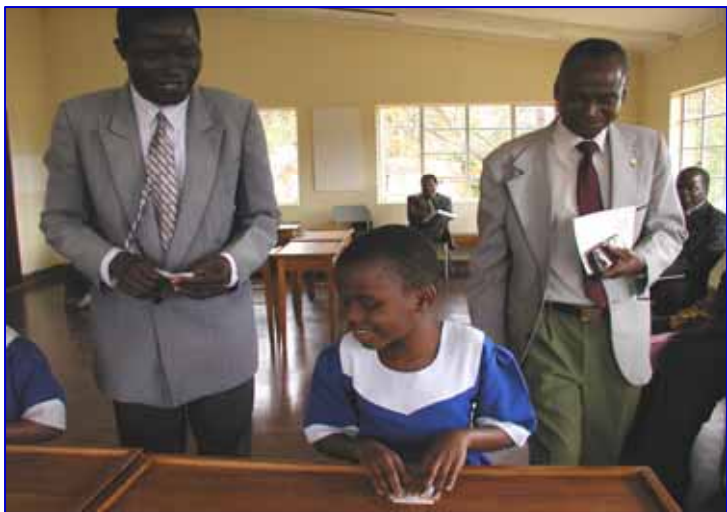
As a result of NDI’s work, parliamentarians conducted field visits to monitor the Malawi government’s performance on priorities identified in the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). In May 2001, NDI organized a field visit with the MPs on the education committee to evaluate the

UNDP estimates that globally, one in 20 people have an impairment (physical or learning) and that over 75% of these people with impairments live in a developing country. *Disability, Poverty and Development, DFID Issues Paper, 2000.*

services provided to schoolchildren with disabilities. Following its field visit, MPs on the committee wrote a report urging the government to protect resources for people with disabilities as a priority poverty expenditures (PPEs) as a part of the PRSP.

Through this DFID and USAID funded program, NDI also partnered with CSOs to assist them to advocate more effectively. NDI worked with the *Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi* (FEDOMA), an umbrella organization which advocates for rights protection of people with disabilities and coordinates the activities of disabled people’s organizations in Malawi. FEDOMA’s mission is “to enhance the welfare of all persons with disabilities and enable them to assume their rightful role in society.”

Under NDI’s program, FEDOMA conducted an advocacy campaign. The objective of FEDOMA’s campaign was twofold: to raise awareness in the community about disability issues and (Continued on page 7)



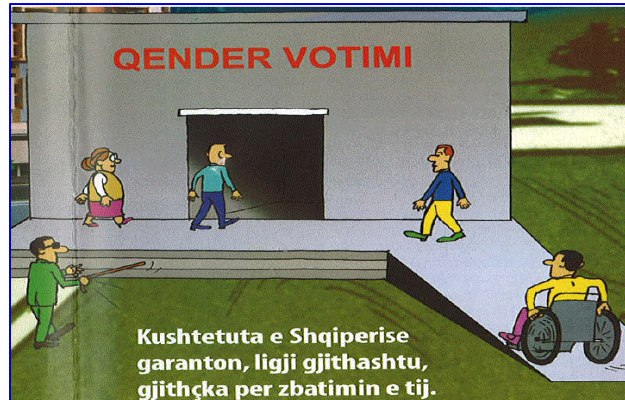
*Several MPs observe blind children reading Braille text.*

## ELECTION OBSERVATION BY CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES

Who better to determine whether polling stations are accessible to people with disabilities than a team of citizens with disabilities? This was the action of the *Albanian Disability Rights Foundation (ADRF)* when a small grant was given by NDI, through a USAID-funded election observation program.

ADRF had advocated to the Central Election Commission (CEC) to create an electoral code providing access to citizens with disabilities. As a result of these advocacy efforts, the CEC approved the production of 1,500 handicap-accessible voting booths. These voting booths were delivered to polling stations in areas with higher proportions of citizens with disabilities. The ADRF also received approval from the CEC to print ballots in Braille for blind citizens. For the first time in Albania, blind citizens were able to vote independently, ensuring secrecy. Lastly, the ADRF assisted the CEC in training trainers who would educate

members of the electoral commissions in the polling stations on the voting procedures for voters with disabilities.



*"Come vote" ADRF Brochure*

After working with the CEC to enact and implement the law on access to elections for voters with disabilities, ADRF engaged 66 citizens with disabilities to monitor elections, with a main focus on accessing voting facilities. These monitors found that the electoral code was partially implemented.

In areas where a high concentration of citizens with disabilities existed, a greater percentage of voting centers were located accessibly on the ground floor or secret rooms were available for wheelchair users. However, many polling stations were still inaccessible and special voting centers for hospitalized voters were not established as the law requires.

*For further information on programs in Albania, contact Christina Costello at [ccostello@ndi.org](mailto:ccostello@ndi.org)*

## USAID'S DISABILITY POLICY

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is dedicated to the inclusion of people with disabilities. This dedication motivated the Disability Policy that extends both to USAID programs and countries where USAID works. USAID's policy on disability is as follows:

*"To avoid discrimination against people with disabilities in programs which USAID funds and to stimulate an engagement of host country*

*counterparts, governments, implementing organizations and other donors in promoting a climate of nondiscrimination against and equal opportunity for people with disabilities.*

*The USAID policy on disability is to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities both within USAID programs and in host countries where USAID has programs."*

*For more information:*

<http://www.usaid.gov/about/disability/DISABPOL.FIN.html>

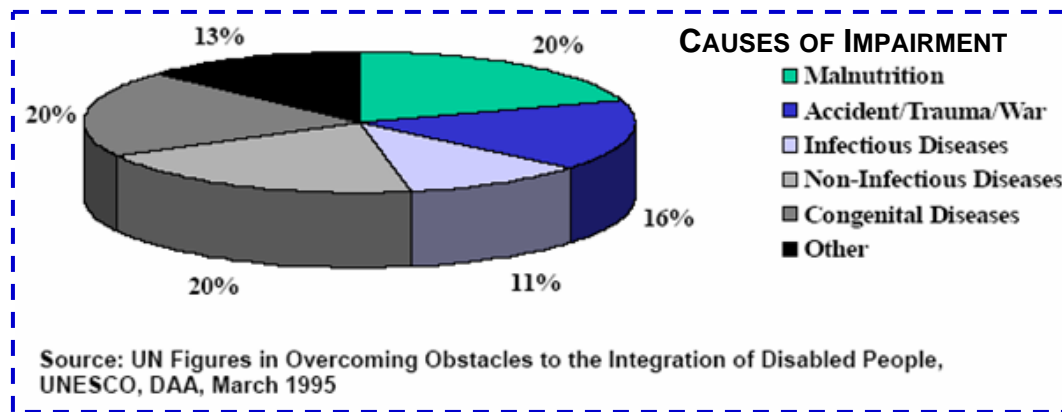
**TIP:** If you plan to work with people with disabilities in other countries, research the appropriate language prior to your interaction. CSOs that work with people with disabilities can be a good resource for preferred terms to use in the country.

(continued from page 5)

to influence the legislature to pass better laws to protect citizens with disabilities. FEDOMA worked with MPs through a mentorship program that NDI supported through regular partner meetings. These meetings gathered CSOs and paired groups with legislators with background on the issue of interest to the CSOs. FEDOMA's campaign ultimately led to the passage of the Malawi's first-ever Disability Act, which established the following initiatives:

- Established the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA)
- Made specifications for the care and welfare of persons with disabilities,
- Provided for the registration of persons with disabilities,
- Provided for the registration, direction, control, and regulation of associations and organizations whose objectives include the care and welfare of persons with disabilities, and
- Appointed a minister of disability affairs.

<http://www.fedoma.org/>



## KOSOVO CSO DRIVES ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN TOWARD SUCCESS

The main activity of the Kosovo NGO *Jeto Jeten* (Live the Life) is advocating for people with disabilities. In March 2005, the group's main objective became access to transportation.

*Jeto Jeten* advocated for a regulation that would require one driving school in each municipality to modify a vehicle for use by driving students with disabilities. Throughout this advocacy focused program funded by USAID, NDI was available for consultation. NDI suggested that leaders of *Jeto Jeten* to contact local officials and schedule a public event. *Jeto Jeten* facilitated a roundtable discussion to discuss the proposed regulation which was attended by local officials, driving school representatives, and people with limited physical abilities.

Following the event Central Assembly member Flora Brovina voiced her commitment to this proposed regulation, "a truly democratic society involves the integration of all citizens, including people with limited abilities and minorities."

Through this campaign, *Jeto Jeten* also raised its profile and expanded its reach to potential new members. While conducting a series of training sessions for students, it created youth awareness for the importance of integrating people with disabilities. *Jeto Jeten* is an example of how CSOs can create awareness among their constituents and build membership simultaneously.

For further information on programs in Kosovo, contact Sarah Workman at [sworkman@ndi.org](mailto:sworkman@ndi.org).

## ADVOCATING FOR UN-LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY

Advocating for the rights of people with disabilities is challenging, because this issue tends not to be in the main stream consciousness of the general public in many of the countries where NDI operates. In these cases, it is the people with disabilities and their friends and family members that are most concerned and tend to be the best advocates for promoting disability policy.

In 2004, through a NED-funded program, NDI worked to connect Bulgarian political parties and NGOs on public policy issues. One of the NGOs that participated in this program was the *Association of Parents of Children with Cerebral Palsy and Children with Congenital and Hereditary Disabilities (Association)* from the city of Varna, which works to prevent and treat cerebral palsy. The mission of the *Association* is to achieve full integration of children with disabilities in society. NDI worked with this service organization to give a political dimension to their work.

NDI worked intensively through trainings and technical support with ten NGOs, including



*Mentor working with a child with Down syndrome the Association*, as they implemented advocacy campaigns on issues such as ensuring public buildings were wheelchair accessible and guaranteeing that minority groups were represented in the political process. One NGO participant stated:

*"We thought there was nothing about advocacy that we did not already know... The combination of training and follow-up work helped us to establish the pattern of documenting advocacy meetings and events and monitoring our progress. Those are valuable skills that have improved our work and have become an integral part of all of our projects."*

The focus of the advocacy campaign of the *Association* was to advocate for better handicapped access in municipal buildings, such as schools and daycares.

As a part of the advocacy campaign, the *Association* organized debates and held meetings with representatives from the Municipal Council and major political parties concerning handicapped access and the development of local policies. The *Association* submitted a proposal to the Municipal Council requesting funds from the 2005 budget. As a result of the *Association's* advocacy campaign and recommendations, the proposal was included in the budget's Social Program.

To engage citizens, the *Association* worked directly with citizens by conducting a focus group to identify priority problems and then conducted assessments of local government buildings and schools, organized a public forum, and circulated petitions to determine public support for the organization's initiative. The *Association* also outlined a plan to certify accessibility in private and public buildings by offering standards for posting "handicapped accessible" signs.

Looking at the results of this program, it is evident that advocating for rights and other issues related to people with disabilities are effectively implemented through organizations and citizens who are directly affected or passionately care about issues facing people with disabilities.

*For further information on programs in Bulgaria, contact Megan Volk Unagst at [muganst@ndi.org](mailto:muganst@ndi.org).*





### About Us

The *Civic Update* is a quarterly publication of the Citizen Participation Team of NDI.

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### Thank You!

The Citizen Participation Team would like to thank all the DC and local staff members who provided assistance with compiling this Civic Update.



### LINK TO THE BILL OF ELECTORAL RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH

**DISABILITIES:** Officially launched September 2002 in Stockholm, The Bill of Electoral Rights for People with Disabilities outlines the responsibilities of states for ensuring that people with disabilities enjoy the same rights as other citizens with regard to elections and the electoral process.

[http://www.idea.int/elections/upload/Finaill\\_of\\_Rights.pdf](http://www.idea.int/elections/upload/Finaill_of_Rights.pdf)

**LINK TO UN ENABLE:** UN Enable works to improve the conditions of people with disabilities to create equal participation in all aspects of democracy. One major development was The Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities adopted in 1994. The Standard Rules consist of 22 rules concerning disabled persons encompassed in four chapters: preconditions for equal participation, target areas for equal participation, implementation measures, and the monitoring mechanism.

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/>



**Civic@ndi.org** is the Civic Group listserv that connects about 100 people interested in citizen participation programs. The listserv is a way to share information and ask questions of colleagues around the world. Most of this information sharing is also available on the Blog! *To be included on the listserv, email Aaron Azelton at aaron@ndi.org*

The **Citizen Participation Blog** was launched in August to strengthen discussion among NDI Civic Program staff, specifically local staff members. Besides the continuous forum on the main blog, the blog also stores the *civic contact list* as well as valuable *resources, links, and images*.

Access the blog at: <http://dialogue.ndi.org>

### NEW ON THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION TEAM

**Cyndee Pelt** joined the Citizen Participation team in late August, after two years serving as an AmeriCorps member both in the Southeastern region of the U.S. with various nonprofits and in New York City with Habitat for Humanity. Building a replica Third World village along side leaders from developing countries in Alabama with an international nonprofit sparked her interest in international development and brought her to the D.C. area. Originally from America's Dairyland (Wisconsin), Cyndee is excited to study international and nonprofit management through the Masters of Public Administration program at American University.