CIVIC UPDATE

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A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

NDI'S WORK WITH INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Welcome to the *Civic Update*. This issue focuses on NDI's efforts to empower citizens with information and communication technology (ICT). In recent years, NDI has helped citizens become more active and influential by using traditional and emergent technologies to develop a stronger and better organized voice in political life. The Internet, cell phones and related technology have been used to overcome resource disparities and entrenched information and communication monopolies. From quickly communicating election observations, to efficiently accessing information about government programs and priorities, NDI partners are using technology as part of their day-to-day attempts to bring about change.

Increasingly, in response to the needs and requests of partners, NDI has implemented a diverse range of programs with critical information and communications technology (ICT) components, targeting democratic institutions and/or supporting democrats in general. Everywhere that NDI works, democracy practitioners and activists are using new technologies to improve their access to information across borders and issue areas, and enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness.

Although technology itself does not take the place of organized and direct citizen action, it can have a profound affect on the ability of citizens to mobilize and exercise their rights and democratic responsibilities. Consequently, NDI views technology as an important tool for civic organizers and activists.

NDI has pioneered the use of such technologies for political purposes in new and emerging democracies. In recognition of this work, PoliticsOnline and the World E-Gov Forum named the Institute one of the 'Top 10 Who Are Changing the World of Internet and Politics' in October 2007.

Over the past two years, NDI developed tools and techniques to help election monitoring organizations throughout the world. By combining a SMS-based reporting system with NDI's rigorous election observation methodology, NDI's partner civic groups were able to use cell phones to quickly capture information on turnout, polling and results.

These groups achieved unprecedented levels of oversight of elections. The Institute's involvement in the use of SMS technology began in Montenegro with the monitoring of the 2006 independence referendum (which is covered in more detail on page 7). Since then, NDI has helped civic groups use text messaging as a reporting tool in elections in Indonesia, Bahrain, Albania and most recently in Sierra Leone.

Once again, the Citizen Participation Team would like to congratulate NDI, the ICT Team and its partner organizations for the award. As always, comments on this *Civic Update* are encouraged.

Aaron Azelton,
Director of Citizen
Participation Programs

Election Monitoring via SMS text-messaging in Montenegro

During Montenegro's May 2006 independence referendum and the September parliamentary elections, NDI's partner provided a critical nonpartisan voice in monitoring the campaigns and reporting observations. The Institute assisted its election partner, the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT) in monitoring voter turnout and reported to the public at regular intervals on both dates. The organization conducted a parallel vote tabulation using returns from a statistically determined sample of polling stations, conveying results through a revolutionary SMS text-messaging system developed by NDI. Using ICT tools, CDT enhanced the integrity of elections by alerting authorities to problems in time to be remedied, and by publicizing an assessment of the quality of polling and tabulation to expose problematic elections and increase public confidence in credible elections.

Montenegro's May election was the first anywhere in which SMS was used as the primary tool for communicating observation reports. This was also the first NDI program in which bulk-SMS was used to communicate directly with participants and volunteers. SMS was considered to be an optimal reporting tool since Montenegro has wide cell phone coverage and both CDT observers and Montenegrins in general are experienced SMS users. Furthermore, SMS reporting is a fast and cost-effective way to collect and analyze certain types of election information.

> The ability to project results (and accurately) in less than an hour was fundamental to claming tensions. Normally, the official count is not announced for 18-24 hours and the opposing blocs often come to blows in the meantime.
> - Montenegrin on Election Day

The polls opened on May 21 with 750 t-shirt clad CDT volunteers covering 1,117 polling stations. The CDT observers sent text message reports throughout the referendum. These reports included the number of registered voters (sent at polling station opening); hourly turnout reports; and a report of the number of yes, no and invalid votes at the end of counting. Observers used short text codes to distinguish what number they were sending. These messages, then, were received at CDT's reporting center in Podgorica on a cell phone connected to a laptop. Using software designed and configured by NDI's ICT team, messages were and instantly downloaded to computer, where they where parsed and their information automatically entered into a database.

> In developing countries, cell phones are the primary source of information and communication for the majority of the population, and they possess tremendous potential for popular political participation. Use of SMS text-messaging technology helps safeguard the integrity of elections and enhance public confidence in the results.
> - Ken Wollack, President of NDI

Immediately, it became clear that turnout would be very high. Within three hours, almost one-third of eligible voters had voted; within five hours, one-half; within seven hours, two-thirds; and, within nine hours, three-quarters. In the end, turnout was an impressive 86.5 percent. The pro-independence bloc carried the day, gaining 55.5 percent of the votes, ushering in an new era of an independent Montenegro.

The following September, CDT was able to use an upgraded version of the SMS text-messaging system in order to monitor the parliamentary and municipal elections. The Center engaged some 350 volunteers to monitor the parliamentary elections, local elections in Bar, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja, and Podgorica, and town council elections in Golubovci and Tuzi—covering 90 percent of Montenegro's polling stations. Again using NDI-designed software and databases, CDT was able to report the first to accurately predict and publicly announce results of the parliamentary and local elections, confirming for the public and the public opinion makers its professionalism. Domestic and international media carried the CDT results the night of elections and the next day—the victory of the ruling coalition of the Democratic Party of Socialists.

Using Technology to Improve Domestic Elections in Angola

Although 'Intelligent Character Recognition' might not sound like a political organizing tool, NDI's partners in Angola have found it to be an easy to use and efficient way to organize a large amount of voter registration information.

Angola has experienced relative peace and stability since the April 2002 ceasefire, which ended 20 years of civil war. Now, the country is struggling to overcome the legacy of conflict and build democratic institutions. Part of the struggle involves helping citizens overcome a lack of confidence in democratic political processes and an unfamiliarity with fundamental democratic principles. Many citizens fear that the next elections will spark a return to war. The 1992 polls – Angola's first democratic elections to take place after independence – resulted in a decade of violence when the opposition party, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), claimed that the process was not fair. Fifteen years later, citizens still largely associate elections with violence and have expressed lingering fear and anxiety regarding the anticipated 2009 polls. This situation demands that citizens are brought into the electoral process early and so that they develop a stake in both the underlying principles and the process.

Although the country's emergent civil society organizations (CSOs) want to be involved in upcoming electoral process, they are inexperienced and have requested assistance to develop their political organizing capacities. In response to this situation, NDI has been helping a range a civic groups across the country organize election-related activities. With support from USAID, and more recently from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute has provided training and guidance to doz-

ens of civic groups, resulting in the formation of electoral networks in all 18 provinces. NDI also helped facilitate the development of the National Platform for Angolan Civil Society in Elections (PNASCAE or National Platform) to coordinate the networks' activities.

With NDI assistance, the provincial election networks have been monitoring and commenting on the current voter registration process. Collectively, observers have completed more than 14,348 observation forms to date, which have been entered into the National Platform's central database. NDI is presently working with the National Platform to improve data collection and reporting by applying 'intelligent character recognition' software. This revolutionary technology reads handwritten data on the election registration observation forms. The information is then scanned and uploaded to a centralized database. The database then processes the scanned observer reports around the country.

Through a well-organized monitoring and education effort, NDI anticipates that the Platform and its networks will be able to increase the prospects for peaceful, credible and transparent elections in Angola.

Registration Observation Form

Aswat: An Online Arabic Resource

Access to timely information, alternative news sources and free expression is fundamental to democracy and its development throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Time and again, political activists— including elected officials, political party leaders, civic representatives or journalists— are calling for ways to connect with their peers, recognizing that they have success stories, experiences and resources to share.

As a response, NDI is facilitating the development of an online portal at www.aswat.com— Aswat means 'voices' in Arabic and is the root word for 'vote.' Aswat is intended to promote dialogue and sharing on politics and reform across the Arabic-speaking world. It provides a platform for like-minded people to explore reform topics at all levels and network together. Relying on the content that users provide, the site is a tool for activists to amplify their voices and forge counterbalance anti-democratic forces. In this respect, it can enhance existing collaborations, better link reformers and connect activists throughout the region who feel isolated from democratic developments elsewhere.

Aswat is envisioned as a website that will provide one-stop access to regional news; a comprehensive, multi-lingual library of documents and training manuals; and opportunities for direct dialogue, sharing and collaboration among users. The site itself promotes democratic values in its own operation, with open forums, blogs, commentaries and rating systems that allow for a full range of opinions. Over time, this portal can evolve into a virtual home for a growing network of reformers in the Middle East and North Africa, shaped by their needs and interests, and act as a repository for their experiences and resources over time.

The development of the site was based on input

from activists and technology specialists across the Arabic-speaking world. NDI conducted interviews and surveys with local partners and staff throughout 10 countries in the region. Focus groups with target users in Morocco and Jordan also helped to determine design and enhance usability. NDI also assembled an Advisory Board composed of leading activists and reform leaders from many different backgrounds — media, political parties, academia and civil society—to continue to guide the on-going development and make the site responsive to the needs of the variety of end users found throughout the region.

Aswat has been developed with financial assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Technical assistance is also supported by a partnership with *Meadan*, a non-profit organization whose mission is to advance global understanding and tolerance by providing people with tools for online cross-cultural dialogue. Currently, *Meadan* has an interest and focus on Arabic-speaking cultures and has assembled a team with expertise in technology as well as in Middle Eastern social networks. The collaborative project is an ambitious endeavor, and it will be able to provide exciting opportunities for growth and expansion over time to support and link democrats in predominantly Muslim countries worldwide.

> Aswat is a place for voicing opinions. It is a place for sharing experiences. A place to gather practical information and resources for making politics and governments more responsive to citizens, transparent in operation and effective in delivering results that matter in people's everyday lives. - Aswat.com

The launch of Aswat is expected to be at the end of January 2008. In the meantime, NDI plans to showcase the portal at various events, workshops and conferences, and will do press releases and hold supporting events on blogging, new media and the use of technology in political advocacy work.

Parliamentary Websites Launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The official website of BiH Parliamentary Assembly (www.parlament.ba) was also launched in 2004, with its newest platform released in early 2007. This website was designed in all three languages of constituent people of BiH as well as in English. It contains all relevant information about both Houses of BiH PA and Secretariat, MPs, the Committees, Caucuses, Rules of Procedure, the Constitution of BiH and other related documents, etc. It is updated on a daily basis, by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly Public Relations Office.

'Cambodia Voices' Gives Citizens A Voice Using the Medium of TV

'Cambodia Voices,' a weekly television program produced in 2002, provided a medium through which Cambodian citizens could discuss key issues. The program used the established technology of TV and used it to provide citizens an opportunity to gain insight into national issues and acquaint themselves with politicians. With Cambodia's third National Assembly elections scheduled to be held in July 2003, 'Voices' offered a rare forum where civil society organizations, international organizations, representatives of the government and Cambodian citizens could have a balanced and informed debate on the political topics at stake.

In 2002, following a survey by the Cambodian electorate in which TV and radio proved to be the broadest reach as information and news sources for Cambodians, NDI oversaw the production of Voices with its local partner, FIT Media. The show was hosted by a well-known personality Pech Kasa Ranniya from Radio Free Asia. It featured a panel of guests experts who first watched a professionally produced ten to fifteen minute documentary on the subject before moving to a lively discussion among the panelists and audience members. It was designed to bring greater clarity to issues of national importance.

The first program, on the subject of voter education and registration, was aired on TV3 in February of 2003. Following this broadcast, however, TV3 decided not to air the subsequent episodes for reasons unclear to NDI. After the cancellation, NDI approached TV9 and completed a new contract to air the series in its entirety.

NDI continued to broadcast episodes on six different topics, including shows on 1.) Religion and Development; 2.) HIV/AIDS; 3.) Weapons Reduction; 4.) Street Children; 5.) Gender and Education; and 6.) Mob Justice.

'Voices' succeeded in finding a home on TV9 on Thursdays evenings from 6 to 7 pm.

Re-runs of previous episodes and new episodes continued to be broadcast without interference or complaint, until the final episode was aired on September 25, 2003. The five new episodes that aired during this reporting period were on 1.) Code of Conduct; 2.) Pre-election Roundtable; 3.)Post-election Roundtable; 4.) Chemicals and Fertilizers and Health Risks, and; 5.) Cambodian Voices Compilation - a compilation of the documentary films that opened each edition of the Cambodian Voices program, with commentary from the host and producers.

During a time when citizens had little means through which they could influence government decisions, Voices was able to establish a bridge between the government and the Cambodian people, thereby strengthening the process of democratization in the country.

Indonesia Launches PBET Website To Make Budget Information Public

Since the Indonesian government began to decentralize in 2001, district and municipal levels of government have increased power and responsibility to govern and allocate their budgets. Indonesia's process of decentralizing authority and resource allocation from the national to district level is an important step in ensuring that the government serves the public and maintains a pro-poor focus in local budgets and expenditures. Because 40 percent of total public spending occurs at the local levels, district-level governments have greater authority over more resources than ever before. Most local governments were unprepared for this level of responsibility and were not accountable to the central government.

In response to lack of citizen participation in government budgeting, NDI implemented a 3-year Participatory Budgeting and Expenditure Tracking (PBET) program in April 2005. The program provides district-level civil society with a clear understanding of the budgetary cycle and avenues to provide input into the planning and allocation of the budget, and methods for monitoring the quality of public services, such as health and education.

PBET focuses on citizen participation and the alleviation of poverty through the following objectives: (1) Improving local governance and accountability through the enhancement of civil society's involvement in participatory budgeting process at local levels; (2) Fostering a pro-poor allocation of public resources; and (3) Tracking key expenditures and measuring the quality of public services. PBET targets 14 districts in nine provinces included in the World Bank Initiative for Local Governance Reform (ILGR) Program. These civic groups monitor and track public expenditures and measure the quality of public services using innovative techniques such as a "civic report card' and user-based surveys.

In cooperation with capacity-building subgrantee Public Participation Forum (FPPM), NDI developed the PBET website to provide info to partners and citizens about the program, relevant laws, budgets, etc. During development, FPPM engaged in intensive coordination with NDI to ensure that the website would increase public awareness and provide comprehensive information to the public concerned with budgeting issues. FPPM also maintained a mailing list and circulated information on various subjects such as budgeting, advocacy activities, PBET subgrantees' activities, and information on the most recent budget regulations. The website, in Bahasa Indonesia, can be found at www.pbet.org.

NDI is also becoming more flexible in the implementation of PBET, taking local contexts and regional differences into consideration, since civil society awareness of the potential of participatory budgeting varies across the districts, as does civil society organizations' capacity to propose, advocate, analyze and take part in the system. In several of the districts including Magelang, Ngawi and Lagoman, local CSO groups worked with the local radio to broadcast talk shows on different topics related to budgeting, planning processes, and results. These talk shows resulted in increased citizen knowledge and participation on budgeting issues, demonstrated by more people participating in the talks shows during the 'call-in' time and incoming text messages during the show.

PBET continues to build on its momentum. The program has significantly augmented local governance by strengthening citizens' ability to take advantage of new transparency and public participation regulations. NDI continues to encourage PBET's civil society partners to work with local media to publicize reform proposals and opportunities for public participation in planning and budgeting.

Future ICT Prospects for NDI

Technology is being driven by young entrepreneurs developing free, web-based applications in the hope of becoming the next Internet fad. Websites like Facebook, YouTube, and Technorati are driven entirely by user-generated content, making them dynamic and inherently democratic. These web-based applications, known as "Web 2.0," as well as other forms of information communication technologies (ICTs) can be used to enhance the programs of NDI and our partner organizations, especially those working with young people.

The digital divide is rapidly closing in Asia and Latin America, where cellular phone use is widespread and Internet use is also increasing. Technologies and ideas that seem novel to older generations are second nature to youth, making these media an ideal platform for outreach, mobilization, and education.

NDI has had extensive experience using mobile phones and SMS messaging to monitor elections. Beyond election monitoring, SMS messaging has been used by an Albanian civil society organization to encourage its 8,000 members to attend protests and rallies. But the use of mobile phones is not limited to text messaging—in the Philippines, an enterprising group created an audio file of the phone conversation of a corrupt politician; the "Hello Garci" ringtone was then downloaded by over 500,000 people in protest. The ringtones are often "remixed" to popular music, making them accessible to young people who might otherwise be disinterested.

Both NDI and its partners could benefit from utilizing social networking applications like Facebook, Hi5, or Ning as well as more activist-oriented youth networks like TakingITGlobal. At no cost, NDI could use a host such as Ning to set up a "closed" social network online that would allow civil society networks or program alumni to keep in touch with each other in situations where distance or security issues keep them from meeting regularly in person. All of these social networks are inherently interactive: they allow users to set up profiles, share documents and photos, communicate, and form groups. NDI partners can also tap into existing social networking applications like Facebook for outreach and mobilization; the caveat being the site used depends on the country—for example, the most popular networking site in Mexico is MySpace, but I

in Ecuador it is Hi5 and in Indonesia it is Friendster.

NDI partners can tap into TakingITGlobal, a network established by young people for youth-oriented organizations. TakingITGlobal has over 160,000 members, either individuals or organizations, who can communicate using the social networking function through country sites, topical areas, or across the spectrum of countries and issues. Functions offered include professional and financial opportunities and a database of toolkits and resources for young people.

Any of these applications can be used not only for outreach, but also to encourage youth to take an active role in civic organizations. Young volunteers are often more experienced with technology and thus are a vital resource to any organization seeking to expand its digital footprint. Not only can young people help set up and maintain these programs, they are also the drivers of their use, creating trends and contributing to these sites with videos, photos, and comments. For any initiative involving ICTs, it is important to make sure that there is a user demand for them; if people do not find a technology useful or engaging, they will simply not use it. Lastly, because the use of technology varies across countries, it is important to research what kind of technology is available in a country and what sorts of websites are popular among the young people.

There are many technologies emerging out of the Web 2.0 movement. Most of them are free to use and enjoy an almost meteoric rise to popularity among their early adapters, who are almost always young people. NDI and its partners interested in collaborating with youth should consider integrating these applications into their programs where applicable.

We have faith in the power to change what needs to be changed but we are under no illusion that the transition from dictatorship to liberal democracy will be easy, or that democratic government will mean the end of all our problems. We know that our greatest challenges lie ahead of us and that our struggle to establish a stable, democratic society will continue beyond our own life span. But we know that we are not alone. The cause of liberty and justice finds sympathetic responses around the world. Thinking and feeling people everywhere, regardless of color or creed, understand the deeply rooted human need for a meaningful existence that goes beyond the mere gratification of material desires. Those fortunate enough to live in societies where they are entitled to full political rights can reach out to help their less fortunate brethren in other areas of our troubled planet.

- Aung San Suu Kyi, 'Please Use Your Liberty to Promote Ours,' *International Herald Tribune* (February 1997)

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

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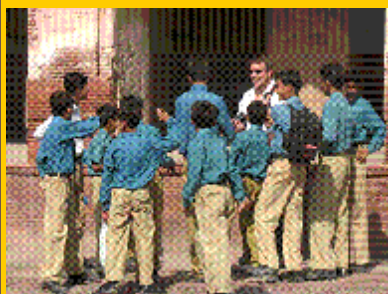
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A FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM DAVID LARSON

The time has come, at least for now, to say farewell. Before I do, I want to thank NDI's staff members. Everything I have done could not have been possible without the hard work, dedication, and passion of NDI's talented staff. I have learned more than I imagined and it is because you.

As I head off to Afghanistan, I wanted to remind everyone of some of the tools the Citizen Participation team has developed over the few years. We researched partnership best practices through the creation of two documents: *Researching Partnerships with GONG and Transparencia* and *Creating Developmental Partnerships*. In conjunction with our GONG and Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), our partners in Croatia and Sierra Leone respectively, we created two tool kits for organizational development. Most recently, we have undertaking a youth initiative. In addition to collecting and housing youth programming resources, we wrote three case studies on successful NDI programs that engaged youth in politics in conflict affected areas and a guide book for engaging youth in politics in conflict and post-conflict areas.

All the best to everyone and this is not good-bye. As is well known, NDI is a large and expansive family and I'm sure I'll be back!

David Larson

Senior Program Officer, Citizen Participation Programs
Dave served as a Program Officer with the Citizen Participation team since 2004.