



# CIVIC UPDATE

A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

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Welcome to this issue of Civic Update. This issue highlights some current NDI programs focused on citizens and civic organizations around the world.

Enhancing skills associated with organized, meaningful communication and then facilitating such communication between citizens is a critical feature of democratic discourse and participation. Citizens must communicate with their fellow citizens, other organizations, government and media, among others, if they are to influence political outcomes.

This update provides an overview of some NDI programs involving powerful communication techniques. This issue looks

at activities which foster communication in different ways.

The highlighted programs fall under one of the following headings: (1) Methods & Tools; (2) Post conflict environment; and (3) Working with Partners. Under these headings, there are programs that enable citizens to create democratic space through communication and deliberation, and then use the space to broaden their influence.

As always, feedback and suggestions are welcome! Enjoy!

Aaron Azelton,  
Director,  
Citizen Participation Programs

## Iraq - Community Mobilization Program

### Post-conflict environment

The Iraq civic program is implementing a multi-pronged approach to fostering community mobilization.

In November, 2007, the Iraq civic program held a conference in Kirkuk to work with civic activists on developing a 2008 civic agenda to address Iraqi citizens' most urgent needs. Seventy-six activists, from across all of Iraq's 18 governorates, who had previously participated in a series of leadership skills development trainings, conducted by NDI, participated in this conference. The event was a three-day, national community mobilization conference and took place between November 11-

13, 2007. The conference served as an opportunity for trainees to present their accomplishments from three-month work plans proposed at the conclusion of previous training and to formulate a national, civic agenda for 2008 around Iraqi citizens' most critical needs.



## Philippines - Citizen dialogue with candidates, political leaders and government



This past October, citizens in the provinces of Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Laguna, Pampanga and Rizal had an opportunity to listen to local government candidates communicate positions on relevant issues and concerns.

NDI, with its national partner, Center for Youth Advocacy and Networking (CYAN), organized the

candidate debates throughout the country. The debates were conducted in a moderated format, providing equal time to all participating candidates. The debates proceeded peacefully and, in addition, garnered media attention. The debates helped shift the campaign focus from one based on personalities and gift giving to a more positive, competitive discussion of the issues which concern citizens.

According to feedback from voters, by participating in the debates, they felt more informed when it came to voting day. By interacting with politicians, they felt more able to act as informed citizens.

Subsequent to the elections, NDI and its partner

are engaging political leaders, government officials and civil society actors in a series of grassroots dialogues to increase interaction between officials and constituents. For citizens, participation in these dialogues facilitates development of communication skills and strategies for engaging in political life. Moreover, these dialogues provide accountability with regard to campaign promises. In addition, through youth groups engaging in these ongoing dialogues, they help promote transparency and equality of allocation of resources controlled by local government. Overall, this enhances citizens' capacity to engage in oversight. ■

## Kyrgyzstan - Fostering Dialogue by Disseminating Information

In order for citizens to maximize capacity for civic discourse, they must have access to independent, reliable information and a space to discuss the information. By empowering citizens with skills and resources, communication not only develops, but grows into a desire to advocate on their own behalf. In Kyrgyzstan, NDI provides citizens with the resources and space to keep up on current events and information, as well as to meet with fellow citizens and engage in dialogue through The Information Center program.

Beginning in 2002, NDI established a network of information centers across all seven regions of Kyrgyzstan. Each information center, located near the center of the town that it serves, has a reading room, where citizens can browse local, national and international periodicals and resource materials, and a meeting room, where NDI, local government officials, and other local and international NGOs can hold discussions or offer seminars on topics of interest to the local

*Number of User Visits & Services Provided:*

Information Center	Li-brary	Discus-sion club	Digest	Train-ing	Other (inquirie s, etc.)	Total Visits
Al-Berdy	901	221	248	48	419	2,036
Balychy	877	176	388	8	18	1,288
Rekrumolnina	876	127	381	82	23	1,478
Chesk	2,744	663	1,877	141	3	5,418
Quicho	384	118	228	80	288	1,088
Jekelabed	218	107	4,181	48	0	4,584
Kademjal	38	84	2,288	18	100	2,487
Kerakol	428	183	808	88	136	1,291
Karssuu	318	48	1,018	26	208	1,618
Kochkor-Ain	1,384	273	248	104	400	2,410
Kyzyl-Akyl	1,773	280	884	0	141	2,888
Kyzyl-Kya	2,077	188	2,832	183	836	6,306
Naryn	1,012	112	3,048	48	168	4,374
Nookai	878	88	884	38	178	1,983
Talaa	886	118	738	18	118	1,888
Tosh-Kumyr	1,873	181	1,848	91	188	3,895
Tolmok	182	174	1,528	87	82	2,044
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,90</b>	<b>3,038</b>	<b>23,021</b>	<b>1,017</b>	<b>3,340</b>	<b>48,326</b>
Monthly Avg. per	234	46	338	16	48	681

community. The 17 information centers maintain a large base of regular visitors. In a typical

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Kyrgyzstan (cont.)  
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month, they host approximately 4,700 visitors, making more than 8,000 visits. The information centers attract a variety of visitors, including pensioners, college students, NGO members, local government civil servants, teachers and the unemployed.

To increase access to independent sources of information, NDI produces a daily news digest in Kyrgyz and Russian, covering local, national and regional issues. The digest is based on content provided by such news agencies as AkiPress (U.S. government-funded), Kabar (Kyrgyz government agency), Eurasianet, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and Deutsche Welle. The digest is distributed in both hard copy and electronic form through the centers, local NGO networks and volunteers. The daily news digest remains one of the primary sources of information for people in small towns and rural areas. Each day, more than 650 Kyrgyz citizens receive a hard copy of the news digest, for a total distribution of approximately 20,000 copies per month.

While providing information has incredible value in its own right, the information centers go the next step by providing citizens with different types of forums to develop their democratic communication skills. The information centers host and moderate

“discussion clubs” to encourage greater participation of community members in managing their own economic, social, and political affairs. Discussion clubs also help citizens engage in meaningful advocacy and policy dialogues with local decision makers. In addition, the information centers hold frequent, structured discussions where participants watch news segments on television and talk about current events. The information centers facilitate a total of approximately 100 discussion clubs per month, covering issues related to women’s political participation, constitutional reform, human trafficking, child labor, public infrastructure, and local government accountability.

The discussion clubs have proven to be a catalyst for civic action. Residents frequently organize themselves into “initiative groups” to advocate on issues raised at the discussion clubs, such as road maintenance, access to drinking water, or the accountability of local government. The discussion clubs have also inspired the formation of numerous NGOs and professional associations, making the centers focal points for community mobilization on both local and regional issues.

NDI’s Information Centers clearly show that once individuals have access to the resources they need to participate in democratic action, they will often take the next step themselves, becoming active, engaged citizens. ■

## Qatar - Civic Education Training of Trainers

Effective communication is integral to community education and organizing. For individuals to develop their capacity as trainers, they must focus on communication. NDI focused on developing presentation and training skills (among others) for future Qatari trainers so that they can provide civic education on their own.

This past fall, NDI initiated a new program in Qatar, designed to support civic education on electoral processes in advance of expected Shura Council elections, as well as on the roles of the Shura and Central Municipal Councils. The purpose of the program is to build a cadre of Qatari facilitators capable of preparing and implementing a civic educa-

tion curriculum prior to Shura Council elections. NDI conducted Training of Trainer workshops for students at Qatar University and for representatives from the Permanent Elections Committee (PEC), government ministries, and civil society.

The workshops introduced participants to major concepts of effective training, including learning style assessment, training methods and tools, presentation techniques, in-course training adjustments, training design, and evaluation. Activities culminated in participants presenting on successful aspects of training.

From the initial group of participants, individuals who held promise as trainers were identified



to participate in a series of advanced trainings to develop and expand skills and knowledge. Upon completion of the advanced course, the trainers will conduct civic education programs, first in partnership with NDI staff and then independently. Once the Emir calls for elections, NDI will assist the PEC in developing and implementing a civic education curriculum. ■

## Romania- Roma Civic Alliance survey

NDI and Roma Civic Alliance (Alianta Civica a Romilor din Romania) have engaged in a strategic partnership with the assistance of a grant from the Soros Foundation's Network.

The Roma Civic Alliance (RCA), based in Bucharest, Romania, is an umbrella organization composed of more than twenty non-governmental organizations focused on bringing rural Roma voices into the dialogue on Roma issues. It is dedicated to the promotion of democratic values, respect for fundamental rights and liberties, and the social, economic, political and cultural rights of the Roma minority at both the national and European level. The collaboration is designed to support development of the RCA's organizational structures and outreach capacity, enabling the RCA to advocate more effectively for Roma interests.

RCA member organizations implemented a survey to measure understanding and expecta-

tions of the Alliance as well as their own organization's role in the RCA. The survey tool, designed and interpreted with the assistance of NDI, gave RCA and NDI useful information about the organizations that constitute the RCA as well as greater understanding of the strengths and needs of the RCA itself.

Surveys are useful tools for effectively communicating information across diverse groups and for aggregating that information into a larger picture. The RCA, by implementing this survey, gave NDI greater information about one of its partner organizations and how to best work with that organization. In addition, survey data provided information about goals and expectations of member organizations by directly communicating with them. NDI and its partner, RCA, can now further customize their work to meet the ever changing needs of Roma civic organizations. ■

## Jordan - Election Monitoring Internal Evaluation Workshops

In February and March, 2008, NDI facilitated internal evaluation workshops for the Al Hayat Center for Civil Society Development (Hayat) and National Center for Human Rights, on their projects monitoring of the 2007 Parliamentary election cycle.

For each organization, the evaluation workshops included key staff and field coordinators evaluating organizational performance during their election monitoring project. NDI designed the workshop to assist coordinators in assessing successes and identifying tangible ways to continue advancing organizational strengths as well as improving future election monitoring projects.

In both evaluation workshops, groups measured performance relative to stated election monitoring project

objectives. The first half of the day long workshops were structured to evaluate organizational performance against election monitoring project objectives. In the second half of the workshops, the groups evaluated

*“Workshops like these always help set a healthy work environment within organizations that is based on mutual understanding, debating and the internal feeling of ownership.”*

performance in terms of organizational capacity regarding observer recruitment, training capacities and content, material development and distribution (election monitoring handbooks and forms), internal communication, candidate registration monitoring,

campaign monitoring, media monitoring, Election Day monitoring, reporting, public relations and media outreach. These workshops provided staff opportunities to reflect and evaluate, as a group, successes and needs for growth.

Working with partner organizations, in a reflective, post-activity manner, NDI is able to support democratic discourse at all levels, both internal self-evaluation and evaluation on the larger, national level where partner organizations work. Not only does this strengthen partner organizations on a programmatic level, it strengthens their overall organizational capacity for staff communication and action, making organizations, and therefore partnership, more sustainable. Arianit Shehu, Resident Senior Program

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*Civic Update* is a production of The Citizen Participation Team of NDI.

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*Contributions Welcome!*

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**Thank You!**

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

**Iraq** (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

This on-going training developed skills and communication across different groups and all have engaged in trainings focused on: 1) enhancing activists' leadership capabilities in local community mobilization strategies; 2) supporting development and implementation of community mobilization projects to respond to critical issues; and 3) building an informal national network of civic actors who raise their voices in the Iraqi political and social scene. At the conclusion of each training session, each group designed plans for their work to be implemented in local community projects over a three-month period with regular NDI consultation.

During the course of the conference, participants (54 male and 22 female) formed "unit" and national-level working groups, with each group choosing three priority issues faced by Iraqis to be implemented at the local and national levels. The three issues selected for implementation at the national level included: *peaceful co-existence, empowering women and youth, and raising awareness of Iraqi citizens through civic education.* The groups planned to meet periodically in the future, on their own schedule and independently of NDI, to devise ways of meeting these objectives. They will also receive follow-up training from the Institute as part of a series to strengthen the group's civic mobilizing capacity.

In February, members of NDI's civil society team launched the first in its series of capacity building workshops for these civic activists who formed the target group of the Institute's community mobilization program. The five-day course, on how to transfer leadership skills in community mobilization to others by way of "training of trainers" (ToT), will be conducted over the next few months for all the activists, who formed the seven working groups at the November training. The conference served as the official launch of the community mobilization program. ■

**Jordan** (cont.)

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Manager in Jordan, and organizer of the internal evaluation workshops, suggests that these workshops have positive consequences on many levels, "these workshops help set a healthy work environment within organizations, one that is based on mutual understanding, debating and the internal feelings of ownership." Fostering discursive skills and activities among staff at partner organizations allows those organizations to grow while at the same time strengthening ongoing partnership. ■

**Team Update**

Beginning May 1, 2008, Kourtney Pompei will be heading to East Timor until mid-July. During that time, Jennifer Heettner will be stepping in as temporary program officer for the Citizen Participation Team. Jenn will be here for resource requests, dissemination of Citizen Participation team materials and coordinating any other support needed from the team.

Jenn has recently completed her Masters degree in Public Policy at Georgetown Public Policy Institute, with a focus on International Policy and Development. Prior to moving to Washington for graduate school, Jenn worked in Manhattan in the non-profit world for five years.

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