



CIVIC UPDATE

A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

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Welcome to this issue of Civic Update. This issue explores the dynamic interrelationship between **voice, space and accountability**, as it relates to citizen engagement in politics and helping democracy deliver. Voice describes the different actions that citizens can take to express their individual and collective preferences to government. Policy advocacy, voting, and government monitoring fall into this category. Space refers to mechanisms and opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns and interests and take part in decision-making. Laws that provide for assembly and free speech provide space. Space can also be created through town hall meetings or constituency offices. Accountability describes situations where those who set and implement society's rules answer to those people that live under those rules.

NDI programs around the world are becoming more sophisticated and are often dealing simultaneously with enhancing citizen demand and increasing government responsiveness to public concerns. In many cases, NDI is engaging citizen groups, political parties and parliaments alike in terms of issues that

people care deeply about, such as health care, sanitation, or education. From a political process standpoint, these types of issues often go un-addressed by government because there are deficits when it comes of voice, space and accountability. Citizen might not have the ability to organize themselves, or they do not have access to the decision makers. Likewise, decision makers might go to great lengths to avoid citizens, because they are not aware of their public service responsibilities or because no one is attempting to hold them accountable. These examples underscore the need for democracy to be practiced, if social needs are to be met in a constructive and sustainable manner.

The NDI program examples found in this Update illustrate the dynamic relationship between voice, space, accountability and the ability of communities to deal with real and immediate issues.

As always, comments are welcomed.

Aaron Azelton

Director of Citizen Participation Programs

Macedonia: Parliamentary Constituency Offices

Creating interactive spaces

Government accountability is often limited due to lack of citizen access to political leaders, particularly in developing countries. One way to enhance accountability is by creating a recognized space for citizen interactions with policy makers. NDI's constituent outreach program in Macedonia has helped create such spaces. In partnership with parliament, the program has fostered a constituency office network comprising 41 offices across the country. The "political" space created has helped connect citizens and members of parliament.

By the end of 2007, the constituency offices had received more than 120,000 individual visits and registered 9,720 citizen complaint cases on such is-

ues as unemployment and public works projects. In total, 4,589 have been resolved.

Housed in politically neutral municipal buildings, the offices provide a permanent, physical space in which citizens and representatives can interact. Initiated in 2003, the program has increased awareness and demand among citizens for more accountability of elected officials in spite of an electoral system unfavorable to direct relations between voters and elected representatives. Each office is equipped with a constituency casework tracking database and staffed with an NDI-trained, professional office assistant, which are key elements.

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Mozambique: Increasing Parliamentary Leadership on HIV/AIDS

Pro-active steps toward accountability

HIV/AIDS has a significant impact on the lives of many people in sub-Saharan Africa. In August 2008, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released its annual 2008 epidemic update revealing that sub-Saharan Africa remains the world's most heavily affected region.

The intensity of the HIV pandemic highlights government weaknesses, while at the same time underscoring the need for better government policies and programs. Those infected and affected must have the ability and opportunity to interact with government in finding solutions to the myriad of social and economic challenges the disease poses. In the absence of a political environment (space) conducive to articulating citizen needs, concerns often go unaddressed.

In Mozambique, NDI is supporting members of parliament (MPs) to work more closely with civic groups in addressing HIV/AIDS challenges. Building on find-

ings from its 2004 study, *"A Survey of Legislative Efforts to Combat HIV/AIDS in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Region,"* NDI supports lawmakers to conduct constituency outreach to identify gaps in government service delivery and legal reforms needed to protect citizens from HIV-related discrimination.

Through the constituency outreach program in Mozambique, lawmakers reached an estimated 8,500 citizens through public fora, ad-hoc hearings, visits to government-funded AIDS projects, and meetings with stakeholders on HIV/AIDS. MPs met with more than 400 civic groups and reached thousands more citizens through media. During the visits, lawmakers spoke

openly about HIV/AIDS, encouraged responsible sexual behavior, engaged with citizens, the private sector and the public on HIV/AIDS and used their positions of influence to lobby state officials to provide better services. By reaching out to their constituents, MPs widened the political space in Mozambique on this issue, by giving citizens an opportunity to speak openly about the disease, vocalize challenges and to lobby their elected officials on appropriate remedies.

As a result of these consultations, lawmakers are developing concrete proposals on anti-discrimination and in September 2008, plan to table legislation in parliament reflecting the input obtained during constituency outreach visits dating back to 2005. ■



A member of the parliamentary AIDS unit requests information about the government-funded program to provide housing to families with orphans.

Lebanon: Citizen Lebanon (Part 1)

Adding citizen voice to the political equation

Voice, space and accountability form an interrelated set of objectives for NDI's Citizen Lebanon program, a comprehensive approach to enhancing organized citizen participation throughout Lebanon. In partnership with seven Lebanese non-governmental organizations, NDI is working across the country with approximately 4,500 citizens from all major religious, political and cultural affiliations, to form sustainable community groups as a platform for civic education and advocacy. Sixty community facilitators from the partners organize and guide citizens through an education phase addressing core principles of democratic practice, towards community action.

Building on Lebanese people's inclination to



discuss and debate political issues. Citizen Lebanon seeks to increase citizens' knowledge of democratic principles. By understanding their roles, rights and responsibilities, Lebanese citizens can enhance a decision-making process that favors public interest over the existing trends of patronage and clientelism.

Once people come to know and understand the potential power of their voices, Citizen Lebanon will strengthen citizens' ability to work together by holding town hall meetings with local officials and influential community actors thus shifting from confessional based communal politics to issue driven politics. Through coordination, dissonant voices and ideas gain

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Lebanon (cont.)

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credibility and allow citizens to take action together to influence policy-making and implementation. If citizens are to generate influence and thus hold their officials accountable, they must have the know-how and confidence to engage in discourse and decision making as a group with a common issue of concern and goal. Finally, Citizen Lebanon aims to bolster civil society organizations' capacity to promote participation at the grassroots level in a democratic political process which encourages the space for deliberation to become sustainable. The seven civic partners of

the Citizen Lebanon program will enhance their community organizing capabilities thus increasing their credibility within communities and providing an opportunity for citizens to bring their voices and ideas to bear in a public and strategic way.

Citizen Lebanon will culminate in citizens having the tools and confidence to form cooperative advocacy campaigns to address local concerns. This powerful methodology incites a 'learning by doing' approach through facilitated discussions and targeted action towards change in their communities.

In the next Citizen Update a second piece on Citizen Lebanon will focus on particular aspects of the program. ■

Nigeria: Legislative Strengthening and Anti-corruption program

Building citizens' voices around budget processes

Citizen engagement in political processes often throws light on decisions that may otherwise take place without public knowledge or input. In the last five years, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI has worked in Nigeria to strengthen the National Assembly. The overarching goal of the program has been to strengthen democratic governance by increasing the capacity of the National Assembly and incorporate citizens' voices into the larger governing structure, in order to advance Nigeria's economic, political and social development

A main program element is focused on helping the National Assembly's solicit and incorporate citizen input in public policy and legislative development. Many of these efforts are focused anti-corruption. At the same time, NDI is working with civil society to help groups organize engagement in budget making, appropriation, expenditure and oversight at the local, state and federal levels of government. By enabling citizens to provide input in budget decisions they can influence the way money is spent on their behalf. Recently, NDI facilitated a workshop to train 51 male and 25 female representa-

tives of civil society organizations on participatory budgeting. The workshop held in Calabar, Cross Rivers state, was the third in a series of programs on budget monitoring to take place in three of the six geo-political zones of the country. The workshop targeted civil society organizations (CSOs) already trying to work on different aspects of budget monitoring in Cross Rivers and other state in the South South region of the country. In addition to CSO representatives, also in attendance were high profile state government officials including the deputy speaker of Cross Rivers State House of Assembly accompanied by nine other members of the assembly, representatives of the Accountant-General and Auditor-General of Cross Rivers state, and the USAID desk officer at the Cross Rivers State Planning Commission.

In his key note address to the workshop, the Deputy Speaker, Rt. Hon. Dominic Akwa Edem, expressed his appreciation for the theme of the workshop which to him indicated NDI's recognition and commitment to addressing the current challenges confronting Nigeria as an emerging democracy. He was of the view that the role of CSOs in governance cannot be



South South CSO Budget Monitoring Workshop participant poses a question for the deputy speaker

overemphasized and reminded the participants that. Cross Rivers State has been at the forefront of involving CSOs in the state budget process, including the review of the 2008 state budget.

Workshops like the one in Calabar offer opportunities for continuing dialogue between citizens and their elected representatives and provide CSOs with new tools enabling them to play a greater and more effective role in the budget process. This in turn, helps to promote greater governmental accountability and increasing transparency in the establishment of spending priorities for their respective states, and helps strengthen the nascent democratic institutions in Nigeria. ■

Mexico: Politics and Disability Issues

Giving voice to marginalized populations

Persons with disabilities, in most countries, are historically marginalized and disenfranchised due to either physical or societal barriers to participation. NDI is helping CSOs representing people with disabilities to join their voices and communicate their unique needs as citizens.

Since August 2007, NDI has worked with the Citizen Observatory for Disability in Mexico (*Observatorio Ciudadano por la Discapacidad en México*, OCDM), an umbrella group of civil society organizations and citizens, many disabled themselves, interested in protecting the rights of the disabled. In September 2007, the Mexican Senate ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an international law that provides greater rights to people with disabilities in order to guarantee their development in social, economic and political life. Within this context, NDI is helping to strengthen OCDM by providing organizational development tools, facilitating strategic planning and providing advice on techniques to implement an advocacy campaign to guarantee the political rights of persons with disabilities in Mexico – specifically the implementation of Article 29 of the Convention which states that persons with disabilities should have political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others.

NDI conducted a series of meetings with OCDM to provide technical assistance and guidance



on the group's work to promote the political rights of persons with disabilities in Mexico. The support provided by NDI has focused on the group's response to a request for feedback on training materials for poll workers received from the Mexico City Electoral Institute (IEDF). The electoral authorities were particularly interested in specific edits or additions to improve the

manuals and decrease the possibility of discrimination against persons with disabilities by IEDF-trained poll workers. In addition, work has focused on the progress of the presentation and promotion of a legislative initiative to reform specific articles of the Mexican electoral code (*Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*, COFIPE) to establish new responsibilities for the elec-

toral authorities to guarantee the participation of people with disabilities in the electoral process.

Finally, there is a lack of statistical information about the situation and challenges faced by persons with disabilities. OCDM members identified this as a potential area of work and asked NDI to help identify appropriate methodologies for this process. By working with OCDM to address the lack of statistical information, NDI will further enable the organization to enhance the voice of people with disabilities. Capturing such information will give OCDM additional legitimacy in articulating the need of people with disabilities to have their own political voice, both collectively and as individuals. ■

East Timor: Making Democracy Deliver

Assessing the relationship between voice, space, accountability and government services

The delivery of basic services, especially clean water and sanitation, continue to be a challenge in East Timor. The failure of government to deliver these services threatens to undermine citizens' confidence in the democratic process.

Recognizing the linkages between community members and local government as key to the successful planning, implementation and sustainability of development projects The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)

and International Development Support Services (IDSS) asked NDI to conduct an assessment of how government actors involved in water and sanitation service delivery, from the national level to the village level, work with citizens and local civil society organizations to identify community concerns and deliver meaningful and appropriate services to the local communities.

In order for East Timor to provide services that meet the needs and expectations of citizens, local government, particularly at the

district and sub-district level, must first be able to understand and utilize available political processes, especially those which allow for feedback from citizens. When locally elected officials properly fulfill their representative role, they provide an immediate and accessible link to citizens, increasing the potential for the government to understand and respond to the needs of the public. Likewise, citizens must have the capacity and space to communicate their needs to the

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government to ensure social accountability.

How local government and citizens work together to identify, plan, deliver and maintain basic services in their communities is a dynamic process. NDI's assessment examined the formal and informal processes used by local government actors and citizens to address community water and sanitation needs. At the core of the assessment, NDI analyzed the ability of local government to implement and support and citizens to participate in the political process surrounding the delivery of water

Assessing Space, Voice and Accountability:

Questions to think about:

Space:

Are there laws that promote, facilitate, or hinder participation of citizens in the political process?

Voice:

Can and do citizens provide inputs on the development and maintenance of public projects in their communities?

Accountability:

What are the formal/informal procedures and practices for citizens to hold local government actors accountable on development projects?

and sanitation programs.

This assessment examined the formal and informal ways in which local government and citizens interact with one another and other key stakeholders (space) on issues

of community concern, engage in dialogue and articulate needs and concerns to the appropriate stakeholders (voice), and for citizens to monitor and hold local government answerable to water and sanitation issues and projects (accountability).

Assessing space, voice and accountability can be accomplished using a diverse set of tools motivated by thoughtful questions (see *the insert for some of the general questions which motivated this assessment*). NDI utilized several assessment tools including surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions to assess these processes across three districts in East Timor. ■

Nicaragua: Accountability and Elections

Organized voices that enhance electoral space and accountability

In the lead up to Nicaragua's November 2008 municipal elections, there are considerable questions about the transparency and integrity of the electoral process and the potential for another institutional crisis among the branches of government. Recent actions by the Supreme Electoral Council (*Consejo Supremo Electoral*, CSE) fueled concerns that partisan interests are influencing electoral decisions.

Political stability prior to the municipal elections will depend on the ability of political actors to make decisions in a transparent and inclusive manner that takes into consideration the well being of Nicaraguans. With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI is working to implement a program to promote credible and transparent municipal elections in November 2008; and strengthen democratic institutions and processes by fostering dialogue and consensus on reform.

Recently, NDI's advice to the domestic observation groups Ethics and Transparency (*Etica y Transparencia*, ET) and the Institute for Development and Democracy (*Instituto para el Desarrollo y la Democracia*, IPADE) helped develop strategies to defend the right of citizens to observe their elections and to ensure a broader observation of the municipal elections. NDI's regular feedback to the Working Group to Promote Electoral Reform (*Grupo Promotor de Reformas Electorales*, GPRE) helped enable the group to consider possible political scenarios in its advocacy strategy and identify opportunities to continue highlighting the need

for reform. In addition, NDI's assistance to IPADE helped the group more accurately gather citizen perceptions on the possible suspension of municipal elections in the Atlantic coast.

To enhance ET's capacity to contribute to improving the transparency and credibility of the electoral process, NDI provided technical assistance to the group's departmental coordinators and central technical team as they considered: 1) key elements for successfully implementing quick counts in five municipalities, including the need to develop a strong local network, clear criteria to select target municipalities and a strategy to develop the group's communications and message; 2) ways to strengthen ET's volunteer network within the context of potential challenges to national election observation; and 3) strategies to defend the right of civil society groups and individual citizens to observe their elections and to ensure a comprehensive observation of the municipal elections should ET not receive credentials necessary to conduct quick counts.

As citizen organizations engage in promoting credible and transparent municipal elections, they further develop their overall capacity to foster accountability in various political processes. The ongoing relationship of citizens and politicians builds an environment where accountability and transparency are the norm. NDI's work in Nicaragua not only supports more democratic election processes, but encourages Nicaraguan citizens to engage politicians to create a more transparent, accountable and effective government. ■

Highlight: Burkina Faso receives praise from SIDA

In 2005, NDI launched a three-year program to strengthen women's political participation in Burkina Faso, particularly in the context of the country's ongoing decentralization program. Two of the primary objectives of this program, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) are to enhance public understanding of democracy and its institutions; and to strengthen partner NGOs' ability to play an effective role in promoting women's participation in politics and the decentralization process. These activities enable Burkinabe civil society organizations to strengthen their roles in the democratic process by collecting information and educating citizens on various policy issues.

Recently, SIDA evaluated this program and gave it high marks for success. Among NDI's program achievements, the Institute's strategy to nurture collaboration with NGOs working around the theme of women's rights was particularly praised by the evaluators. On the initiative of NDI and the Center for Democratic Governance (CGD), an NGO discussion forum was established. NDI hosted the meetings of the forum, which helped ensure that 1) NDI activities were relevant and coherent with those of other actors, 2) local NGOs expertise was utilized for specific thematic training, and 3) cooperation amongst NGOs around a common theme was fostered and a successful lobbying towards ad-

vances for the 30 percent quota legislation for women at decision making levels was conducted.

In Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou and in other areas across Burkina Faso, where women involved in politics have benefited from NDI's support, several elected women who were previously unable to simply stand-up and express their opinion, are now able to do so and even respond to various attacks with more self-confidence.

As a result of these positive achievements, SIDA evaluators recommended that funding for the program continue for another five-year period. ■

*Macedonia
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In 2007, the program began to receive direct financial support the National Assembly of Macedonia. As part of NDI's sustainability strategy, the Institute and the Assembly are working together on gradually divesting the management of the network entirely to parliament.

In June 2007, the Association of Municipal Authorities (ZELS), the Assembly, and NDI signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to host all offices in municipal buildings, ensuring equal access for all citizens. Participating MPs and their assistants work in their offices on selected cases; organize public meetings on issues of concern; and share information with citizens about government and the work of parliament. Several constituency offices publish annual reports or newsletters highlighting their activity.

In order to continue providing assistance to the constituency offices NDI developed a tri-lingual (Macedonian, Albanian, and English) case management database to manage casework reporting and record-keeping by documenting each inquiry received in person or by phone, email, or letter. The database is now operational in all 41 offices.

NDI helped parliament develop a code of conduct to ensure even performance of the constituency office assistants by establishing their roles and responsibilities, including working hours, administrative and reporting requirements. An important component of the code is to ensure that all citizens—regardless of eth-

nicity and political affiliation—are welcome at the offices. NDI conducts unscheduled visits regularly to ensure that office compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Finally, NDI has trained constituency office assistants on the use of the database, legislative procedures, newsletter and questionnaire development, desk board graphics, how to form professional networks in the given municipality, and how to organize and run public meetings.

In December 2007, the Macedonian National Assembly voted in a rare cross-party initiative to amend the Assembly's 2008 budget to provide substantial financial support to the constituency office network, the Legislative Internship Program, and the "Assembly Days", where parliament opens its doors to citizens once a year; all three projects are joint initiatives of NDI and parliament. The vote represents a major milestone for the sustainability of NDI's programs to improve connections between citizens and elected representatives in Macedonia.

The success of this program is threefold: Through its programs, NDI was able to contribute substantially to raising awareness and demand among citizens for more accountability of elected representatives; the constituency office project provides the physical space and professional environment for regular interactions between citizens and members of parliament; and the success of the projects has convinced the Macedonian parliament of the benefits of constituency relations for the on-going democratization process, thus prompting its financial engagement to help ensure sustainability. ■

Sierra Leone: Creating An Informed Electorate

Foundations for accountability



Candidate debates and public fora help to create space for democratic discourse, enabling citizens to learn about their electoral choices and express their interests to political candidates. When citizens engage future leaders on the issues relevant to their lives, such as water or sanitation, a more accountable relationship begins to emerge. In addition, debates and fora set important precedents that can help promote ongoing dialogue.

Candidate debates in Sierra Leone, co-organized by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and NDI, encouraged citizens to become more involved in electoral and political processes. Most recently, SLAJ and NDI co-organized debates for mayoral and chairperson candidates for 13 of the 19 contested elections across the country. NDI provided technical assistance to SLAJ to develop organizing committees and publicity strategies, and to plan the format and thematic focus of the debates. When such debates are facilitated effectively, candidates are guided away from rhetoric and focus on practical issues that concern their constituents. In Sierra Leone, candidates debated issues including access to water, sanitation, roads, and plans for generating revenue for the Bo city council and Bonthe district council.

In addition, NDI organized candidate fora for party and independent female candidates for mayoral and coun-

cil elections to explain their platforms on pertinent issues, such as education and sanitation. A total of 145 female candidates debated issues to more than 1,300 constituents. NDI partnered with civic groups to conduct candidate fora in heavily contested and violence-prone areas. Candidate fora were disseminated to a wider audience through radio broadcasts. At the fora, citizens gained access to information about the positions of female candidates on issues in order to make informed decisions on voting day. The fora provided a platform through which female candidates engaged substantively with their potential constituents, while presenting the opportunity for citizens to learn about the local councils, the purpose of the elections, and details of the voting process. The citizens who attended eleven candidate fora were educated about the local elections process, including getting information on voting procedures, the candidates, and the importance of local government for the development of Sierra Leone.

Constituent participation in candidate debates and public fora, and extensive media coverage of the events, helped to create dialogue between citizens and their future leaders on the issues that matter to Sierra Leoneans. This has helped set the stage for continued policy dialogues between citizen and elected leaders. ■

**Interested in learning more
about voice, space and
accountability?**

Check out

<http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/voice-and-accountability>

for a great reading list



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Thank You!

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