



CIVIC UPDATE

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A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

Supporting Inclusion of Marginalized Ethnic and Religious Groups

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

This edition explores NDI’s work with marginalized ethnic groups and highlights the approaches used to help “mainstream” these populations in political life. A marginalized ethnic group includes those who are deprived of their social, political, or economic rights on the basis of their ethnic identity. As the cases in this Update illustrate, these groups are not always minorities and the causes surrounding marginalization are varied.

NDI’s interest in working with these populations stems from an understanding that democracies are more likely to develop and endure when all segments of a society have a political voice and a stake in the development process. The exclusion of certain populations from political processes presents a risk to democratization as it may lead to radicalization and extremism among groups who do not feel they have the ability to express their voice with existing government institutions. Groups who experience exclusion may resort to violence or rely on parallel, informal structures which can undermine nascent democratic institutions.

With the goal of helping ethnic minorities become mainstream members of society with the rights, responsibilities, and respect afforded all citizens, NDI has chosen to work on the issue ethnic inclusion in several instances. All of the programs have worked to lower the barriers to participation and help ethnic population actively occupy political space. In some cases, NDI assistance has exclusively targeted members of the marginalized groups, while – in other

cases – NDI has helped integrate members of marginalized groups in efforts involving a wide range of citizens.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

Aaron Azelton, Director

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Considering the Problem

Entrenched discriminatory practices and cemented cultural stereotypes present barriers that often prevent marginalized ethnic groups from using the same political spaces available to other citizens. Due to this lack of access, these citizens may have developed fewer democratic behaviors compared to others in the same society and may not see the utility in pursuing these spaces. This lack of access often extends to educational institutions, whether due to language barriers or overt discrimination in admissions. This can result in higher illiteracy rates and lower base levels of knowledge about government institutions and citizens' rights and responsibilities. Programming may need to take these educational differences among participants into account. For example, NDI programming supporting the political inclusion of indigenous women in Guatemala had to be adjusted to accommodate illiteracy among participants.

When working with a marginalized ethnic or religious group, NDI programs are frequently better placed to have an impact when partnering with local organizations and individuals who understand the unique cultural context and community dynamics in question. There are often internal divisions and power dynamics that need to be fully understood prior to outreach. NDI may need to explore the internal dynamics of the target population with these local partners prior to commencing implementation of an assistance program. Due to a history of exclusion, many groups may lack trust in outside organizations. Therefore, NDI should consider seeking local partners with pre-existing relationships in the community who can serve as facilitators and assist in building trusting relationships between the Institute and program participants.



Indigenous women in Guatemala participate in NDI's Leadership Academy



NDI-trained candidate for parliament Peter Pollak votes in the Slovak elections. Pollak became the first Roma MP in Europe, serving as a role model for the community

NDI also may encounter groups that are hesitant to participate in political processes due to a history of abuses on the part of state institutions. Programs should identify individuals within the target community who are willing to engage and participate in political processes to serve as role models. This approach has been successful in NDI's work with Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe, who are often less willing to engage in political processes due to a history of exclusion.

Targeted vs Integrated Approaches

In reviewing NDI's work with marginalized ethnic and religious groups, one common design consideration required determining how to strike a balance between program interventions that exclusively targeted members of an ethnic group and those that integrated these members into efforts involving a cross-section of citizens.

A targeted program has the benefit of providing participants with a safe space to learn and to organize around issues specific to their community. NDI's Women's Political Participation Team has found that targeted program activities are best when members of a marginalized group are in need of greater exposure to an idea or possibility, capacity to carry out an action and the confidence to participate at an equal level with others.

While targeted activities can be an important means of getting groups on firm footing, there are also good reasons to include members of marginalized groups with other groups receiving NDI support. This approach can help foster recognition across groups, by demonstrating that there are issues that cut across communities. Incorporating representatives from these marginalized groups in initiatives such as election observation can be a way to ensure these precedent-setting activities take into account the particular needs of these populations and can also create broader awareness among other organizations of the challenges facing marginalized populations.

As NDI's work in Kosovo suggests, an integrated approach can also serve to promote inter-ethnic tolerance and cooperation by setting precedents for collaborative relationships. Breaking down these cultural barriers by humanizing the other and overcoming bias is often a key component to overcoming political barriers to participation. Without including other members of society, a program may run the risk missing opportunities to engage a significant segment of the population that can be instrumental in implementing change in the future. Careful consideration may be required when determining which organizations, political leaders and institutions from outside the target community to incorporate into a program, keeping in mind the importance of establishing and maintaining trust.



OR



Promoting Interethnic Dialogue among Roma and non-Roma in Hungary and Slovakia



Roma and non-Roma participants collaborate on a joint project

NDI has implemented a number of projects in Central and Eastern Europe aimed at mainstreaming marginalized Roma communities in civic and political life. Roma throughout the region are largely excluded from such engagement, stemming from entrenched discriminatory practices preventing them from accessing government services and institutions. Amidst the growing fiscal crisis in Europe, societies have increasingly expressed their frustrations by targeting Roma as scapegoats for their problems, fueling support for nationalistic movements and anti-Roma rhetoric. With the resurgence of far-right groups in Hungary and Slovakia, youth from particularly impoverished and remote communities with few opportunities for advancement have become more susceptible to their influence, deepening the divide and further inhibiting the ability of the Roma community to participate as equal members of society.

In response, NDI's ongoing youth-focused program in Hungary and Slovakia seeks to combat further discrimination and promote inter-ethnic tolerance and civic awareness through community service projects and engagement between Roma and non-Roma youth in such high-risk communities. Partnering with the Slovak branch of the Czech organization People in Need, NDI began by recruiting roughly 100 young participants from eight communities who were later educated on their civic rights and responsibilities, civic activism at the local level, and the importance of political participation. Promising Roma and non-Roma participants worked with their counterparts to create community service initiatives and engaged with each other in shaping numerous projects. This NDI program demonstrates an effective integration approach in which members of the non-Roma population felt they had a stake in the success of their Roma peers and Roma participants gained confidence as equal partners in program activities. For some of the young participants, it was their first time interacting with a member of the other group. These interactions help to alter entrenched misperceptions, and can lay the foundation for future cooperative efforts.



Hungarian participants gain media skills during an NDI training

Internal Diversity

While these marginalized groups are defined by a shared ethnic or religious identity, there are variations in age, socio-economic status, gender, and geographic location within these groups that can create cross-cutting layers of marginalization. This often results in differing priorities among members, and can make it difficult to achieve consensus and collective action. Certain members may face “double” or “triple” exclusion owing to their gender or age. Levels of education may also vary greatly according to socio-economic status.

NDI may need to plan for additional outreach and coordination with local partners to bridge internal divides. For example, the Institute’s assistance program in Colombia experienced this challenge in working to mainstream the Afro-Colombian population in political life. This group has been disproportionately affected by the conflict over the past few decades. Illegal groups such as narco-traffickers, paramilitary forces, and guerrillas, aware of the social and economic isolation of Colombia’s Afro-Colombian populations, can politically intimidate these communities and hence deepen the cycle of political marginalization. Lingering perceptions that political institutions are not independent from these illegal groups remain in poverty stricken areas with high levels of vulnerable populations. Given that much of the Afro-Colombian population lives in isolated areas affected by violence, a high percentage is affected by poverty which is further compounded by a culture tolerant of racism. To address these barriers, NDI has partnered with local civil society organizations (CSOs) in Colombia since 2009 to foster an increased Afro-Colombian presence in political processes and party platforms. As with many vulnerable and underrepresented populations, internal differences created challenges in establishing consensus within the Afro-Colombian community on prioritization of needs. Divisions have also prevented this community from developing a strong base for political leadership. NDI assisted local CSO partners in identifying and harmonizing the priorities of different Afro-Colombian communities. Consensus-building proved to be a necessary first step for NDI assistance to this population in connecting them to political parties and in enhancing their capacity to advocate for more outreach and responsiveness to the needs of the Afro-Colombian population on the part of the Colombian government.

Women who are members of marginalized ethnic or religious communities often face additional barriers to participation due to their gender. Cultural norms within the group may differ from those of the rest of society in a way that prevents women from accessing what limited political space may be available. Women may also be more likely to lack basic knowledge in political processes, largely because of restricted access to education and the historic exclusion from power structures. Low literacy, in turn, prevents more women from being eligible to run for office or simply learn about the political process. Though this can be a problem within the community as a whole, women belonging to marginalized ethnic groups have to compete with men for an already limited pool of educational and economic opportunities. Oftentimes, men are given preference over women where resources are limited, thus making it more difficult for these women to break the cycle of exclusion.



Members of the Afro-Colombian community participate in an NDI workshop in Cali

Increasing the Political Participation of Women in Guatemala

In Guatemala, despite representing a sizable percentage of the population, indigenous groups have limited political and economic power and some of the highest rates of poverty and illiteracy. Although the 1996 peace accords that ended a 36 year civil war called for increasing political involvement of the indigenous population, this population remains marginalized. NDI studies revealed that indigenous women had the lowest rates of political participation and face additional obstacles to engaging in political life due to traditional gender roles in indigenous cultures. To address this multi-level challenge, NDI has sought to strengthen the leadership capacity of members of this population, which included the creation of a leadership academy. NDI brought more than 50 women into its Indigenous Women's Leadership Academy where they were provided with important skills for effective political leadership. The content of the sessions with the women were tailored to meet the specific needs of the participants and to ensure that they were culturally appropriate and relevant.



Indigenous women gather for NDI's Leadership Academy



Participants give remarks during the graduation ceremony

To complement this capacity building exercise, NDI supported the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in developing a plan to improve outreach to women and indigenous peoples and in updating the electoral registry. This along with other factors led to a historic increase in the number of indigenous women voters in the 2011 elections. NDI also met with leaders of multiple political parties to assist them to reach out and include indigenous women in the political process. The goal is that once indigenous women become incorporated into the party structure, they will be more effective in advancing the priorities of their respective communities from within the political framework.

Civic Education and Increasing Political Awareness

Marginalized ethnic and religious communities may display lower levels of civic education and awareness of citizen rights and responsibilities compared to others in society. This is often due to a lack of outreach on the part of government institutions to these communities when making information publicly available, whether in minority languages or in formats that are easily accessible and that resonate with these marginalized groups. This effect can be compounded in transitioning societies with new legal frameworks that include specific provisions ensuring the protection of the rights of these groups but which are not effectively implemented or explained to the groups themselves. For these reasons, civic education may be needed to address this knowledge gap and provide members of these communities with the foundation necessary to engage politically.



Iraqi students share their experiences with diversity

For example, NDI implemented a comprehensive “Diversity Public Awareness Campaign” in Iraq that sought to promote the integration of ethnic and religious minorities. The sectarian divides in Iraqi society have become more deeply entrenched in recent years, leading to a precarious security situation for many members of minority ethnic and religious communities. To address this concern, NDI began a series of 95 educational sessions for students and teachers on tolerance, diversity, and peaceful coexistence, building on recommendations developed by religious and political leaders at the Social Tolerance and Coexistence Conference held in 2010. The Institute launched the program with a youth camp for high school students and teachers to discuss these topics and identify strategies for promoting tolerance

in a diverse society. The curriculum focused on the rights guaranteed in the constitution of Iraq and the historical roots of Iraq’s diversity, and included sessions highlighting the barriers faced by members of minority communities. Students were encouraged to engage in substantive discussion and provide personal anecdotes, ultimately leading to the design of a public diversity awareness advertising campaign. Based off of the recommendations of the participants, NDI provided assistance to the Ministry of Human Rights in designing a media campaign consisting of television ads and a talk show to spread awareness of the rights afforded to members of minority communities in Iraq’s legal frameworks. These efforts were aimed at increasing understanding and acceptance among Iraqis of minority groups that too often suffer from violence, displacement, and discrimination.



Participants learn about constitutional protections for minorities

Fostering Inter-Ethnic Understanding and Leadership Development

NDI has used its convening power to bring together representatives from marginalized ethnic and religious groups and others in society to participate jointly in programmatic activities. This supports the aim of mainstreaming these communities in political life by promoting cross-cultural cooperation and inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. Through participation in NDI programs, individuals can build relationships across ethnic and religious divides and alter their perceptions of others. When combined with NDI's political skills building interventions, this builds a new cadre of effective leaders more willing to compromise and reach out across ethnic lines. Providing emerging leaders with hands-on experience in political activities such as organizing and advocacy is an effective way to build the skills necessary to put them in a position to advocate on behalf of their community moving forward.



Serb and Albanian participants engage in a teambuilding exercise

For example, NDI's program in northern Kosovo brings together youth from both Serb and Albanian communities in the ethnically divided city of Mitrovica to collaborate on advocacy projects at the local level. The majority of Serbs in this area of Kosovo do not engage with Kosovar institutions, and there are very low levels of interaction between the Serb and Albanian communities, thereby undermining the ability of nascent institutions of Kosovo to be accountable to the needs and interests of all citizens. NDI provides training in leadership skills, community organizing, and public communication to develop a committed and self-motivated group of ethnically diverse leaders.

Participants are provided with the necessary tools to recruit other young people in their community to engage with the proposed advocacy projects. As a result, participants collaborate on projects addressing issues of importance to youth, such as the conditions and academic standards at the local university. This cross-ethnic cooperation set a positive precedent for inter-community dialogue and created a group of young Serb and Albanian leaders with experience in advocacy and a greater understanding of the benefit of working across ethnic lines.



Participants brainstorm community needs



Civic Update

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NDI's Citizen Participation
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Team thanks all
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Additional Resources

- Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action Across States and Societies, DFID
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/Output/186480/Default.aspx>
- Marginalized Minorities in Development Programming, UNDP
http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/human_rights/marginalised-minorities-in-development-programming-a-resource-guide-and-toolkit.html
- Youth in Development Policy, USAID
http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/policy_planning_and_learning/document/s/Youth_in_Development_Policy.pdf

CP Team Update

Inclusion of Marginalized Populations

The Citizen Participation team has been tracking new opportunities to expand the Institute's work on the political inclusion of marginalized populations, including people with disabilities, youth, the LGBT community, and ethnic and religious minorities. This includes a current grant from USAID in partnership with IFES to draft a manual on disability inclusion in democracy and governance programs surrounding elections, attendance at the Victory Fund international conference for openly LGBT candidates for political office, and participation at an international disability rights conference hosted by the State Department. In addition to exploring the ways that supporting these populations contributes to NDI's overall democratization mission, the team is following the increased emphasis placed on this work by the US government. Initiatives such as the new USAID policy on youth in development, the amendment of DRL proposal guidelines to encourage more work in this area, and Secretary Clinton's numerous international speeches highlighting the need to prioritize assistance to these communities provide openings for the Institute to build on our previous experience partnering with these groups to review how this work can be enhanced and broadened.

Staff Transitions

Marlena Papavaritis is joining the Citizen Participation Team as the new Project Assistant. A native of Miami, Florida, she received her B.A. in Political Science and Central & East European Studies from Boston College in 2011. She is currently working toward her Master of Arts degree in European & Eurasian Studies from the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University, concentrating in international organization, diplomacy, and globalization. Prior to joining NDI, Marlena participated in an academic seminar with American and Central European students in Slovakia, and discussed post-communist social and economic reconstruction efforts. Marlena has also conducted Hispanic voter outreach at the national level and interned with her congresswoman on Capitol Hill since moving to D.C. in the fall of 2011. Marlena is fluent in Spanish and conversational in Russian.