CIVIC UPDATE

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The Use of ICT to Enhance Citizen Participation

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

The rapid rise in the use of new information and communication technology (ICT) tools among citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs), is increasingly complementing – and challenging – traditional democratic institutions and processes and directly affecting the relationships between government and the citizens they represent. Examples include the use of social media for mobile organizing in Arab Spring countries, web portals and text messaging systems that enable direct communications between constituents and their elected leaders in Uganda and crowd sourcing election day experiences and adapting low-tech computers and phones in order to increase opportunities for participation in the earthquake reconstruction process in Haiti.

Despite the fast growth in the use of such technologies, there is little data available on the impacts they have had on issues, the organizations adopting them, and the political institutions and processes they are intended to influence, or how to best provide technical assistance. As these tools are employed with greater frequency, it is vital that donors, academics and democracy assistance organizations understand their impact in order to provide effective assistance. In 2012, NDI received funding from the NED to investigate these topics. The Citizen Participation and ICT teams are currently in the process of researching several country–level programs that sought to use ICTs to support citizen participation.

The assertions of this Civic Update reflect initial results of this work, using a broad array of program examples. The research analyzes two prevalent assumptions. One is the seeming oversimplification that the addition of ICTs alone would be able to provide the types of experiences necessary for individuals to meaningfully participate in ways that develop their citizenship skills and contribute to democratic development. The other is the notion that ICTs' capacity to increase communication channels and access to information will adequately alter deeply entrenched power inequities. This is presented as a work in progress intended to generate dialogue and feedback to inform the broader endeavor.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

The Citizen Participation Team

Civic Education & Constitutional Monitoring in Egypt

Following the fall of the Mubarak government and the rapid changes in the political environment in Egypt brought on by the Arab Spring, the opportunities for organized and meaningful citizen participation increased. Likewise, the need to help citizens organize and engage also grew more apparent. Anticipating parliamentary and presidential elections, NDI identified a widespread need for voter information and education. In response, NDI provided technical support to the Partners in Change coalition (PIC) in launching the *Ally Sotak* ("Raise Your Voice") voter education and information campaign in October 2011. *Ally* Sotak is a collaborative partnership with PIC and a coalition of approximately 44 other Egyptian CSOs who individually advocate on a wide range of issues from the political participation of youth to the rights of people with disabilities. The campaign provided voters with basic information about their rights and responsibilities in preparation for the November 2011 Parliamentary Elections, including how to register and where to vote, as well as basic information about their electoral choices.

With NDI guidance, the group developed a strategic, multi-faceted campaign plan that included the creation of a website and a social media presence. The plan also highlighted the need to engage young people, and took into account the short electoral time frames and lack of experience among Egyptian voters, civic activists and politicians alike. To deal with some of these challenges, the coalition determined that the campaign required an online presence in order to quickly reach a large number of young people who frequently used the internet and social media. NDI provided expertise to the group on how to develop their online engagement which became a centerpiece of the overall effort. In addition to the campaign's use of traditional media outlets, such as TV and radio, to reach segments of the population with less familiarity or access to the internet, its integrated use of ICTs and targeting of young people set the campaign apart.

The campaign's use of a website as a central organizing tool established uniformity in messaging and information for a quickly-organized, country-wide campaign. Because *Ally Sotak* provided citizens with detailed information on a variety of topics related to the elections, including voter registration, accepted forms of ID, where to vote, and etc., creating the website was instrumental in offering a one-stop resource where all this information could be found. The campaign was therefore able to organize volunteers on the ground, and utilize social media and advertising to direct people to the website without requiring extensive training of volunteers on the information itself, allowing *Ally Sotak* to expand rapidly without compromising accuracy or comprehensiveness. The campaign employed a strategic approach in incorporating social media tools, which included a detailed analysis of existing online information and resources, as well as the needs and location of the target audience which varied with respect to different aspects of the election. The coalition used its social media analysis to create online content that resonated with the target audience. Using data from Facebook, the campaign consistently tracked citizens' engagement with the social media aspects of the

The *Ally Sotak* booth at a Candidate Fair

campaign to ensure that the content and online dialogue fostered by the campaign continued to be engage and resonate with its audience.

The *Ally Soak* campaign also encouraged citizens, especially young people, take a more active approach to acquiring information and developing a deeper understanding of the election process. For example, the campaign used the website and social media to advertise 'candidate fairs', public events where candidates and political parties interacted with

Ally Sotak's Facebook page, demonstrating data used to track the public's engagement

voters. In turn, *Ally Sotak* would set up a booth where volunteers provided nonpartisan information to citizens, and directed them to the campaign website and social media.

Ally Sotak's ability to maintain political neutrality and provide nonpartisan information on the elections proved critical to the overall success of the program, and helped set the stage for future actions. The campaign's wide reach and the neutral message significantly enhanced credibility and created a trusted brand, according to coalition members and NDI staff. The coalition used the same approach in the lead up to the June 2012 presidential election.

Building on the credibility established during the November 2011 and June 2012 elections, *Ally Sotak* partnered with the Egyptian Constituent Assembly, the body charged with drafting the new constitution and comprising representatives from major political parties. *Ally Sotak* worked with the Assembly to increase citizen input in the drafting process by providing space online to post, comment, and vote on proposed provisions, ranking them by popularity. The campaign complemented the online work with door-to-door campaigns, public events, and campaign volunteers stationed on public transportation to collect citizen input. As in previous efforts, the offline campaign referred citizens to the website as a source for more information on the constitutional referendum. The Constituent Assembly discussed 100 of these suggestions, eventually adopting 34 for the Constitution.

Ally Sotak volunteer handing out information on the Constituent Assembly on public transportation

Overall, the successes of the *Ally Sotak* coalition provide an example of how the strategic use of social media can assist in outreach to specific target populations, in this case youth. It also demonstrates the importance of ongoing monitoring of social media engagement to ensure content continues to resonate with target audiences. Additionally, the coalition's combination of online and offline approaches show how websites and social media can lay the foundations for rapid scaling-up of information campaigns to respond to time-sensitive opportunities while maintaining consistency of message. This approach enabled *Ally Sotak* to utilize the opportunity of elections to provide for structured and organized engagement following the demonstrations at Tahrir Square, and to begin building a sustainable form of citizen organizing.

Advocating for Democratic Reforms in Burma

Prior to the 2011-2012 democratic reforms and the subsequent opening of democratic space in Burma, citizens had an extremely limited political voice. Restrictions on political activity forced many activists who advocated for political reform and human rights to operate in exile from neighboring Thailand and other countries in the region such as Indonesia and Singapore. These circumstances compelled exiled organizations to seek the assistance of the international community in putting pressure on the Burmese government. However, it remained difficult for the exiled groups to coordinate awareness-raising and advocacy messages, as most of the groups resided in different places and lacked the capacity to effectively collaborate.

Data collected during the 2010 elections displayed geographically on the Burma Election Tracker website

In order to consolidate their voice, a number of Burmese civil society organizations (CSOs) established the Burma Partnership (BP) in 2006, at a regional conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand convened by NDI. The conference established partnerships among the various groups operating in exile and allowed them to developed and implement a common pro-democracy strategy.

As a follow-up to the conference, NDI provided technical assistance to improve coordination among BP partner organizations and build their capacity to conduct advocacy initiatives and awareness-raising on human rights abuses. This assistance included communication training sessions to build staff competencies with internet platforms and social media communication. Additionally, NDI supported the creation of a new website, at www.burmapartnership.org, in order to serve as a unified platform for coordination. The website provided links to the partner organizations' respective websites, contained a centralized database of contact information for Burmese activists, and included advocacy toolkits and resources. Using online communication tools enabled groups operating over a wide geographic area, and with diverse networks inside Burma, to produce a united stance when engaging international organizations and foreign governments regarding political developments in Burma and advocating for urgently needed reforms.

The 2010 elections provided an opportunity for the Burma Partnership to be increasingly influential in changing international perceptions about Burmese politics because the Burmese government had expressed an interest holding free and fair elections to enhance legitimacy abroad. Leading up to the elections, NDI assisted BP in creating the Burma Election Tracker, an online tool to monitor and map human rights abuses and electoral irregularities. Activists from BP member organizations collected information through their networks in-country, and then transported it across the border to Chiang Mai in both paper and electronic formats. The group then published reported incidences of electoral fraud and associated human rights violations
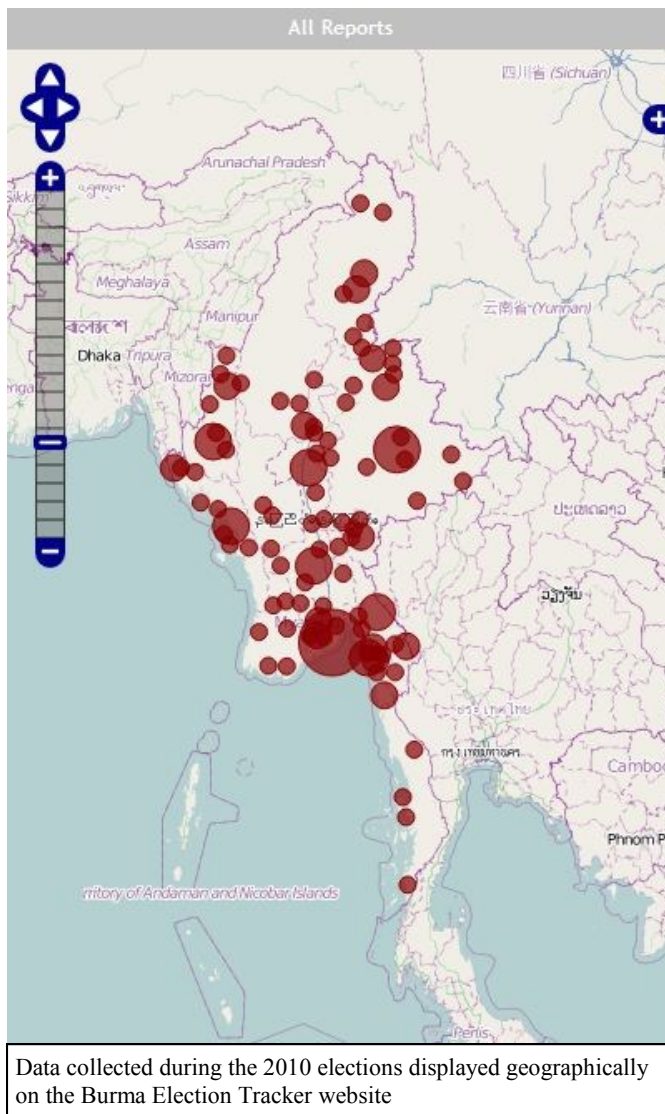
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on the website, and displayed them on an interactive map that allowed visitors to the site to understand both the depth and breadth of reported incidents. This utilization of a creative and engaging visual display of data assisted in attracting the attention of international media outlets. Moreover, the information displayed on the website strengthened international organizations' and the media's ability to critique the Burmese regime by providing concrete evidence of violations, resulting in statements from the international community denouncing the 2010 elections. Additionally, partner organizations reported that the process of collecting and publicizing data significantly raised

awareness of the rights surrounding elections - such as ballot secrecy, access to poll stations, and accurate and transparent counting - both among the organizations' networks in Burma and among the diaspora population, which helped change perceptions of the obligations of the Burmese government.

With a new web platform and increased communication skills, the Burma Partnership has been able to increase its profile with the media and international community and more effectively engage as a unified voice in events such as the annual ASEAN Civil Society Conference and other initiatives to raise awareness on human rights abuses in Burma.

Improving Communication Between Citizens & MPs in Uganda

In Uganda, public opinion research has revealed that citizens felt fearful of using traditional channels for political participation and increasingly cynical that attempts to voice their opinion would result in change or impact policymaking. Ugandan MPs generally spent little or no time in their constituencies, and rarely contacted the citizens they represented, presenting serious barriers to accountability. Building on previous constituency outreach assistance to Ugandan MPs, NDI created a parliamentary call system, known as U Speak, to enable constituents to directly communicate with MPs via SMS or voice message. The program, initially designed as a pilot initiative, included a robust evaluation component, developed in collaboration with Columbia University, to

provide a better understanding of the program's effectiveness in light of the experimental nature of the approach.

The U Speak platform built on the widespread use of mobile phone technology throughout Uganda, providing an excellent example of contextual analysis to determine the most effective and appropriate technology to utilize. The Parliament website was configured in order to install U Speak software, which contained an aggregation system that tagged and categorized the incoming messages. In order to spread awareness of the program, NDI advertised U Speak extensively through radio and a more limited, one-month face-to-face marketing campaign in the constituencies represented by a randomly selected group of MPs during this pilot phase. Although this was not meant as a substitute for face-to-face engagement by MPs, the U Speak platform provided an additional mechanism for engagement with MPs in a context where most citizens had minimal opportunities to provide input.

Although the program began with a randomly selected subset of MPs, it is currently expanding to the en-

tire legislature. This phased approach allowed for lessons learned from the initial rollout to inform the full launch of the platform. To date, the usage by constituents has not reached expected levels, so the program aims to determine why this is the case and address this challenge in the next phase. As the evaluation of the first phase is ongoing, lessons will be incorporated in subsequent phases of the program once data becomes available and is properly analyzed. For example, the program faced a challenge in attracting the anticipated number

UsPeak: The Top Ten Topics

Elections, 3%
Youth Funds, 3%
Health, 5%
Water supply, 5%
Electricity, 5%
Roads, 5%
Infrastructure, 6%
Employment, 6%
MP Performance, 15%
Education, 17%

Information collected as part of the evaluation of the U Speak platform

of users with the advertising strategy employed in the first phase. To address this, one area that will be tested in the next phase of the program is whether NDI should work more closely with issue-based CSOs to use U Speak as a means of increasing their ability to strategically aggregate citizens' voices and express them to elected leaders in their advocacy work, thereby increasing meaningful usage. The inclusion of comprehensive evaluation in program design helped bring these challenges to light, enabling NDI to address them moving forward. This demonstrates the value of piloting ICT-based approaches in a way that can be analyzed and improved, thereby providing an example of how to structure experimentation with ICT tools to determine what works and where shortcomings can be expected.
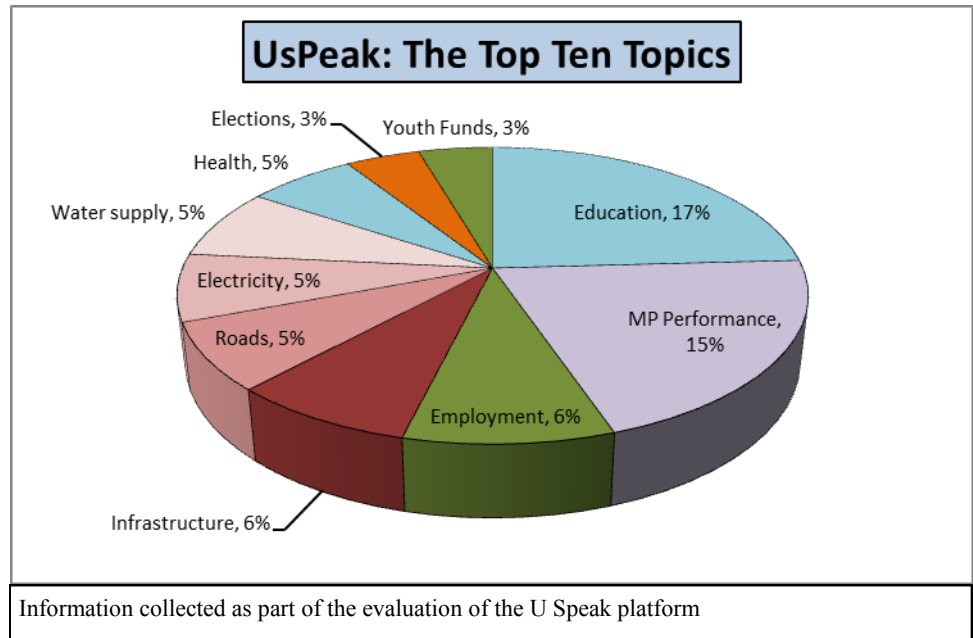
Issue-Based Advocacy in Mexico

The prevalence of organized crime and violence in certain regions of Mexico poses a serious challenge to democracy. Surveys show that unsuccessful efforts to improve citizen security and the judicial system weaken public confidence in democratic institutions. However, increased citizen participation in the development of citizen security policies and judicial reform combined with oversight of implementation can generate greater confidence. To address this, NDI assisted local CSOs in border regions in Mexico in forming coalitions to advocate for security and justice reforms and to raise awareness of the issues, bringing together activists, issue experts and citizens. The run-up period to the July 2012 elections opened up space

to more actively advocate these issues with candidates for federal office.

In collaboration with CitiVox, a domestic Mexican technology firm, NDI assisted coalitions of civic groups in the states of Baja California and Chihuahua in creating web platforms and a social media presence as tools to enhance advocacy initiatives. The web platforms strengthened the advocacy campaigns by providing a one-stop information resource for citizens looking to learn more about the issue as well as helping to engage a broader audience through social media. Partnering with a local company on development of the web platforms provided benefits of exper-

Candidate Forum in Chihuahua

tise in the local technology context as well as long-lasting development impact. NDI assisted the coalitions in creating content for the web platforms that provided information on existing legal frameworks for citizen security and analysis from experts on deficiencies and potential reforms. The web platform was advertised using TV and radio spots, as well as through social media. In addition to the online presence, NDI assisted the coalitions in organizing public forums on security and justice reform with citizens, issue experts and local authorities. The local groups advertised the events through the website and social media and then posted recordings on the web platform.

Leading up to the July 2012 elections, the web platform evolved in three phases. Initially, online deliberative space was provided on the web platform where citizens could express and share their opinions on security and justice themes. In the second phase, citizens posed questions to the candidates online. Citizens could share up to three questions on the portal, and then vote for the best options. Finally, the three questions receiving the most votes online were posed to candidates in filmed citizen-candidate dialogues, which were then posted online, so that citizens and the media could compare candidate responses. The social media presence provided additional space for dialogue through the ability to comment on content posted. In addition to video interviews, NDI assisted local coalitions in organizing town hall discussions with candidates in Baja California and Chihuahua from all political parties and electoral coalitions, videos of which were then posted to the website. The presentation of information on the various candidates' positions on citizen security issues on the web portal simulated a debate format, which was impossible to hold in reality due to political context, as candidates would not be seen in the same room for political and electoral reasons. The website bypassed those considerations to establish new space where citizens could research candidate positions and platforms, gain information on the issues, and express their own opinions and concerns.

The evolution of the web platforms over time and the ability of the coalitions to adapt them to respond to the opportunity of federal elections demonstrate flexibility that is often required with incorporating ICT approaches in advocacy campaigns. Post – election evaluation of the program's efforts to date highlighted several encouraging outcomes. First is that the online political spaces are still being actively used by CSOs and citizens, which continues to build public understanding of these complex issues and demand for public officials to take appropriate action. The program use of a multimedia is augmenting off-line advocacy efforts. For example, the recordings of candidates' statements of policy positions are now being used as a basis for accountability initiatives, including legislative scorecards. In addition, the groups involved in the campaign cited the web – based platform as a necessary catalyst in bringing diverse CSOs together in coalitions that otherwise would not have existed, and unified groups across three regions of the country. This, in turn has given the coalitions increased political strength.
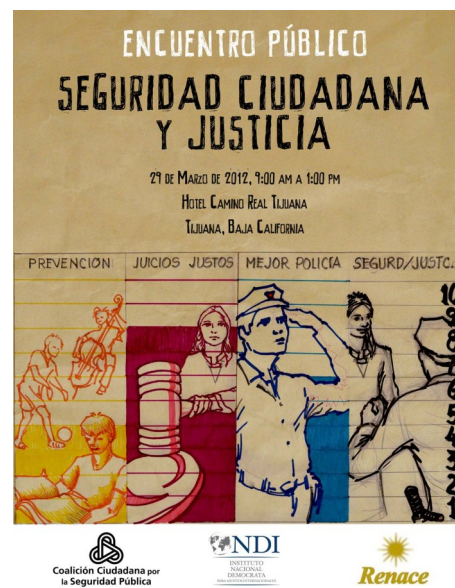
Advertisement for a Candidate Forum in Baja California

Enabling Citizen Input in Political Processes in Peru

Many Peruvians have continued to face growing socioeconomic divisions and exclusion from politics. Citizens have reported low levels of satisfaction in democratic institutions due to a lack of trust in political parties and politicians. In order to address these low levels of public confidence and overall pessimism about the democratic process, as well as to improve the quality of legislation by increasing transparency and build closer links between legislators, civil society organizations and citizens, NDI assisted local partner *Reflexión Democrática* (RD) in developing a website titled *131 Voces* (131 Voices). The website is designed to provide information about ongoing debates in Congress and serves as a platform for citizens to voice their opinions about proposed legislation.

Prior to this program, citizens had limited access to information about legislation or current debates in Congress. *131 Voces* seeks to address these issues by providing access to information on pending legislation to the public. The website also includes information on specific MPs and their proposed bills, with space for citizens to leave comments and opinions. Additionally, breakdowns of legislative agendas by committee are provided, enabling activists to target specific initiatives and better organize advocacy and outreach programs. Twenty-four legislators have joined 131 Voices, committing to actively provide information on bills and activities in Congress and communicate with citizens through the platform, thereby increasing the level of transparency and citizens' access to legislative information. Furthermore, specifically providing a breakdown of legislative committee agendas, where most lawmaking decisions are made, provides an opportunity to correctly identify and disseminate information that would best enhance advocacy efforts and citizen input.

Tentative Lessons for Using ICT Tools in Citizen Participation Programs

As we further our understanding of the effectiveness of ICT in building and enhancing effective citizen participation programs, it is important to take into account several important lessons for the future:

- ICTs' ability to increase communication channels or access to information is not necessarily sufficient for democratic development, the fundamental skills and methods of community organizing still apply

- New ICT tools may have the greatest impact on programs in more " traditional " ways, such as creating new opportunities for building critical relationships (constituent-legislator, coalitions)

- Power analysis is required to determine whether and how utilizing a new technology might alter

the power balance so that program implementation leads to meaningful engagement rather than incorporating technology simply to "be innovative"

ICT tools hold potential to create new political space for citizen engagement. However, occupation of this space remains a challenge as the new space is often occupied by the same groups with the most access prior to the introduction of new technology. It is necessary to look at ways to engage previously inactive segments of the population as well, particularly those that have historically been disenfranchised. Additionally, there are sometimes concerns that the enthusiasm displayed by legislators and CSO leaders is not always met by the general public.

Additional Resources

- *LEADERS COME TOGETHER TO DISCUSS 'DEMOCRACY IN A TECH-EMPOWERED WORLD'*
  - ◊ SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE & VIDEO RECORDING AVAILABLE AT: http://www.ndi.org/silicon-valley-tech-conference

CP Team Update

New Additions

Brittany Danisch has joined the Citizen Participation team as a Senior Program Manager. After spending the past year working on the Obama campaign and on her French-language skills, Brittany has returned to NDI and will be putting her grassroots organizing and development skills back to work. Brittany is rejoining NDI following her nine-year tenure at the Institute working primarily in West Africa, where she acquired extensive voter education and election observation experience. She also brings experience as a producer for several US-based local and national radio programs and has spent considerable time thinking about how radio and audio tools can be incorporated into NDI programs.

Vivek Shivaram joined the Citizen Participation Team as the new Project Assistant in January 2013. He received his B.A. in Government & International Politics from George Mason University in 2007. He recently completed a Master's Degree in International Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, at the University of London, concentrating in South Asian affairs. Prior to his graduate studies, Vivek completed internships at both the U.S. House of Representatives and the House of Commons of the United Kingdom.