



CIVIC UPDATE

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A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

Radio as an Effective Communication Tool

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

In a democracy, citizens are expected to express their preferences, either by aggregating their interests through associations or acting individually, to influence public officials. For such political participation to be effective, citizens must understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government and possess knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority. Access to such information enables the public to make informed personal choices, contribute to public/popular initiatives to make social change and advocate for policy improvements on issues.

NDI regularly works with partners—civil society, political parties and lawmakers—to communicate more effectively with citizens. Well established public communication principles dictate several important steps to conveying a message to a broad audience. It is important to discern how communications support a campaign strategy, who the audience is and the context of the communication. Once the context has been established, appropriate communication channels and sources can be selected that best target the audience. Finally, before fully implementing a program, the intended messages should be tested and revised accordingly. These basic steps are essential for effective public communication, no matter what medium is used.

Despite the rise of new media technology, NDI partners continue to use radio as a useful tool for getting their messages out to citizens. There are good reasons for this. In most developing countries, the vast majority of citizens receive their news and information from the radio. Radios themselves are much cheaper than televisions or computers. Radio production is much less involved and less expensive than television production. Newspapers tend to cater to urban, literate populations. And the internet remains a prohibitively expensive source of information for most people in developing countries.

This is not to say that radio, as a channel for communication with the public, is without challenges. Radio stations must have access to some basic equipment, such as a transmitter and antenna, as well as electricity, in order to broadcast. Staff must be able to run and maintain the equipment, and possess at least basic news judgement and reporting skills. A variety of factors contribute to the quality of programming aired by a given station. Certain stations may be politically motivated as a result of their ownership, or biased due to the influence of state institutions. Community radio stations in rural areas may be hard pressed to produce sufficient content to fill their broadcast schedules and find it difficult to access externally-produced content without internet access or high-tech connections to broadcast networks. Nevertheless, even communities in some of the most remote parts of the world have access to information over the radio.

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NDI programs that incorporate radio as a communication tool generally are looking to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- Inform listeners: provide basic—hopefully actionable—information about specific issues or topics, such as information about where, when and how to vote.
- Educate listeners: explain rights and responsibilities related to a political process or institutions, such as an election or the legislative process.
- Connect listeners: facilitate outreach, feedback and/or dialogue with government/elected officials, public authorities, community leaders and among citizens, and promote ideas of responsiveness on the part of public authorities.

To use radio as a communication tool obviously requires partnering with one or more radio stations to broadcast the program. At times, NDI will also partner with a local or international group with technical expertise on production of the radio programs. NDI brings to these partnerships certain expertise that improves the quality of the programming and ensures that it is an effective communication tool. The following are some of the specific ways in which NDI contributes value to radio programs:

- Developing content: particularly when there is a high need for accuracy (e.g. voter information)
- Coaching radio partners on content (e.g. guests to interview/invite for panels, policy questions to ask, key points to highlight about a particular political process)
- Facilitating participation of elected/government officials (e.g. assisting in preparation of talking points, advising on how to respond to difficult questions/angry callers)
- Convening the meeting/encouraging openness (e.g. town hall meeting, debates, legislative hearings, etc.)

In order to determine what kind of radio program will best accomplish your objectives and reach the target audience most effectively, there are a variety of factors to consider. Is accuracy and control of your message a priority (as it might be for a voter ed program), or are you more concerned about interactivity (as with a constituency outreach program)? What format and topics will be most interesting to listeners? Would it be better to broadcast in a language spoken widely or in local languages more common in specific communities? The following chart can help you think through which of the various kinds of radio broadcasts make most sense for your program objectives.

Production Style	Program/Content	Pros	Cons
Pre-recorded	Dramas, in-depth reporting, interviews, “evergreen” (i.e., not tied to a particular news event), public service announcements	Able to control content—useful for civic/voter ed. Able to reuse content	Depending on communication infrastructure in country, can be challenging to distribute widely to community radios
Live, in-studio	Newsy topics, panel discussions, interviews, call-in/text-in	Allows for discussion and interaction with listeners	Difficult to control accuracy of content—requires strong moderator, careful selection of guests
On location (live or recorded)	Town hall meetings, legislative sessions, debates	Provides listeners unable to attend event with access to information/discussion	May be challenging to access needed equipment in rural areas

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As with any NDI activity that has an educational or informational component, it is important to be thoughtful about how you incorporate radio. Ostensibly, you have already determined your target audience and that radio is the best way to reach that audience based on the specific circumstances of the country, program scope and budget and messaging. However, there are different kinds of radio stations and program formats that each have certain advantages and challenges.

Once you have determined the format of the program, you need to evaluate the radio landscape. What kinds of radio stations exist? The specific mix of stations will differ from country to country but often include some or all of the following categories:

- State radio: Often has the furthest reach, usually can broadcast in most useful local languages, often controlled by government and used for propaganda.
- Private commercial radio: Usually several options in larger cities, can be beholden to owner's political interests, or may be outright controlled by a political party. May have decent to good broadcast reach.
- Public interest radio (e.g. church-sponsored stations, foundation-sponsored stations): Often well-respected and trusted not to be biased, at least among key constituents. Depending on how well funded, may or may not have good reach. Possibly less popular and/or reliable than commercial stations.
- Community radio: Locally focused, usually broadcasts in local languages. May be only information option in most remote areas. Often challenged to produce sufficient content locally and may face severe financial and infrastructure constraints.

When assessing the radio landscape, depending on your resources, you can take a structured, research-based approach or an informal, consultative approach. In general, there are three main categories of information to collect:

- Information from the radio stations themselves: What is their mission? What kinds of programs do they produce/broadcast? What information do they have about their listenership?
- Perceptions of the public: What do citizens think about the various radio stations? Do they like certain stations because they have a partisan stance and others because they are unbiased? Are certain stations known for producing high-quality programming?
- Independent research: Is there any independent research about the effectiveness of radio as a development tool, the quality of community radio networks or other statistics about listenership? Even better if you can find something country specific.

The following case studies—from Nigeria, South Sudan, Cambodia, Haiti and Liberia— illustrate ways NDI's use of radio in its programs has served to inform, educate, and connect listeners on a variety of scales and in a variety of contexts. The examples illustrate lessons learned over the course of the programs and highlight strategies to be considered in future programs involving radio.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.



Community radio tower in Cambodia. Photo by Flickr user Damien @ Flickr

The Importance of Testing: Nigeria

When developing a radio program, testing the audience's reception of themes and content through focus groups and script testing can ensure that the program will have the desired impact. In Nigeria, home to a massive film industry, people are accustomed to quality entertainment. As NDI has learned, testing ideas and materials along the way provides assurance that the content created resonates with listeners.

In Northern Nigeria, NDI identified a need for civic education regarding electoral and political processes. However, as the region is the site of widespread ongoing violence and lacks adequate infrastructure, face-to-face activities could not be reasonably undertaken on a regular basis. NDI turned instead to radio as a means of outreach, thereby avoiding the security and logistical challenges. NDI chose to develop a drama series, as opposed to an explicitly educational program, with the expectation that listeners would be more invested and inclined to follow the story's progression. The Institute also recognized the potential of radio dramas in the Nigerian context.

The result of NDI's efforts was *Dukan Karshe* ("The Last Straw"), a drama telling the story of a young man and woman who run for their local council with the hope of addressing injustice and poor governance. Other characters in the ensemble included a corrupt politician seeking reelection and a host of community leaders representing a variety of ages, ethnicities and literacy levels. To conduct research and develop the program, NDI partnered with Forward in Action for Education, Poverty and Malnutri-

tion (FACE-PAM), a Nigerian civic group with experience conducting democracy and governance programs in Northern Nigeria.

Research began with focus groups conducted in Borno, Kano and Sokoto states to learn of citizens' perception of issues facing the community—participants identified barriers to women's and youth's political participation and the prevalence of corruption. Many participants also noted that listeners would benefit from a dramatized demonstration of how their votes count, as a means of addressing skepticism about the democratic process. For example, one participant said "...you know some people at times refuse to vote, so it will be good to show them how those who voted enjoy the benefit of their voting." Focus group participants also said they'd like to hear corrupt politicians facing punishment in the series. Based on these suggestions, the final story included a corrupt chairman seeking re-election being called out for his misdeeds and a female candidate garnering widespread community support.

NDI and FACE-PAM, with the help of professional scriptwriters and media consultants from Singing Tree Productions, used the focus group research to write nine scripts in English and translated them into Sokoto Hausa and Kano Hausa. FACE-PAM hired community theatre groups to read small selections of the scripts in three towns—FACE-PAM then solicited audience feedback regarding how realistic and pertinent the stories seemed. In general, citizens found the scripts to be entertaining, thought-provoking and realistic, as well as reflective of the religious and cultural context of the region. Additionally, audience members noted that the dialogue sounded authentic and appropriate, which gave NDI and FACE-PAM confidence that the programs would convey the intended messages.

To complement this feedback, FACE-PAM held focus groups to gather more extensive responses to the scripts. Although the feedback was predominantly positive, some focus group participants noted that they felt uncomfortable with the idea of a woman running for office, saying that the Quran forbids it. However, these reactions stemmed from unjust, long-standing stereotypes about women, and the script retained this plot line. Focus group participants seemed to understand the main lessons: don't



Production of *Dukan Karshe*. Photo by Lindsay Robinson

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sell your votes, vote for the candidate whose platform reflects your beliefs, women should be allowed to participate in the political process and electoral violence is a problem in need of addressing.



In order to maximize the drama's

potential reach and impact, NDI consulted the National Broadcasting Commission to select the widest-reaching

radio station based on size, popularity and geographic coverage. The series was estimated to reach about 14 million listeners, based on a formula developed by NDI and approved by Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services. It takes into account the state's adult population, population growth rate and the percentage of radio listenership, as calculated by a 2010 BBC survey.

This research and testing regimen provided NDI and FACE-PAM with confidence that *Dukan Karshe* conveyed relevant messages to its audience. Also, the focus groups and script readings confirmed that listeners enjoyed the content.

The Benefits of Discussion: South Sudan

Radio can be an effective education tool on its own. However, supplementing radio programs with moderated discussion plays a significant role in enhancing listeners' understanding of education topics and in encouraging civic participation. An experiment in South Sudan revealed the value of small group discussions in conjunction with civic education broadcasts.

In 2009, NDI collaborated with a Princeton University social scientist Betsy Paluck to examine the behavioral affects of radio programming—which included drama segments and recorded interviews—and corresponding facilitated discussions. The study affirmed the benefits of civic education broadcasts, especially drama segments, which increased listeners' likelihood of recommending the program to others and bolstered their participation and contribution in discussions.

The experiment also determined that facilitated discussions are more effective than self-moderated ones, and that women were more likely to participate in discussions led by NDI staff than in discussions without a moderator present. Additionally, the experiment established a correlation between participation in moderated discussion and volunteerism. Discussion in general, and especially when moderated by NDI, increased listeners' perception

that their listening peers agreed with the topics of the episodes, creating a greater sense of community with respect to the issues at hand.

Above all, the experiment confirmed the benefits of supplementing radio listening groups with discussion. It showed, for example, that an NDI-led

discussion of an episode on women's participation increased men's perception of the scarcity of women in politics. Participants in another NDI-led discussion were significantly more able to provide a definition for "fair and free election."

The report also notes the expense of having NDI staff facilitate discussions with every episode. It therefore proposes the training of local

community leaders to serve as discussion moderators, a far more sustainable practice. Even without facilitated discussion, however, the study found radio programming—specifically drama—to be effective. Both educational and drama segments were shown to increase listeners' knowledge, but drama particularly encouraged listeners to recommend the show to family and friends and discuss topics more actively whether the discussion was facilitated or not.

The link to the full Princeton research report can be found in additional resources.



Radio listening group in Sudan

Using Surveys to Assess Broadcast Effectiveness: Cambodia

The usefulness of radio as a communication tool is often difficult to assess, particularly in countries where regular collection of listenership data does not take place. In some cases, NDI has conducted its own surveys, used to draw correlations between radio broadcasts and self-reported changes in listener behavior and attitudes. Follow-up surveys can be used to assess program results and gather listenership data for future use. This strategy was used in Cambodia, giving NDI an idea of how listeners perceived the program.



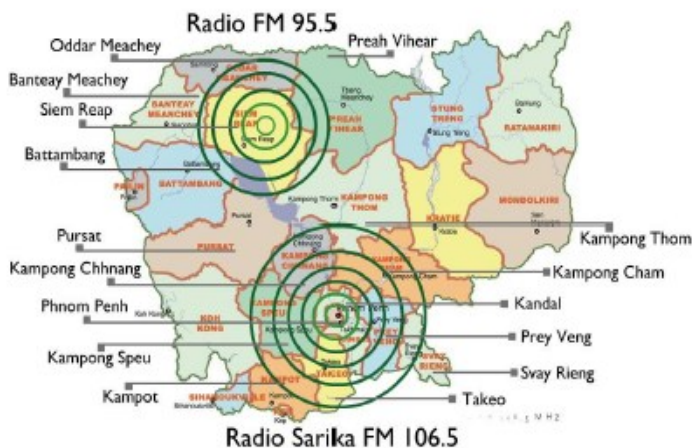
Candidate debate in Cambodia

The Cambodian ruling party restricts public access to information and politicians have limited and inconsistent opportunities to communicate with citizens, leaving Cambodians with minimal means of understanding candidates' platforms. In an effort to promote a more open exchange of information in the lead-up to the June 2012 commune council elections, NDI arranged 10 candidate debates in collaboration with political parties across five provinces, involving a total of 43 candidates. To maximize these debates' impact and bolster constituency outreach efforts, NDI recorded the debates and partnered with radio stations across the country to broadcast them.

and after the elections took place, NDI conducted an extensive country-wide survey, involving 1,200 citizens from 20 provinces. The Center for Advanced Study, a Cambodian non-partisan organization focused on research, public debate and education on issues pertinent to Cambodian society, conducted face-to-face interviews based on an NDI-designed questionnaire. Questions addressed who heard the debates, which stations were popular, whether listening to the debates changed listeners' attitudes, whether the debates were perceived as fair and if respondents voted in the election.

Several weeks after the debates aired on these stations,

With regard to listening habits, the survey provided NDI with a better understanding of the program's reach.



Estimated coverage of Radio Sarika FM, one of the stations that aired debates

Of those surveyed, 85 percent had a radio, and 74 percent said they listened to local radio at least once per day. Notably, radio was reported as the most-used source of political party information. NDI also discovered that 17 percent of respondents were aware of the debates, and nearly 13 percent tuned in for at least one debate.

The survey showed that those who tuned in to a debate felt satisfied with the content and in many cases saw the election in a new way. In fact, nearly 79 percent of respondents who listened said the debates changed their opinion of at least one of the political parties or their candidates. Listeners also reported that they generally perceived the debates to be fair and respectful towards candidates, and the issues dis-

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cussed to be personally relevant. More than 85 percent of listeners said the debates increased their confidence in election fairness in Cambodia. The respondents frequently recommended better promotion of the debates, a strong indication of the debates' value.

This type of survey is costly, and not feasible for every program involving radio. However, it provides valuable lessons about how citizens get their information and how they perceive this type of program, which can

be taken into account later on. In the case of Cambodia, candidate debates formed part of a larger ongoing project focused on elections and political party strengthening. Survey results, therefore, were used to improve future debates, including those held in the lead-up to the 2013 national election. NDI used survey data to choose the radio stations that would maximize listenership and scheduled the airing of debates based on data gathered on the most popular times for listening.

Low Cost Public Information: Haiti

Radio can serve as an inexpensive means of broadening a program's reach. In rural areas, information is often difficult to access, and radio is often the primary source of news. By tapping into community radio stations, for example, NDI can effectively amplify its program at a low cost.

The border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic is a site of ongoing tension between communities on both sides. In response, NDI is working to create safe spaces to discuss sources of community conflict and facilitate interaction between government officials of border towns and diverse community members. To achieve these ends, NDI organized community assemblies to serve as forums for open, moderated discussion.

Radio was not part of the program's initial design—rather, it was incorporated at the suggestion of participants in the assemblies who wanted to publicize the events to encourage broader participation in the assemblies and specifically the participation of customs agents. NDI decided to partner with community radio stations to broadcast the assemblies. The events were broadcast live, and then rebroadcast several times throughout the month. During the rebroadcasts, listeners

could call in and express their reaction to the assemblies, facilitating further discussion.

Initially, some public officials were wary about attending the assemblies. Elected officials feared community members would blame them for issues being discussed, and customs officials worried that they would experience

public backlash in response to discussions of corruption. The choice of radio stations, however, alleviated this problem—in Belladere, Haiti, the program was broadcast simultaneously on three stations known for promoting opposing political views. This served as assurance that the content being aired was not designed to



Community assembly in Belladere, Haiti

promote one view over another. In addition to helping NDI reach more people, broadcasting the assemblies was appreciated at the stations, which do not have access to unlimited content. Station managers were inclined to play the assemblies repeatedly to fill time.

As seen in Haiti, radio can be very effective when used as a low budget amplifier for existing NDI activities. Broadcasting activities like community assemblies can drastically increase the discussions' reach when a call-in element is incorporated and also encourage listeners to attend events in person.

Connecting Lawmakers and Constituents: Liberia

Although it is not a substitute for in-person discussion between legislators and their constituents, live radio programs can offer a mechanism for interaction. By hosting discussions with legislators and incorporating live call-ins, politicians can connect with citizens in their districts without the need to overcome various logistical barriers, such as poor road conditions and lack of telecommunications infrastructure.

Liberian lawmakers still lack a sense of responsibility to those who elected them into office, even as citizens expect more accountability from lawmakers. In most cases, legislators are unwilling or unable to return to their districts to face their constituents who, misunderstanding what role government officials play, ask for payments of school fees or have other unreasonable requests.

In order to foster an environment of open dialogue between legislators and constituents, NDI created the *Legislative Spotlight*, a radio program launched in 2009



Poor road conditions make travel to their districts difficult for lawmakers. Photo by Flickr user DW Akademie—Africa

that is broadcast nationally. The *Legislative Spotlight* features a live call-in interactive talk show with senators and representatives from around the country followed by live call-ins from constituents. Topics have included the national budget, standardization of the educational sector, youth development and the government's decentralization policy and other policy proposals.

Legislators from across the country have requested to be on the *Legislative Spotlight* to, for example, explain to citizens their sponsorship of a particular bill and seek their input on important issues facing their communities. Lofa County Representative Varfray Kamara donated a transmitter to a station in the Kolahun District to improve its coverage in the community with the hope of supporting engagement in that district.

The *Legislative Spotlight* has become an established medium by which lawmakers and constituents can communicate. In addition to overcoming logistical barriers that prevent in-person interaction, this form of communication has served to set a precedent of constructive open dialogue with government officials. This form of live radio can have similar benefits in regions where dialogue of this nature is limited and logistical problems may not allow face-to-face discussion.



Legislative Spotlight recording in Liberia. Photo by Brittany Danisch



Additional Resources

- ◇ *MONITORING AND EVALUATING INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES*, **DFID**
- ◇ *WHEN DOES INFORMATION CHANGE LIVES?: AN EVALUATION OF RADIO DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN AND THE THREE AREAS*, **INTERNEWS**
- ◇ *HOW TO PRODUCE A RADIO SOAP FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION/RESOLUTION*, **RADIO FOR PEACEBUILDING AFRICA**
- ◇ *THE IMPACT OF THE "LET'S TALK" CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAM: EXAMINATION OF LISTENER DISCUSSION, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIOR*, **NDI AND BETSY PALUCK (PRINCETON)**

Civic Update

is a production of
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Team thanks all
the DC and field
staff members who
provided assistance
in compiling this issue
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CP Team Update

New Additions

Margot Tuchler joined the Citizen Participation team as an intern in June. She is pursuing a degree in International Comparative Studies with a focus on European Studies and a minor in Political Science from Duke University, and is scheduled to graduate in 2015. She has a background in journalism, having served as an editor for Duke's daily student newspaper and an intern/blogger for a food magazine. Margot will be spending several months studying in Italy, where she hopes to research the widespread violence and xenophobia shown towards immigrants.