NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Civic Update

Integration

In most places where NDI operates, the relationship between citizens and government needs a lot of work. Instead of serving citizens, government institutions are often weak, coopted by elite interests, or ineffective due to corruption and impunity. When government is unable or unwilling to address basic needs, citizens suffer. NDI has learned that there is an inherent relationship between governance and socio-economic development. It is not enough to work only on setting up democratic institutions and processes. These institutions and processes must be put to work creating opportunities for citizens to lead healthy and productive lives. For this reason, NDI has emphasized program approaches that "help democracy deliver." These approaches typically try to *integrate* improved democratic governance and socio-economic change. As a result, the relationship between citizens and government starts to transform, and the quality of life advances.

In Liberia, engineer James Kendor explains to Senator Joyce Freeman Sumo how water is distributed to her constituents. Photo credit: Varney Karneh

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NDI also understands that citizen participation can help drive these developments. When citizens take organized political actions, they can alter power relations and influence government behavior. NDI's focus group and survey research consistently demonstrates that citizens normally care most about quality of life issues, such as health, education, employment and public safety. These are also the issues that citizens are most willing to organize around, because they address immediate needs and interests. This allows NDI to integrate socio-economic development priorities into programs designed to increase the political participation of citizens and their interactions with government officials. These programs create a dynamic intersection where citizens and government are using democratic principles, institutions and processes to address substantive public-policy issues.

The program examples in this Civic Update illustrate how all this works in practice. They also underscore the need

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Citizens meet to strategize transportation solutions in Bahrinesti, Moldova.

for citizens to think and act politically when it comes to their socio-economic welfare. In this regard, NDI's work helped citizens:

- think strategically about how change happens and the pathways to change;
- create compelling narratives supported by evidence to motivate and mobilize for change;
- analyze political power dynamics and map political interests;
- establish political relationships and networks;
- conduct public outreach to promote credibility;
- match the appropriate tactics to an overarching strategy;
- embrace the use of dialogue and deliberation to resolve disputes and reach consensus;
- behave transparently and accountably to ensure public trust; and
- form or join coalitions with like-minded actors to foster power and solidarity.

NDI's work in this area is informed by USAID's 2013 Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, which affirms that democracy and governance are integral to USAID's overall development agenda. NDI takes a complementary approach by engaging citizens in democratic processes in response to development issues impacting their quality of life.

I. INFRASTRUCTURE

Poor infrastructure can pose a significant barrier to economic growth and the timely delivery of public services. Without reliable roads, telecommunications systems and electrical grids, citizens are hindered from engaging in productive activities, such as transporting goods to market, that generate income and support resilient societies. The following examples illustrate how NDI has helped groups address infrastructure challenges.

Improving Transportation Services

Moldova is among the worst performers in Eastern Europe in terms of infrastructure. When citizens in the village of Bahrinesti identified their issues of highest concern, transportation appeared at the top of the list. Citizens selected this issue as part of NDI's Civic Forum program, which aims to help people organize themselves to solve local-level problems. Civic Forum is present in 21 communities in Moldova, led by five civic organizers and small working groups consisting of three to eight people in every community.

Citizens in Bahrinesti identified a lack of bus stops and limited bus access, as the village had just one bus stop and the local bus only made visits until 1 p.m. This meant that people had to walk long distances and sacrifice a good deal of time to be able to conduct their daily activities. To address this issue, Civic-Forum-trained leaders organized a public meeting attended by approximately 100 people, including local authorities and the directors of the transportation company that operated the bus line. During the

Citizen Voices

"I think I will continue being involved in community organizing and in solving local issues. After attending meetings and studying the experience of other people involved in solving issues that are important to their communities, I understood that local issues can be solved only if people get involved, and this can change the quality of life for people living in rural communities" (Parascovia Ichim, *Ciobalaccia, Moldova*).

"I like organizing very much; I think this can help us as a community to have a decent life. I think we acted politically, as we involved local elected politicians and we acted according to the law" (Aliona Ciobanu, *Bahrineşti, Moldova*).

meeting the company responded positively to citizens' requests for an additional bus stop and an improved route through which the bus would run at least once in the afternoon. As a follow-up to the meeting, the group submitted a letter to the president of the company and the local authorities formally requesting a timeline and an agreement in written form. Within six months, the transportation company had implemented the requested modifications to the bus schedule and increased the number of stops. Working on this issue with local authorities and business leaders proved an effective way to solve an infrastructure problem through thinking and working politically.

Civic Forum's successes have inspired communities across Moldova to organize their own issue campaigns. As part of one such locally-owned initiative in the village of Ciobalaccia, citizens organized independently to compel their representatives to repair a broken bridge, having gained knowledge through Civic Forum about how to work strategically to tackle an issue of common concern.
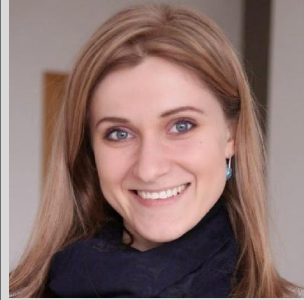
Increasing Access to Electricity

In **Burkina Faso**, NDI supported three local civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor the quality of government service delivery within the education and health sectors. Through technical and financial assistance, the Institute trained local organizations in three geographical zones (East, Central and West) of the country to expand their knowledge on issue advocacy and citizen mobilization.

To start, the CSOs distributed questionnaires for individual interviews, conducted focus groups on priority issues, and created community scorecards to rate the quality of public service delivery. In Fada N'gourma, in eastern Burkina Faso, NDI worked with the Association Todi Yaba to hold meetings in three community health centers - Fada 11 (an urban center), Natiaboani, and Namoungou (both rural centers). Through these meetings, Todi Yaba established that in rural communes lack of electricity in the village's health center was a priority concern. NDI supported Todi Yaba in mobilizing politically to request that electricity be installed so "births no longer took place under the light of a flashlight." To prepare the community to engage in the effort, Todi Yaba engaged members of the

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PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD
Anna Susarenco, Civic Program Officer, Moldova

Why is it easier to organize people around development, rather than political, issues?

First of all, in either case, it is very important that people are interested in the issue at hand, which usually happens when they are affected by it. Tackling development issues is easier in the sense that results can be seen faster so people will be more motivated to organize and engage politically to solve that issue. Organizing around both types of topics is different in terms of time and effort, however, components like a clear objective and an interested and organized group of people remain the most important. I think if we want to organize people around political issues we can start by tackling development challenges, which are closer to them and can be resolved in a reasonable amount of time. In turn, that will increase their confidence in their ability to influence politicians as well as help them learn how to organize.

Did people's attitudes toward their authorities change after organizing?

In many of the communities we are working in, there was no relationship between citizens and authorities besides during elections. When people started organizing they also began building a relationship with their authorities - and not a confrontational one necessarily. Many times authorities are happy to see active, well-organized citizens asking for concrete changes, so they are open to collaborate. Yes, people's attitudes changed because they gained knowledge about the role, responsibilities and duties of public authorities. Authorities' attitudes also changed: when people first started organizing, they weren't willing to listen because they believed they were better prepared to judge and make decisions about the community's needs. Later they realized that citizens had meaningful contributions about the challenges affecting their communities.

local council, health care workers, health center personnel and CSO partners on the concept of social accountability and advocating for government responsiveness. It also trained citizens on their role in bringing the community's concerns to the health center's managers. In addition, the group provided a space where government officials and citizens could work together towards common goals during town hall meetings, workshops, and radio programs. These combined efforts resulted in the desired infrastructure improvement to Namoungou's healthcare center. Today the center operates with electricity, and citizens know that strategic action can yield tangible quality-of-life improvements.

As part of the Citizen **Syria** program, an NDI-trained community leader, Abed Elah Ojey, facilitated the creation of an advocacy plan to improve electricity provision in the city of Amouda. The community identified this issue as a pressing concern through local council meetings and worked collaboratively with local council members, tribal authorities, and other community leaders to frame three specific objectives to address electricity concerns: first, to

Citizen Voices

"Our perception about our power to monitor the government and authorities has changed a lot. In the past when we monitored the government, our main goal was to expose the shortcomings and imperfections of authorities' actions. After this social accountability program, we understood our real role, which is to be intermediaries between governors and citizens. To do this, we need to create spaces for dialogue between them and get them to work together permanently. We need to encourage governors to really understand the populations' needs. Likewise, we need to allow the citizens to know and understand the laws affecting them so they can later play a more active role in shaping and implementing them" (Bouama Michel Ouoba, Todi Yaba, *Fada N'Gourma, Burkina Faso).*

"The program has created an environment where both citizens and authorities can meet. Authorities accept face-to-face discussions with the population. Decisions are made taking into account citizens' concerns and aspirations. For us, this change in behavior is due to the accountability program conducted through NDI support" (M. Achille Ouattara, *Orodara, Burkina Faso*).

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD
Ali Al-Omari, Resident Program Officer, Syria

How does a community leader engage politically with development topics?

Citizen Syria leaders were trained and given skills in facilitation, leadership and needs assessment. In turn, those skills helped them better identify priority issues in their communities. Leaders learned about the overlap between development goals and political engagement. Once they understood the connection between day-to-day life issues and politics, they were able to share this knowledge with the community.

increase the provision of electricity to six hours per day over a four month period; second, to acquire 16 generators with 500-kilowatt capacity from civic groups, the local council ministry of electricity, and international aid organizations; and third, to work with CSOs and local parties to decrease city-wide electricity consumption from 20 megawatts to 16 megawatts per year. The plan included specific steps to publicize these efforts through newspaper and radio, and to achieve buy-in from key decision-makers who could act as champions.

II. EDUCATION

Education is a key contributor to economic growth and poverty reduction. Without proper access to education, people's social and economic opportunities decline. Furthermore, they have less access to knowledge, including that of citizens' rights and obligations. NDI has supported several programs that help citizens to engage elected officials on education issues.

Addressing School Performance

In **Burkina Faso**, NDI helped the Association Manegdbzanga (AM) design a campaign to address education issues in the city of Loumbila. AM systematically gathered information from the community and identified several key problems, including the late arrival of textbooks (classes began in October and textbooks arrived in

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November and December), lack of parental involvement, scarcity and unhygienic condition of bathrooms, and poor teacher performance.

Using this information, AM organized community meetings in four local schools - Tangzougou, Bangrin, Silmiougou, and Nomgana - with the goal of promoting school accountability. Attendees included members of the parent's association, the Association of Mother Educators (AME), the village development council and local youth associations, as well as representatives from the mayor's office and schools. This began a year-long process of building a working relationship between the parents' associations and the AME, mobilizing more active AME support for the schools and students and establishing a committee in the mayor's office dedicated to ensuring better teacher attendance and punctuality. During the final program assessment, students showed improved results on certificate exams, with 87 percent of students receiving a passing score compared to 68 percent in prior years. This program provides an example of how, through employing democratic practices such as citizen participation and community dialogue, NDI's local partners attained better public services.

In northwest **Cambodia**, NDI organized a town hall meeting that served as a venue for one citizen of the Roluos Meanchey community to voice her discontent about the quality of education in a village school. With only three

Women discuss local school improvements in Burkina Faso.

classrooms and two teachers, the school faced severe overcrowding. In response, the provincial Education Department sent two additional teachers to the secondary school and one to the primary school. The NDI-launched Engaged Citizens' Network project, which brings citizens together with their elected representatives in order to develop a shared understanding of community needs, made this interaction possible. Through this project, citizen groups have worked together to prioritize issues, engage officials, and monitor progress. This process contributes to democratic learning and helps ensure that the community's quality of life concerns are addressed.

Citizen Voices

"I choose topics that immediately affect the community; topics that attract people and are a priority for them. Issues related to electricity and education are typically not considered political. However, I was able to explain to other community members how they relate to political empowerment. Politics influences these issues, and we as citizens have to choose our representatives in local councils so we can take back control over issues that affect our daily lives" (Walaa Aloush, *Jabal Azawyiah, Syria*).

"I pick issues that ignite people's hopes to build a better Syria. Issues that people need to know so we can all build a new democratic Syria. There are always political issues going on in the community I live in so for me, everything in our lives is linked to politics. Politicians make decisions for us so we as a community need to be politically educated, engaged and mirror best practices and international principles of democracy" (Abdul Elah Ojay, *Amouda, Syria*).

"I chose the issues in consultation with several local NGOs and based on our community's needs. Elected officials influence and shape issues affecting citizens so we need to educate the community on how to engage in political discussions. Issues affecting citizens are influenced by leaders representing them and all these are political practices that we should learn more about and educate the community on. So definitely, all topics are related to politics" (Mustafa Abdi, *Kobani, Syria*).

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

Marko Ivkovic, Program Manager, Regional Election Administration and Political Processes Strengthening (REAPPS)

Why is it easier to organize people around development, rather than political issues?

The individuals engaged in this program were able to fully identify themselves with the issues. Political issues seem to be far away from their daily lives so they can't immediately see the benefits of engaging in them. In contrast, they are exposed regularly to healthcare and similar issues that affect their quality of life, motivating them to get involved. As a matter of fact, many said they would like to see a second round of monitoring and even offered to work on a volunteer basis, which is proof of the involvement inspired by development issues.

Did community members' perceptions change in respect to the power they have to expose their government's shortcomings?

Our team believes that they did - the research report was covered extensively by the media and the Ministry of healthcare reacted publicly to the results. The outcome of their work was publicly recognized. Still, we believe that real empowerment would occur if healthcare centers show improvements in their performance.

III. HEALTHCARE

Access to adequate healthcare services is a critical factor in a country's economic development and in the quality of life of its citizens. People's ability to achieve their full potential as individuals and members of society significantly decreases when their health, or that of a family member, declines; likewise, if a government is unable to guarantee access to basic healthcare, its legitimacy is inevitably weakened. In recent years, NDI has supported citizens' efforts to attain improvements in the provision of healthcare services through community dialogue, advocacy, and monitoring and observation.

Evaluating Healthcare Services

NDI focus group research in Albania revealed citizens' unhappiness with the quality of the country's healthcare facilities. As one participant declared, "If you refuse to bribe doctors they will refuse to help you, or you will get very poor service. I am saying this from my personal experience because I had to bribe them so I could enter the operating room." Opinion research also found that people felt disconnected from their elected representatives and saw them as unresponsive to people's needs.

In Albania, volunteers use election observation techniques to monitor healthcare indicators.

NDI supported the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections and Sustainable Democracy (CFFESD) to assess the performance of Albania's healthcare facilities. They did so using a methodology, known as sample-based observation (SBO), which is traditionally used to monitor polling stations during elections. CFFESD deployed 550 observers to collect and analyze findings from a sample of the country's primary healthcare centers. They assessed quality standards for health center administrators, medical personnel, medical equipment, inventory and infrastructure. Observers then reported their findings based on a questionnaire to a call center of 30 operators. Among the observers' findings were that only 17 percent of the centers had the proper infrastructure required by Albanian law and that more than 90 percent of centers were not accessible for people with disabilities.

The project has received positive feedback from govern-

ment officials. Albanian Health Minister Ilir Beqaj publicly acknowledged the usefulness of the findings, stating via Twitter that they will guide future Ministry work. The results for democratic engagement were positive as well. Marko Ivkovic, Program Manager for Regional Election Administration and Political Processes Strengthening (REAPPS), who provided technical assistance for the program, reported that "After the exercise people were excited, observers wanted to participate again on a volunteer basis. The healthcare monitoring program boosted activism especially because they cared a lot about the services provided by the centers under scrutiny; they were able to connect with the topic."

Citizens gather signatures for the approval of a town hall meeting in Cartagena, Colombia.

Organizing for Disability Access

In **Colombia**, NDI supported the Cartagenian CSO Mar Adentro to organize a town hall meeting to discuss the revision of laws pertaining to healthcare, education and public accessibility for people with disabilities. Their specific demands included: building wheelchair ramps into the curbs on major streets; lower public transportation fares for people with disabilities; free mental health services for people with disabilities and their caretakers; a disability awareness training programs for public employees; and an increase in the number of school teachers proficient in sign language.

The process to organize a town hall in Cartagena was lengthy and challenging. The local government required the group to gather petitions from 3,400 Cartagenian residents, ensure each of the petitions were filed in fully legi-

ble handwriting (which was problematic because some citizens with disabilities could not write legibly; the petition also excluded those who read and wrote using Braille) and designate one speaker to express community concerns, whose information would be recorded by the National Civil Registry well before the meeting. In an unprecedented collective action, community members - with the technical support of NDI and Mar Adentro - actively engaged to gather 4,700 petitions, out of which the government considered 4,200 valid.

After months of preparation, the town hall took place in April 2015. It was attended by over 600 people, including the director of the Citizen Participation Department from the Ministry of the Interior, the director of the National Plan for Inclusion for People with Disabilities from the Executive Office, all members of the District Council of Cartagena, and representatives from the mayor's office. Two significant agreements resulted from the meeting: 1. To create a working group on disability issues composed of representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Executive Office, the district council, the mayor's office, as well as the designated community speaker.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

Andres Osorio, Program Officer, Colombia

Are governance and development goals complementary?

NDI's governance and democracy objectives overlap with development goals, some directly and some indirectly. Changes in economic opportunities, equality, infrastructure, education, and healthcare improvements all imply a growth in the will and skills of citizens, government officials and lawmakers. Governance and development goals become more attainable as citizens and legislators use different participation mechanisms to engage with one another. At NDI Colombia, we strongly believe that changes related to development will be a natural consequence of our work in democracy. Strengthening citizen participation will eventually lead to improvements in other important aspects of life: social, economic, etc.

2. To review, and, where appropriate, rewrite current local laws concerning people with disabilities.

Two days after the town hall, the mayor's office began a campaign to map the population of citizens with disabilities in Cartagena, specifically seeking to establish how many Cartagenians have a disability, the nature of their disability, and in what part of the city they live. With this information, the local government will be able to tailor public services to the needs of this population.

IV. WATER AND SANITATION

1.1 billion people lack access to water globally, and 2.7 billion people experience water scarcity for at least one month per year. Inadequate sanitation is an issue for 2.4 billion people, who are exposed to diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever. Two million people die each year from diarrheal diseases, most of them children. In Africa, 358 million people lack access to clean water, making it a key topic of citizen concern and a pressing issue for governments to address.

Responding to Water Issues

In Liberia, NDI partnered with the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Network. In response to citizen concerns about water pollution and lack of proper sewage systems, NDI and the WASH Network organized an investigative study mission to provide policymakers with a better understanding of the country's water and sanitation issues. The mission, which included a 17-member delega-

tion of lawmakers, legislative staff, government officials and media representatives, observed focus groups, visited affected sites, and interviewed citizens to assess the issue.

The study mission found that, in Monrovia's Clara Town slum, 48,000 residents shared only six public toilets. One of the Senators in the delegation, Joyce Musu Freeman Sumo, promised to be a champion for this issue and later sent a letter to the Senate calling for action. Senator Sumo's letter led the Senate to organize a public hearing on water and sanitation issues in May 2014, at which the WASH Network testified. Shortly afterward, Liberia was hit by the regional Ebola outbreak, which necessitated both civil society and government to turn their full atten-

At a public hearing in Liberia, a student representative testifies on the status of water and sanitation facilities in her school.

tion to this public health crisis. The rapid spread of Ebola throughout Liberia only served to further highlight the critical need to reform the country's water and sanitation system.

In the wake of Ebola, the Senate is continuing to address water concerns based on Senator Sumo's recommendations. NDI was successful at aiding the WASH Network in organizing a meeting with a diverse group of attendees, capturing a legislator's attention, and motivating her to bring the issue to the Senate. By organizing focus groups, conducting interviews, and coordinating representatives' visits, the WASH Network and NDI began a process of engaging citizens on issues affecting them and demonstrating to elected officials that they are under public

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scrutiny.

In Kampong Tralach, **Cambodia,** a citizen lodged a complaint at a town hall meeting about the use of illegal fishing tools in community ponds. The tools, such as nets with holes small enough to catch baby fish and electric eels,

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD
Thomas Du, Program Manager, Liberia

Are there differences between organizing around development issues and organizing around political issues?

I don't think there is any big difference in Liberia. Liberians usually link issues like the lack of water supply, deplorable school facilities, poor road infrastructure, and terrible health services to corruption in the government, lack of political will, and a dishonest legal system that doesn't protect ordinary people. In Liberia, organizing around both types of issues will take about the same effort, as people see them as closely linked.

Was organizing around water issues easy in terms of gaining community member's attention and willingness to engage politically?

Yes, water as an issue is a good entry point for community organizing; however, engaging the community in political issues is also welcomed by many and different community members. A lot of people don't see much difference in discussing water issues or politics. Citizens believe that decisions made by political leaders and policy makers affect their daily lives and that the problems they have, including water access and delivery, are a product of flawed politics.

were largely responsible for a recent decline in the local fish population. The district fishery department responded to the citizen's concerns by confiscating the illegal tools, fining perpetrators, and educating them on legal fishing methods. This interaction demonstrates how using democratic processes, such as public forums, can influence environmental change.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Kenneth Wollack and K. Scott Hubli. "Getting Convergence Right."

https://www.ndi.org/files/
JoD_Wollack_Hubli_Oct2010.pdf

Thomas Carothers. "Democracy Support and Development Aid: The Elusive Synthesis."
http://carnegieendowment.org/
files/02_21_4_carothers_pp__12-26.pdf

USAID Strategy On Democracy, Human Rights And Governance .
http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/
documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%
206-24%203%20%281%29.pdf

Community members in Kampong Tralach, Cambodia participate in an awareness campaign for environmental protection and fish conservation.

Civic Update is a production of NDI's Citizen Participation Team. For more information, or for comments or suggestions, contact:

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