

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

Civic Update

Peace, Security and Democratic Resilience

Citizen Participation Team | August 2015

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) currently works in more than 30 countries that are experiencing or recovering from significant violent conflict. Such circumstances require NDI to carefully consider how conflict dynamics affect democracy programs, and also how democracy programs in turn affect conflict. Although conflict is a normal part of political life in every society, the ability to manage conflict peacefully and justly are democratic hallmarks.

Built on principles of pluralism, openness and tolerance, democratic systems mitigate and manage conflict nonviolently through mechanisms like elections, legislative deliberation and public dialogue, government checks and balances, and legal guarantees. Poor governance and inequality are widely recognized as the roots of



Young people sign the Inter-Party Youth Forum peace pledge leading up to 2013 elections in Kenya

Inside this Issue

Introduction.....	1
Programs to Prevent or Reconcile Violent Conflict	
Mitigating Youth Electoral Violence	3
Mali: Women-Led Community Reconciliation	4
Colombia: Victims Participation Roundtables	5
Central American Citizen Security.....	5
Violence Against Women in Elections	6
Syria: Sexual and Gender Based Violence	7
Programs to Increase Democratic Resilience	
Somalia: Engaging Citizens on Constitution Drafting..	7
Ukraine: Public Opinion Polling	8
Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cross-Party Collaboration ..	8
Iraq: Constituency Outreach Offices	9

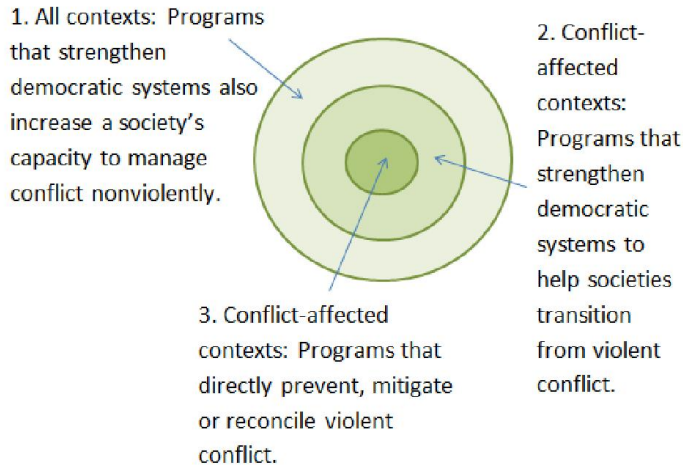
many types of violent conflict. Weak, unaccountable institutions, exclusive policies that favor some groups at the expense of others, and the inability of youth and other marginalized groups to access political power all contribute to instability and conflict risk. Unlike democracies, autocratic states control conflict through force and political repression. In hybrid democracies, which retain some characteristics of autocracies, or failed states, contestation over power and resources may be less repressed, but political avenues for managing that conflict are weak and lack legitimacy. This creates openings and incentives for competing groups to use violence to achieve political aims. NDI's efforts to support effective, inclusive and legitimate democratic systems are therefore central to building peace and mitigating conflict in fragile and post-conflict states.

When considered through a conflict 'lens', NDI's work can be put into three embedded categories. The first encompasses all of NDI's work to create resilient democratic systems with the capacity to manage social, economic and political grievances nonviolently. The second corresponds to those programs in conflict-affected countries, where the development or renewal of democratic institutions and processes are needed to sustain peace.

Continued

Lastly, there are a smaller number of programs that explicitly aim to prevent, mitigate, or reconcile conflict.

NDI Programs from a Conflict Lens



The case studies below highlight NDI programs that fall into categories two and three.

PROGRAMS TO PREVENT OR RECONCILE VIOLENT CONFLICT

Mitigating Youth Electoral Violence

One third of **Kenya's** population of 44 million is under 35 years old, yet despite these numbers, young people have been historically left out of electoral politics and decision making processes. Globally, high rates of unemployment and political disenfranchisement have left youth both idle and frustrated with the status quo. Continued marginalization can lead young people, in Kenya and other nations experiencing this demographic shift known as "youth bulge", to become targets and exploited as political pawns and militants. As a result, young people are at a comparably higher risk of becoming involved in election-based violence. In Kenya's 2007-2008 electoral violence that resulted in 1,000 deaths and 600,000 citizens being displaced, young people accounted for 70 percent of perpetrators.

However, NDI also recognizes the enormous potential for young people to be a force for positive democratic change. If provided with constructive avenues to participate, youth can contribute meaningfully to their communities and will not feel compelled to turn to vio-

lence to make their voices heard. Through dialogues, get-out-the-vote campaigns, party youth league engagement and peace pledges, NDI has worked with youth in many countries to promote non-violent political engagement during elections.

In the lead up to Kenya's 2013 national elections, NDI organized and facilitated a national youth conference that focused on young people's role in promoting peaceful and transparent elections. It was conducted as part of the NDI-supported Inter-Party Youth Forum (IPYF), which was formed in 2009 as a national platform to promote constructive political participation among youth across party lines. The IPYF engages young political leaders across the country in town-hall forums on topics including ethnicity, electoral violence and youth engagement, and works in conjunction with the Kenya Youth Parliamentarians Association, which helps build the youth caucus' ability to advocate for youth interests in parliament.

Youth attending the IPYF forums shared some of their most pressing concerns, such as lack of national identification cards, which are required for voter registration, and high levels of unemployment. By focusing on issues of concern to young people and facilitating cross-party discussion, the IPYF taught young people about peaceful ways to participate in politics. The national youth conference illustrates these young people's commitment to peace after participating in the IPYF. More than 950 youth representing 38 political parties attended the conference and signed a pledge to uphold peace and tolerance during

Continued

PEACE, SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP

NDI staff have recently formed a Peace, Security, and Democratic Resilience (PSDR) working group. The group has two aims: 1) to better articulate NDI's past and current contributions to building peaceful and resilient democratic systems, and 2) to explore future opportunities for the Institute to expand and develop its ability to do so. The working group would like to start a conversation with field staff. How do conflict dynamics affect NDI's work in your countries, and how does NDI's work help prevent or reconcile conflict? To learn more about the PSDR working group, join the Google Community (Peace, Security and Resilience @NDI) or email Kristen Wall at kwall@ndi.org.

the 2013 elections. This work to discourage youth from participating in violence contributed to March 2013 elections in which a record 12 million Kenyans peacefully cast their votes.

NDI has supported similar initiatives against electoral violence in **Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone**. For example, in the lead up to 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, NDI partnered with music icon 2face Idibia's foundation and a prominent youth organization, the Youngstars Development Initiative, in a nationwide youth get-out-the-vote campaign to encourage a peaceful election. In Haiti, NDI organized a multi-day dialogue with youth activists, civil society organizations and government and political leaders to identify sources of electoral violence and possible solutions. Youth activists then presented toolkits for facilitating discussions about non-violence to journalists and political leaders. When youth are given the opportunity to organize themselves, voice their opinions and engage in political decision-making, they can become a force that demands and defends democracy and nonviolence.

Mali: Women-Led Community Reconciliation

In **Mali**, competition over resources and differing definitions of statehood have contributed to increased inter and intra-ethnic tensions and conflict between farmers and herders. Further disrupting social cohesion and worsening Mali's fragile state, the 2012 coup d'état and ensuing conquest of two-thirds of the country by separatist groups and Islamic extremists in the north left thousands of Malians displaced.

Peace talks attempting to put an end to violent clashes between the government and rebel forces began in 2014. In conjunction, officials in the capital of Bamako created the Ministry of National Reconciliation (MNR) to develop and implement a social reconciliation plan. Reconciliation processes in post-conflict environments are important for rebuilding social trust, the foundation of cooperation and collective action in democratic societies. The most successful reconciliation processes work to repair social trust at several levels, including between citizens and the state and person-to-person, encouraging stability and interrupting cycles of revenge that can contribute to the re-emergence of violent conflict.

The MNR's activities included rewriting educational materials, conducting media campaigns to support peace and unity, and holding national dialogues. This highly centralized process did not consider local perspec-



The IPYF Peace Pledge

I am a youth and I am a Kenyan.

I choose to respect and protect my fellow Kenyans without discrimination based on ethnic group, religion or political affiliation.

I shall not participate in any acts of violence, before, during or after the general elections.

I shall respect the rule of law and uphold the constitution. I believe in the spirit of unity as expressed in the National Anthem.

I WILL maintain PEACE.

As a youth, I PLEDGE.

tives, however. Recognizing the critical role citizen participation plays in legitimizing and enriching reconciliation processes, NDI partnered with the Peace and Security Network in the Economic Community of West African States (*Réseau Paix et Sécurité des Femmes de l'Espace Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest - REPSFECO*), to link local community concerns with national reconciliation efforts.

NDI and REPSFECO, a national women's organization, trained and supported women leaders in seven of Mali's eight regions to lead reconciliation activities in their local communities and advocate for including citizen perspectives in the national reconciliation process. NDI and REPSFECO prioritized selecting women from communities that were known to have intra- and inter-community conflicts, such as those between herders and farmers or between members of different ethnic groups. The program also prioritized communities with large numbers of people who were internally displaced during the insurrection.

Women leaders organized a total of 70 reconciliation activities, including community forums, cultural ex-

Continued



In the region of Koulikoro, women leaders distribute REPSFECO's guide on reconciliation and lasting peace

changes and discussions about the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). For example, in the town of Mopti, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local agencies prioritized returning IDPs when distributing aid, which seemed to be unfair when viewed by other community members. The NGOs approached the women leaders to ask for help explaining their rationale for the distribution. The women led discussions in the community that helped residents understand and accept the distribution practices and welcome the return of the displaced citizens.

The women leaders also reported that reconciliation activities reduced animosity between ethnic groups. In Mopti, participants in a community forum acknowledged that people of all ethnicities have the right to live side by side, and in the region of Koulikoro, community members declared they would stop calling light-skinned IDPs “rebels” (a stereotype that assumed they were part of the 2012 armed insurgency) after taking part in the discussion. The program elevated these local women as leaders in their communities. They continue to be asked to mediate local conflicts, even after the official reconciliation activities ended.

In addition to working on community conflicts, the women advocated for including local perspectives in the national reconciliation process, aiming to improve the government's responsiveness to citizens' needs and concerns. The women made recommendations to the MNR based on perspectives expressed during the local dialogues. The MNR had not previously taken communities' priorities into consideration when designing national reconciliation efforts, but following consultations with the women leaders, the MNR revised its 2015 strategic plan to

incorporate these recommendations and agreed to further revise its planning approach to solicit input from regional authorities and citizens. This advocacy enhanced the legitimacy and effectiveness of the national reconciliation process by promoting the inclusion of citizens' perspectives. Meanwhile, through building social trust and reinforcing civic principles such as participation, dialogue and ethnic inclusion, NDI's program with REPSFECO helped strengthen the democratic fabric of Malian society.

Colombia: Victims Participation Roundtables

Victimization and displacement from the 50-year conflict between the Colombian government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC*), as well as other paramilitary and armed groups, has generated one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. As part of the ongoing peace process, the Victims and Land Restitution Law (*Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras*) established “Victims Participation Roundtables” (*Mesas de participación efectiva de víctimas - VPRs*) to work with authorities to address the grievances of the conflict's more than seven million victims. These victims include those who have experienced torture, kidnapping, displacement, sexual violence, murder of a family member, or other serious crimes. As marginalized populations are often dispro-

Continued



In Quibdo, Colombia, members of the VPR put together an advocacy plan ahead of their next meeting

portionately affected by violent conflict, the VPRs reserve seats for vulnerable groups such as women, Afro-Colombians, indigenous peoples and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals.

The VPRs provide a mechanism for victims to have a voice in the Victims Law's implementation regarding issues such as reparations and land rights. Following violent conflict, reparations can play a central role in satisfying victims' expectations for justice and establishing rule of law, as well as providing redress for harms suffered. Reparations can take a number of forms, including financial compensation, guarantees of non-repetition, new legislation, social services, or symbolic gestures such as official apologies. These actions are influential in rebuilding trust in institutions and establishing government responsiveness to citizens' needs, particularly if they are approached and implemented in an inclusive way.

Since 2013, NDI has provided technical assistance to VPRs in the departments of Antioquia, Atlántico, Bolívar, Chocó and Nariño to strengthen their capacity to make recommendations to local and national authorities. NDI's workshops train VPR members on holding internal elections, developing their strategic plans, securing funding, designing government oversight mechanisms and implementing advocacy strategies to inform and ensure the implementation of government reparations projects. VPRs that received NDI support subsequently met with victims, government representatives and local councils to present their reports. Based on the VPRs' recommendations, four local councils established committees to monitor the implementation of policies that impact or directly provide assistance to victims. NDI and partner organizations also developed a manual to guide VPRs to effectively monitor,

Continued

CENTRAL AMERICAN CITIZEN SECURITY

The dramatic deterioration in public security in Central America and Mexico over the last decade has eroded public trust in government institutions and weakened citizens' belief that democracy is capable of protecting citizens. This led to the creation of NDI's regional **Central American Citizen Security** programming. Public opinion polls show that Guatemala and Honduras recently recorded the biggest decline in citizen support for democracy in Latin America in a single year, and a 2012 study indicated that more than 50 percent of citizens in Guatemala and El Salvador identified crime and violence as the main problems facing their country but expressed doubt that democracy would solve these issues. El Salvador now has surpassed Honduras for the highest homicide rate in the world – 68.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, a 57% increase over the previous year. Drug trafficking, poverty, the youth population bulge, two-way migration flows (immigration and deportation), corruption and weak institutions all play roles in increasing violence.

Governments have responded with increased militarization of police forces and the perpetuation of punitive, "iron fist" national approaches, which generate short-term reductions in violence but weaken democracy and close political space. Unless citizens are engaged along with government and security forces in developing and implementing a holistic response to citizen security threats, reforms are unlikely to be sustainable and officials less likely to be held accountable. Furthermore, when citizens participate in developing security strategy, they are more likely to emphasize respect for rule of law and defend space for civil society.

NDI has developed a strategy to work with political and civil society leaders at the local, national and regional levels to understand citizen security challenges and develop inclusive policies to address them. Programs have included inter-parliamentary forums to harmonize legislation across the region, capacity building of civil society organizations to monitor the implementation of government policies and support to elected officials to better respond to citizens' needs.



A local police officer and civil society activists work together to develop a list of key public policy terminology in Intibucá, Honduras

evaluate and conduct oversight of public policies related to the Victims Law; other international organizations, government institutions and VPRs around the country have subsequently used this manual and followed NDI's methodology.

As a result of these achievements, the Colombian government cited the NDI-supported VPRs in Antioquia and Nariño as models of success. NDI has since increased its conflict-related work in Colombia to support local municipal council members who have been targeted for violence to be eligible for reparations under the Victims Law.

By building the VPRs' capacities, NDI is helping generate conditions for an improved reparations process and inclusive post-conflict environment. At the same time, this programming develops Colombian citizens' involvement in their country's democratic processes. The VPRs offer an example of how supporting democratic practices can converge with reconciliation and reparations activities, thereby repairing civic trust and improving a society's democratic resilience.

Syria: Sexual and Gender Based Violence

During violent conflict, civilians face increased risks of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), which is often used as a weapon of war or perpetrated due to a breakdown in the security environment. SGBV can be especially difficult to document and address publicly due to social and cultural barriers that limit survivors' abilities to report incidents and speak out. Consequently, SGBV usually receives little attention from decision makers and local communities are typically unaware of available ser-



During NDI's first SGBV activist training, one Syrian human rights defender discusses incidences of sexual violence and survivors' access to resources for treatment in her community in Latakia province

vices for survivors. SGBV can also be a powerful force deterring women from venturing outside of their homes and participating in public or political life.

In June 2015, NDI began working with a local partner, People Demand Change (PDC), to identify, implement and advocate for policy solutions to SGBV in **Syria**. As part of its program, NDI will facilitate two civic education training workshops with a network of 15 women activists from around the country as a launching point for a SGBV education and advocacy campaign. Through civic education modules and public forums with opposition leaders, activists trained by NDI and PDC will conduct needs assessments with citizens to identify priority needs of survivors, educate local communities about SGBV and advocate for the adoption of long-term policies that mitigate this type of violence and its effects on reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in Syria.

PROGRAMS TO INCREASE DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN CONFLICT AFFECTED CONTEXTS

Somalia: Engaging Citizens on Constitution Drafting



I support the government and I'd take part if the constitution making process if they give me the chance.

Snapshot of NDI's public service announcement on engaging youth in the constitutional review process

In **Somalia**, multiple transitional governments, political infighting, unfamiliarity with the policymaking process and high turnover of officials have limited state effectiveness. Since 1991, when clan-based factions overthrew the sitting government, the country has existed in a state of fragility and conflict presided over by fighting warlords. In 2012, Somalia established its first permanent federal government in more than 20 years. As the government moves forward with drafting a new constitution and

Continued

preparing for federal elections in 2016, soliciting citizens' contributions and educating them about the constitution are critical. Efforts to ensure government mechanisms faithfully represent citizen priorities are key to building trust in new governments and discouraging the creation of parallel governance institutions, such as warlords, during fragile political transitions.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

Political, legal, social, economic and cultural barriers all can stand in the way of women's equal participation in political processes. Elections present a flashpoint for political violence that creates particular vulnerabilities for women, who are targeted because of their commitment to vote, their political activism, their jobs as electoral officials and their aspirations to hold political office. **Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E)** is defined as any act of violence that is unduly directed at someone because of her gender, and that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence engagement in an electoral process. NDI has developed a new practice area focused on VAW-E and is developing strategies and tools to train election observers to document and mitigate violence that influences women's electoral participation.

Throughout the election cycle, women voters face violence at four times the rate of men. For example, in Zimbabwe, an estimated 2,000 women and girls were targeted and raped by state-sanctioned groups seeking to intimidate them and influence their voting behavior in the months surrounding the 2008 presidential elections. In the lead up to 2015 presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire, female respondents in NDI focus groups emphasized their fear that voting would make them targets of violence. Election-related violence against women has not been extensively documented, but anything that prevents the full participation of women in the electoral process has implications for the integrity of that process, and ultimately undermines democracy. For these reasons, NDI is addressing the issue through a global campaign to raise awareness of the issue, increase and improve data collection and develop guidance on mitigating electoral violence targeting women. NDI's VAW-E framework has informed election programming in Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Guatemala and will be implemented in Burma and Tanzania later in 2015.



Nigeria's "Stop Violence Against Women in Elections" ambassador Stephanie Okereke Linus (far right) unveils the initiative logo at the campaign launch event

To promote this process, NDI conducted three rounds of public opinion research from 2010 to 2013. The research engaged more than 1,400 citizens in one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, and remains one of NDI's most ambitious and geographically extensive research efforts to date. Findings included that although more than half of participants knew of Somalia's provisional constitution, few were familiar with its content. Many participants also expressed a negative attitude towards the constitution, even though they had little information about it. For example, despite a constitutional provision requiring all laws to be consistent with *Shari'a* law, many participants cited *Shari'a* as their reason for not supporting the constitution. One participant explained, "the constitution does not comply with *Shari'a* so we don't recognize it. The one we recognize is the holy book."

To help increase citizen knowledge around the constitution's content and the drafting process, NDI collaborated with the Independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Committee (ICRIC) to develop a civic education campaign. NDI produced five public-service announcements (PSAs) to be played on local TV channels throughout the country. The PSAs, which featured current and former government officials, civil society representatives, and ordinary citizens, were aired a total of 139 times in the first three months. NDI also worked with four local radio stations to air 20 live 60-minute civic education talk shows to facilitate interactions between citizens and national representatives. Panelists included politicians and civil society actors, with listeners calling in to pose questions related to the constitution and the country's transition. Through this programming, NDI helped citizens communicate their priorities to local leaders and encour-

Continued

UKRAINE: PUBLIC OPINION POLLING

Across all contexts, NDI strives to achieve a nuanced understanding of how local dynamics impact its programming. In places that have experienced violent conflict, this may include assessing how the conflict shapes citizen attitudes and impacts people's daily lives. For example, the results of a 2015 public opinion survey NDI conducted in Ukraine showed that in many parts of the country's southern and eastern regions, more than half of citizens would be willing to sit down with people who support the other side of the conflict and discuss ways to resolve it. Incorporating this kind of knowledge into program design, implementation and evaluation helps NDI deliver informed and appropriate support in all environments, including those affected by conflict.

aged greater understanding of the constitution's content. Facilitating this engagement contributes to rebuilding state legitimacy while encouraging a culture of citizen consultation, both of which are central to advancing a stable, peaceful Somalia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cross-Party Collaboration

The 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to the war in **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)** through a political solution that yielded a highly decentralized state, with two sub-national entities, the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska and the largely Bosniak and Croat Federation of BiH, each which hold substantial political autonomy. This governance structure, which aligns political identity and competition along ethnic lines, reflects and further entrenches the divisions of the conflict. While Dayton brought an end to the war, recrimination and lack

of trust remain part of, and indeed dominate, the political environment. To this day, political parties in BiH are largely determined by ethnicity, and politicians rarely work together across party lines. Meanwhile, the system Dayton created has been used to effectively camouflage both private and partisan corruption.

In 2010, NDI organized a study mission in which members of parliament (MPs) from parties representing the country's three main ethnic groups came to the United States for one week to learn about responsive governance and balance of power within a federal system. This trip provided an opportunity for the MPs to build relationships with one another outside BiH's polarized political climate, leading the participants to ask for NDI's support to continue working together as a cross-partisan group on reform initiatives. Calling themselves the Democratic Initiative for Europe (DIE), the group has worked to spur issue-based discussion, improve the effectiveness of political parties and parliament, and move BiH in the direction of European Union (EU) integration by incorporating EU standards into national legislation.

NDI helped establish the DIE and plays a key role in moderating discussion among the members, bringing experts to group meetings, facilitating connections to civil society leaders and working with the group to analyze political strategy. While BiH's parliament is often a place for showmanship and divisive rhetoric, members of the DIE make all decisions based on consensus and inclusive discussion. Indeed, members have remarked that the NDI-organized forums are the only space they have to discuss and understand each others' positions outside of the politically-charged environment of formal institutions. Similarly, some civil society organizations have stated that the DIE is their only avenue to work constructively with BiH MPs.

Since 2012, the DIE has focused on tackling corruption. NDI worked with the group to include civil socie-



Participants from Bosnian IRG delegation at an event during their 2010 visit to Washington, D.C.

Continued

ty experts in a discussion about how a lack of government transparency and whistleblower protection feed corruption. After collaboration with civil society organizations such as the Center for Responsible Democracy and the Association of Whistleblowers, the DIE drafted a Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers and amendments to the Law on Freedom of Access to Information.

As it prepared the drafts, the DIE organized a public hearing in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly and a series of roundtables to seek input from experts and citizens across the country. The DIE then advocated to other party members and MPs to gain support. As a result of their efforts, the legislation was passed with full consensus at the end of 2013. This was a notable effort as, that year, only thirteen laws were passed in the state parliament, three of which the DIE proposed, including the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers and amendments to the Law on Freedom of Access to Information. The DIE members were honored for their efforts, particularly related to passing the Whistle-blowers Act, at the annual assembly of the USAID-funded Anti-Corruption Civic Organizations' Unified Network Project.

The passage of these laws marks the first time in BiH's history that legislation had been sponsored by an ad hoc multi-ethnic group of MPs, rather than directed by party leaders or committee work. The DIE's success has provided a positive example of inclusive and constructive political action, both improving the functioning of BiH's parliament and working to address the inter-ethnic tensions at the heart of many of the country's governance challenges. It has also given BiH a democratic achievement for Europe to look to in considering the country's EU candidacy.

Iraq: Constituency Outreach Offices

In **Iraq**, violent sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia populations and the ISIS offensive across western and northern provinces have left more than a million people displaced, many of whom are members of Iraq's minority groups including the Yezidi, Turkmen, Shabak, and Christian communities. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) experience heightened humanitarian and security risks that may include lack of shelter, attack or abuse while fleeing to safety and arbitrary deprivation of property. They are often displaced in inhospitable environments that lack adequate educational facilities, employment opportunities, health care and other public services. Additionally, IDPs can face stigmatization and marginali-

zation when entering new communities, particularly when resources are scarce and conflict reinforces social, ethnic and religious divisions.

In times of crisis, all citizens need their government to be transparent and accountable to their needs. This is especially critical for IDPs, who rely on public assistance and responsiveness for much of their livelihoods. Since 2010, NDI has been working with MPs and their staff across Iraq to open and operate 24 constituency outreach offices, specifically prioritizing minority-party legislative blocs. Because many of these offices represent a large number of displaced constituents, they have been particularly focused on addressing the humanitarian needs of IDPs. These offices offer an example of how traditional NDI programming to support representative - constituent relations and foster democratic practices intersects with addressing the impact of violent conflict on local populations.



Yezidi Movement MP Vian Dakhil Saeed meets with constituents at an IDP camp in Dohuk province in Iraq's Kurdish region

Constituency offices provide an avenue for citizens to voice concerns and appeal to their representatives for assistance, which has become increasingly important as the conflict's toll puts many citizens in great need of public

Continued

aid. In addition to providing material and financial support, NDI has provided technical and administrative assistance to constituency office staff, including training on how to liaise with MPs, interact with constituents and work with local governments. Over the past four years, more than 91,800 constituents have visited these offices. Office staff worked with MPs to successfully resolve over 40 percent of the more than 35,500 cases filed, addressing issues ranging from insufficient local infrastructure to a lack of humanitarian assistance for IDPs.

Meanwhile, minority constituency offices operated by the Chaldean Assyrian Syriac People's Council, Assyrian Democratic Movement and Yezidi movement are helping bridge the gap between elected representatives and minority communities. Over the past four years, the minority party offices have received more than 12,000 visits, accepted more than 3,800 cases and resolved more than 1,300 requests related to public service provision and financial and humanitarian assistance. In one instance, Yezidi Movement MP Vian Dakhil Saeed's constituency office staff conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of more than 420,000 Yezidi IDPs residing in Iraq's Kurdish region in order to inform elected representatives and international organizations about their dire living conditions. MP Saeed's staff presented the results to the United Nations, and her office distributed humanitarian assistance to more than 1,400 displaced families in her constituency.

Throughout the conflict and displacement crises, minority constituency offices have played important roles in liaising with elected representatives, local and international non-governmental organizations and multilateral bodies to provide aid to IDPs. These offices have contributed to improved living conditions for Iraq's displaced populations while providing an avenue for marginalized individuals to voice their grievances through legitimate political institutions. As political marginalization can be one source of renewed conflict, this process helps prevent further exclusion that could destabilize Iraq in the future. Constituency offices are also building the skills and competencies of MPs and their staff members to interact with their constituents and respond to community priorities. In the early stages of Iraq's democratic transition, constituency outreach offices help establish a precedent of including internally displaced and marginalized citizens in political processes, and helping elected representatives understand their obligation to be accountable to their constituents' needs.

Additional Resources:

NDI, "Guidebook on Engaging Young People in Politics in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings,"

www.ndi.org/files/Engaging_Young_People_in_Politics.pdf

NDI, "Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence," www.ndi.org/files/Monitoring-and-Mitigating-Electoral-Conflict.pdf

Havard Hegre, "Democracy and armed conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 51 no. 2 (2014): 159-172
<http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/51/2/159.full>

Gabrielle Bardall, "Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence," www.ndi.org/files/Breaking%20the%20Mold%20Gender_Electoral%20Violence.pdf

Civic Update is a production of NDI's Citizen Participation Team.

For more information, or for comments or suggestions, contact:

Lauren Kitz, Program Officer, Washington, D.C.
202.728.6312 | lkitz@ndi.org

or visit www.ndi.org/civic_update

National Democratic Institute



455 Massachusetts Ave, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20001-2621
p: 202.728.5500 | f: 888.875.2887

www.ndi.org
www.twitter.com/NDICitizens
www.facebook.com/national.democratic.institute