

## Civic Update

### Advocacy

Citizen Participation Team | May 2018

Advocacy can be defined as a set of organized, strategic actions taken over a period of time to influence decision makers and bring about a specific desired change. Citizens' ability to organize and advocate for change are fundamental methods of holding leaders accountable, but are often new or underdeveloped practices in countries where NDI works. In response, NDI has worked with a wide variety of groups - from community-based organizations to national NGOs - seeking to influence public officials through advocacy campaigns on issues including public-service delivery, human-rights protection and electoral-law reform. For NDI, advocacy is not typically about a particular issue or partner organization, but rather about how organized, collective action helps shift power dynamics and political behavior by increasing citizen voice, expanding civic space and fostering accountability. In this way, support for advocacy helps citizens address their immediate needs and interests, and simultaneously helps strengthen democratic norms and practices. This issue of the civic update examines NDI's support of advocacy, featuring program examples from Honduras, Afghanistan, Macedonia, Kosovo and Nigeria.



Participants of a regional consultation in Mazar, Afghanistan

#### How does advocacy influence democratic development?

According to NDI's theory of change, citizen participation can be an instrumental driver of socio-economic development and political change. The theory is built on a Voice, Space, and Accountability (VSA) framework and explains how these three variables interact and are influenced by citizen organizing and actions like advocacy.

*Voice* is citizens' ability to frame their points of view to effectively communicate their needs to appropriate decision maker(s). Advocacy is a fundamental means by which citizens exercise this voice. An effective advocacy campaign entails citizens identifying their priorities, developing a strategy and acting collectively to influence a particular political outcome. Through these actions, citizens develop political know-how, relationships with key stakeholders and power that can be used for future engagement.

*Space* refers to the different avenues and opportunities (e.g., voting, meeting with an elected leader, attending a city council meeting, organizing a protest, monitoring an election) that exist for citizens to access information, express their preferences and en-

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engage government. In all democracies, space must be demanded and defended by citizens, or it will close. Strategic advocacy campaigns make use of diverse entry points and political opportunities to influence decision makers. By accessing and occupying different political spaces, advocacy allows citizens to create expectations about where, when and how they can engage in politics.

*Accountability* is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility by political officials for their actions, decisions and policies; this includes the obligation to report, explain, and be answerable to the needs and best interests of their constituents. Accountability refers to situations where those with the authority to make and enforce the rules are answerable to those who live by the rules. As citizens engage with key decision makers through the advocacy process, power dynamics shift and accountability increases between elected officials and constituents. Advocacy campaigns are important opportunities to develop and institute new or heightened expectations of government responsiveness to citizen concerns.

## Types of advocacy:

Advocacy can take a variety of forms, depending on the magnitude of the campaign issue, the actors involved and the political context, among other factors. NDI supports advocacy campaigns that can have a combination of characteristics and require different types of support. Some examples include:

1. **Grassroots Advocacy:** local-level campaigns, often involving an informal grouping of citizens working to achieve a discrete community improvement.
2. **Single Issue:** campaigns organized to resolve one clearly defined policy issue.
3. **Sectoral Coalitions:** campaigns involving multiple organizations within a sector working across a range of interrelated issues. Coalitions can be challenging to form and manage, but can also be a more powerful means of gaining attention and exerting political pressure.
4. **Monitoring to Advocacy:** campaigns that are driven by evidence gathered through rigorous monitoring and data collection.

## Other forms of citizen participation

Advocacy is one of the many ways that citizens participate politically. Some other common forms are listed below:

- ◆ Community Organizing
- ◆ Political Process Monitoring
- ◆ Litigation
- ◆ Lobbying
- ◆ Participatory Budgeting
- ◆ Awareness raising/public information/public education campaigns

## What does advocacy actually involve?

An advocacy campaign will look different based on the actors involved, the campaign issue and objective, and the local political context. However, there are some common features and steps involved when organizing an effective campaign. Due to the political nature of advocacy, it should not be treated as a mechanistic, or even a linear process. Campaigns may cycle through different steps and jump between them as needed, in response to shifting political dynamics, events and information. Examples might include adjusting campaign messages or redirecting efforts at a different decision maker.

### *Issue Identification:*

The first step in an advocacy campaign is identifying the issue of concern and gathering background information to inform the type of advocacy needed. Data can be gathered through desk research, surveys or assessments, and meetings or focus groups with people who are knowledgeable about the issue. Utilizing this information, campaigners identify the issue's underlying causes and most pertinent aspects, which helps inform possible solutions and smart campaign goals. This typically involves distinguishing the issue of concern from the goal of campaign; for example, a campaign issue may be a lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities, while a specific campaign goal would be the installation of wheelchair ramps in all public buildings.

### *Power Analysis:*

After picking the issue, campaigners identify the various stakeholders involved with or affected by the issue. This involves asking a series of questions, such as, who is impacted by the problem and

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wants change to happen? Who benefits from the status quo and would be opposed to change? Who are the decision-makers that have the power to influence the change, and what are their incentives to support or oppose it? A power analysis helps identify potential campaign allies, champions, influencers and opponents. Most importantly, a power analysis reveals who the ultimate decision maker is for the issue; this person is known as the campaign target. With this information, an advocacy campaign can be strategic in targeting their time and resources towards the correct people.

### *Developing a Strategic Advocacy Plan:*

Once campaigners have a thorough understanding of the issue and the stakeholders involved, they will develop and map out a strategic advocacy plan. This involves formulating a series of achievable long- and short-term goals. For example, a long-term goal might be getting a law passed, with short-term goals of establishing relationships and securing meetings with strategic decision makers. In coalition advocacy, this stage involves convening various stakeholders to develop a common vision and strategy. This process also entails choosing and planning strategic activities - known as tactics - that will move the campaign forward towards its ultimate goal, as well as defining roles and disaggregating responsibilities amongst the campaign team members. Once the plan

for advocacy is in place, the campaign members begin to take action.

### *Reflection:*

Every advocacy campaign should intentionally build in time to continually reflect on its progress and shift strategy and tactics as necessary. This reflection should take place after every campaign activity to assess its relative success, what new information the campaign team learned, progress towards long- and short-term goals and whether future strategy and tactics should change as a result. Reflection time is also necessary to monitor how the political environment may be changing and adapting strategy accordingly. Regular reflection helps a campaign make necessary course corrections to ensure its strategy continues to be effective and responsive to shifting political dynamics.

## **Coalition Advocacy in Honduras**

Under the Pan American Development Fund (PADF) and USAID funded Regional Human Rights and Democracy Activity, NDI is collaborating with legislators and civil society in Northern Triangle countries - El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras -- to improve legal frameworks for the protection of human rights. In 2017, NDI conducted a regional baseline study of existing human rights legislation

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## **Considerations when Supporting Advocacy Campaigns**

### **Provide necessary staff and resources:**

Skilled staff and sufficient resources are essential components of an NDI advocacy-support program. Local partners, particularly those who are new to political activism, benefit from expert training and guidance from a seasoned campaigner on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis. Staff with prior campaign experience and knowledge of diverse advocacy tactics bring a unique and invaluable skill set to help local partners succeed.

### **Structuring Partnerships:**

Advocacy must be locally-led and NDI needs to establish close working relationships with committed local partners that care about the issues. This may entail strengthening local partners' efforts to continue advocating for issues they are already working on, or helping partners identify issues they care about and start new campaigns. While NDI brings the technical expertise in advocacy, its local partners are the experts on their communities and their priorities.

### **Uncertain Timelines:**

Political cycles don't always align with program periods and there is no way to predict the exact period of an advocacy campaign. Some campaigns might take weeks, while others might take years. Political realities will dictate most of the campaign timeline. It is critical that NDI works with local partners to make strategic advocacy decisions with regard to these political realities and not limit advocacy to activities only within a prescribed timeframe.



*Vote for Equality campaign poster advocating for rights of the Afro-Honduran population*

and the level of institutionalization of human rights protection in each country. In Honduras many marginalized communities, in particular lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI), are frequently targeted for violence, creating a challenging and dangerous environment for human rights advocacy - in 2017 alone, over 30 LGBTI activists were murdered. In July 2017, following the launch of the baseline survey results in Honduras, NDI and partner organization We are the Center for LGBTI Development and Cooperation (*Centro para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación LGBTI, SOMOS-CDC*), held a week-long consultation with groups who participated in the study, including human rights defenders, women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous and Afro-Honduran populations and LGBTI communities. In an effort to strengthen the collective voice of these populations, SOMOS-CDC, in partnership with the Victory Institute, formed an advocacy coalition with organizations representing these marginalized communities.

In September 2017, SOMOS-CDC and its coalition partners launched the “Vote for Equality” campaign, which provided a platform for different populations to unite around promoting political participation and inclusion. As part of the campaign, the coalition developed an advocacy platform, the Pact for Inclusion<sup>1</sup>, which included policy recommendations to

address the priorities of marginalized populations. At launch events in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, the coalition invited congressional candidates to sign the Pact, thus pledging their commitment to support the inclusion agenda if elected to office. The coalition presented a unified agenda in recognition that candidates would be more inclined to pledge their support since the Pact included the agendas of multiple marginalized groups and represented the concerns of their constituency. During the launch events, 18 candidates signed the Pact. Of these, two signatories were elected to office: one Afro-Honduran deputy from the National Party (*Partido Nacional, PN*) and one deputy from the Democratic Unification Party (*Unificación Democrática, UD*).

Following the November 2017 election, seven Afro-Honduran deputies and one indigenous legislator were voted into office. Consequently, SOMOS-CDC identified the Commission on Relations with Indigenous and Afro-descendant Populations (*Comisión de Enlaces de Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes*) as an additional entry point for the campaign. The group met with the commission’s president, who agreed to hold consultations with marginalized groups in the coming months to discuss the proposals laid out in the Pact. SOMOS-CDC is using the momentum from the Pact to generate consensus and support among coalition members for new Equality and Equity legislation. This would institutionalize some of the Pact’s broader social inclusion policy recommendations, such as prohibiting discrimination and ensuring the right to dignity, autonomy, justice, health and education.

The “Vote for Equality” campaign increased collaboration among civil society organizations and, for the first time, created a collective platform for marginalized populations, strengthening their efforts to advocate for equality. Additionally, with support from NDI, SOMOS-CDC has developed their capacity for leadership and increased their visibility among peers, which contributes to the sustainability of current and future campaigns.

## Single Issue Advocacy in Afghanistan

The Free and Fair Elections Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), the country’s first citizen monitoring group, has been conducting a variety of initiatives since 2004 to ensure the legitimacy of election processes.

<sup>1</sup> “Voto Por La Igualdad” <http://www.votoporlaigualdadhonduras.com/firmantes-del-pacto/>



*Advocacy group members and participants at the end of FEFA's two-day conference*

Over the last 14 years, FEFA has grown to become the largest political process monitoring group in Afghanistan. Electoral reform in the country is an issue of high concern, but one where glacial progress has been made. Fraud allegations overshadowed the 2010 parliamentary and 2014 presidential elections, and public opinion research in 2016 found that public confidence in the government and election institutions was at an all time low<sup>2</sup>. In the lead up to the October 2018 parliamentary elections, NDI is partnering with FEFA to conduct electoral reform advocacy as a part of The Advocacy for Electoral and Political Reform Support Project.

At the start of the project in July 2016, FEFA facilitated a series of regional dialogues with representatives from civil society, political parties and electoral bodies over the course of over 6 months to identify the main issues surrounding the electoral process, as well as recommendations for reforms. After several rounds of dialogues, FEFA compiled the information they had gathered into an Advocacy Action Plan for electoral reform, with short- and long-term goals for nine policy areas: building trust and transparency; preparing voter lists; advocating for smaller constituencies; improving political campaign finance; reviewing electoral system options; increasing the involvement of women and youth; improving the voting process; vote counting; and results announcements. This action plan also proposed activities to

help achieve each of the nine goals. This included identifying the parties responsible for implementing each reform, potential resources that could be used, foreseeable challenges to the reforms and a general timeline for changes to occur.

The advocacy action plan was launched before the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) officials at a conference in Kabul in April 2017. FEFA also used the conference to convene a group of civil society leaders to form an Electoral Reform Advocacy Group. Following the launch of the plan, NDI and FEFA have supported the advocacy group in arranging follow-up meetings and consultations with government officials, electoral bodies and civil society leaders with the goal of making progress on implementing the reforms leading up to the October 2018 elections.

Since the launch of the action plan, the government has made some strides in electoral reforms -- the IEC conducted a nationwide assessment of polling centers in August and September 2017, and the ongoing voter registration process is expected to generate the country's first comprehensive voters' list (previous elections were vulnerable to fraud due to an incomplete, inaccurate voters' list and the abundance of duplicate voter cards in circulation among the population). Additionally, the advocacy process itself has

<sup>2</sup> The Asia Foundation, "A Survey of the Afghan People – Afghanistan in 2016" pp. 103-106.

increased the capacity of CSOs working on these issues. In organizing the stakeholder meetings and solidifying an advocacy action plan, civil society leaders in the advocacy group had an opportunity to develop their civic voice by building consensus on a unified electoral reform platform. Through the regional dialogues, FEFA facilitated relationships between civil society, political parties and the election commission. The election commission, which has faced many institutional challenges since its formation in 2016, greatly benefitted from engaging with civil society and consequently has a better understanding of their accountability relationship with citizens. Officials at the IEC and IECC have formed a positive working relationship with civil society leaders, attend regular meetings with the advocacy group, and have committed to work towards addressing the reforms put forth in the action plan.

## Single Issue Advocacy in Macedonia

NDI's parliamentary advocacy program in Macedonia provides continuous consultancy, training, and mentoring to a broad range of civil society organizations to increase their knowledge of Macedonia's legislative process and strengthen their capacity to engage in legislative advocacy. Although Macedonia has an active civil society sector with a history of conducting issue-based advocacy, many CSOs lack the knowledge and experience to engage with Parliament, undermining government accountability to citizens. Through this program, NDI provides select CSOs with training on the legislative process, entry points and opportunities to influence legislation and/or public policy, relationship-building with elected officials, creating policy briefs and press releases, as well as communicating with media. Over the past decade, NDI helped develop the advocacy skills of more than 30 partner CSOs whose efforts have contributed to education, awareness-raising, and legislative reform on a range of issues, even during times of political gridlock.

NDI has provided process-oriented consultancy and technical assistance to Front 21/42 (Front), an environmentally-focused CSO, on legislative advocacy campaigns since 2010. Front's prior successful efforts included the *Cool Mayors for Environmental Hotspots* campaign to dismantle old industrial sites that were causing pollution, and establishing an informal "Green Lobby" in parliament to amend the Law on Environment. During the summer of 2016,

Front organized an advocacy campaign for the preservation of the Lake Ohrid region of Macedonia, one of 35 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites recognized for both its cultural and natural heritage. In response to planned infrastructure development projects that would cause environmental degradation in a protected national park, several CSOs, including Front, raised the issue before UNESCO, which consequently investigated and released a report detailing the threats posed by the projects. Utilizing the momentum of the UNESCO report and the upcoming parliamentary elections, Front officially launched a campaign in 2016 called "*Edno e, vredno e*" (It's One, It's Valuable!) to preserve the Ohrid region and its UNESCO status.

Front began with public outreach, gathering over 20,000 signatures on an online petition and nearly 8,000 signatures on pledge cards asking for a parliamentary oversight hearing with the intention to place a moratorium on further infrastructure development in the region. Following the December 2016 elections, with NDI's assistance Front reached out to all members of parliament for support, focusing specifically on MPs from the Ohrid region and those with a history of support for environmental causes. In April 2017, NDI helped Front to convene more than 30 interested lawmakers for a presentation of their initiative, which resulted with the successful establishment of an informal, cross-party UNESCO caucus with five MPs, including the Majority Whip, Chair of the Committee on Culture, and other senior members of several political parties.

Having established support from citizens and MPs, Front and the UNESCO caucus worked with the President of Parliament to arrange a public aware-



Front 21/42 presenting 8,000 signed pledge cards to the president of parliament

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ness raising event in June 2017, highlighting the Ohrid preservation issue and the need for legislative action. The 8,000 signed pledge cards by citizens were officially presented to the Legislature, and the event featured high level speakers including the Minister of Environment and President of Parliament, who publicly announced his support for the issue and called for an oversight hearing. Despite political gridlock in parliament, the UNESCO caucus continued their advocacy efforts by meeting with key stakeholders within the central and local government, including the ministries of Culture and Environment, the National Park Agency, cultural and biodiversity preservation experts and Ohrid's mayor. As a result of this campaign, the Government of Macedonia verbally committed to a moratorium on all infrastructure projects in the area in February 2018. An oversight hearing is scheduled for May 2018, at which point Parliament is expected to formalize the moratorium. Through this campaign, CSOs are building relationships with elected officials, improving their capacity for legislative action and increasing space for civic engagement in the legislative process.

## Grassroots Advocacy in Kosovo

NDI's Women's Political Academy (WPA) and Youth Leadership (YLP) programs in Kosovo support advocacy efforts to empower young people and women of all ages to conduct issue-based advocacy around issues of concern to them. By targeting predominantly Serb communities in the north, NDI is striving to promote Serb engagement in civic life and their greater inclusion in Kosovo institutions. Through

these initiatives, cohorts of women and youth activists are trained in political engagement and advocacy skills, such as issue research, effective messaging, and outreach strategies. These activists then identify and conduct issue-based advocacy, work with parties to transform advocacy initiatives into effective policies, and hold elected officials accountable at the local and central level. Campaigns conducted by these groups have included implementing gender equality laws, improving waste disposal and recycling, reducing school violence and improving sports infrastructure for youth.

As part of one WPA program, in April 2016 a cohort of women participants in the North Mitrovica municipality identified traffic safety around schools as a concern in their community. Due to a lack of infrastructure investments outside the city center, there was a shortage of road signs to identify school zones, proper sidewalks for children, and crossing guards to ensure road safety. The group began its campaign by surveying parents in the area to identify potential solutions. The survey responses resulted in recommendations that included the creation of a safe walking zone near the school, installing road signs, and establishing a police patrol in the school's vicinity to monitor safe crossings before and after the school day.

Having identified a number of potential solutions, the WPA group developed a proposal and identified local authorities who had the capacity to respond. The group then set up meetings with relevant decision makers including the Director of Municipal Administration of North Mitrovica, Kosovo's Regional Police

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*WPA group members delivering safety vests to students as a safety measure until safe zones are constructed*

Commander, officials at the Department of Urbanization, and school principals; they were all supportive and agreed to the WPA group's proposal. The group also identified the mayor as an ally and garnered his support to implement its proposal.

After gaining buy-in from these government officials, the group officially introduced the traffic safety initiative in a municipal hearing in September 2016, and it was adopted by the local assembly the following day. One primary school has already set up a police patrol, and funding for constructing "safety zones" around schools has been allocated for the 2018 municipal budget. Meanwhile, infrastructure improvement recommendations are being incorporated into the municipality's 2018 infrastructure plan. Through this and other similar campaigns, community members are addressing shared problems, developing their capacity for civic action and establishing responsive relationships with local officials.

## Monitoring to Advocacy in Nigeria

Persons with disabilities face multiple barriers to political participation in Nigeria, where accessibility is regarded as neither a norm nor a right. Solutions for addressing these barriers are often compounded by a dearth of reliable data on the number of Nigerians with disabilities and the specific challenges they face taking part in public life. As a part of the Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Project (EECSP) in Nigeria, NDI is partnering with the disabled person's organization Inclusive Friends Association (IFA) to monitor voting access for persons with disabilities through accessibility audits and use the data to present recommendations and conduct evidence-based advocacy.

In the first phase of the program, NDI supported IFA to use sample-based observation methods to gather data on polling station accessibility. In the fall of 2016, IFA undertook the first ever persons with disabilities-led accessibility audits in Nigeria during the off-cycle gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states. The audits assessed the availability of features such as handrails, ramps, braille or tactile ballots, written voting instructions and sign language interpreters. Of the polling units included in the audits, 65% in Edo and 77% in Ondo were in inaccessible locations, 87% in Edo and 90% in Ondo did not provide written instructions for voters who are deaf or hard of hearing, and none provided braille or tactile ballots. Additionally, 45% of audited units in Edo and 70% in Ondo failed to employ form EC 40H, which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) uses to track participation of persons with disabilities.

With input from NDI, IFA utilized the audit data to analyze electoral barriers for persons with disabilities and define a set of accessibility recommendations. Their advocacy campaign, *Access Nigeria: Disability Votes Matter*, is now focusing on lobbying decision makers to implement these recommendations, which include amending the Electoral Act to make braille or tactile ballots mandatory, and providing funds in the national budget for sign language interpreters and accessible voting cubicles. In the fall of 2017, IFA held a launch event where they presented their audit report to key stakeholders, including the INEC chairman. At the event the INEC chairman publicly committed to support IFA's suggested accessibility reforms and confirmed INEC's recognition of disability rights as fundamental to Nigeria's democracy. To date, INEC deployed magnifying glasses at polling units during November 2017 polls in Anambra state, and will pilot tactile ballot guides during July 2018 polls in Ekiti state. INEC has been cooperating with IFA on steps to adopt a more wide-reaching disability policy.

IFA's organizing has now shifted to using the audit data to pressure decision makers to take action, using INEC's public commitments to their advantage. Beyond INEC, they are also considering alternative entry points for advocacy such as the National Assembly and ministries with the power to bring about accessibility reforms. IFA is currently creating a quarterly stakeholders' forum with relevant officials as a platform for monitoring progress on implementation.

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*IFA's Grace Jerry (left) discusses the audit checklist with another Access Nigeria observer during an election day deployment.*



## Monitoring & Evaluation with VSA

Monitoring and evaluation in an advocacy program can be challenging due to the nature of the changes NDI seeks to measure. Nuanced developments that reflect shifts in power dynamics, improved accountability relationships and the expansion of democratic space can often be difficult to monitor. Quantitative indicators such as the number of meetings convened with stakeholders or the number of signatures acquired on a petition do not always reflect how strategic the meetings were in moving an advocacy campaign towards its goal, how effective the petition was in increasing influence over decision makers to make policy changes, or impacts on overall democratic space. Even when an NDI partner achieves their advocacy campaign goal, it does not necessarily indicate that democratic norms have evolved. Likewise, a partner can fail to achieve their campaign goal but the program may still be considered a success from NDI's perspective of exerting positive influence on political practices and institutions.

In response to this challenge, one method NDI has developed to assess advocacy programming is using the Voice, Space, and Accountability (VSA) Framework. VSA has been used as a monitoring and evaluation method in several countries including Nigeria, Liberia, Cambodia and Tanzania. At the outset of each program, NDI utilizes structured interviews with stakeholders to establish its partners' levels of political influence and advocacy capacity. Through these interviews, NDI can assess voice by investigating CSOs ability to access political information, monitor changing political situations, use research and evidence to establish their expertise, and offer SMART and realistic solutions. To assess space, NDI measures opportunities for citizens to participate in politics equally, CSOs capacity to use existing entry points and establish new ones, and the risks and challenges associated with utilizing civic space. Finally, NDI assesses accountability between elected officials and citizens by measuring elected officials' attitudes towards citizens and their responsiveness to citizens' priorities and demands. By conducting follow up interviews throughout the course of the program cycle, NDI can track the extent to which its partners have demonstrated progress in each category. Using the VSA framework, NDI is able to provide targeted assistance to partners and better support their efforts to execute a successful advocacy campaign.

## Additional Resources

National Democratic Institute. "Putting Elections to Work for Accountability." <http://puttingelectionstowork.ndi.org/>

O'Connell, Shannon. "Policy Development and Policy Advocacy Course Materials." [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20Development%20and%20Advocacy%20Workbook\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Policy%20Development%20and%20Advocacy%20Workbook_EN.pdf)

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

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