



CIVIC UPDATE

A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

BEST PRACTICES FOR MEANINGFUL CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

What moves citizens to engage in political processes? Why do they continue to engage over time? How can NDI design and implement programs that create meaningful citizen participation that leads to greater change?

Citizens will generally buy into the political, social, or economic system that consistently provides them with what they desire. If they feel that they are not getting quality health care or their children don't have access to an education, citizens will have a reason to engage in political processes. But providing citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) with technical assistance for advocacy campaigns is merely an entry point for creating systemic or contextual change. Working with citizens as they engage in community organization or advocacy processes, NDI has the ability to nurture democratic values in partners through experiential learning and guided practice. It is not enough simply to provide the tools and knowledge necessary for change, programs must also prove to participants that engaging in democratic practices is vital for making life better at both the personal and community level.

This quarter's *Civic Update* provides examples of NDI programs that have utilized unique methods resulting in meaningful citizen and CSO engagement. By listening to local CSOs' perspectives on what they need and where their interests lie, NDI has been able to provide effective and

relevant assistance on activities important to its partners. Using participatory practices have allowed CSOs and citizens to take ownership of programs. When people become the driving force behind an initiative, systemic and attitudinal change is more likely to occur.

In some contexts, however, citizen and CSO interest in engagement is not the issue. Entrenched distrust between the citizenry, civil society organizations, and government can seriously impede attempts to create transparent and accountable political systems. In dealing with one such situation, NDI structured its program so that stakeholders took collective ownership of the process, which led to a successful constructive collaboration. Long-upheld tensions between CSOs and local government officials were dissipated enough so that they were able to work together on policies important to both groups. NDI has also assisted local CSOs in opening up communication channels between citizens, civil society organizations, and members of parliament (MPs) in order to encourage a greater level of trust between them.

NDI cannot cultivate trust between differing groups unless it has already gained that trust for itself as an institution. In order to do so, NDI has learned how to develop an understanding of different contexts by hiring local staff and maintaining a long term presence in each country. Through these measures it has been

able to gradually build the confidence and capacity of local groups to the point where they can independently engage in successful political interventions. NDI's long-term engagement in the countries in which it works also allows it to build new programs from previous ones, incorporating lessons learned in the process.

The following programs are examples of how NDI has adapted to specific contexts and needs in order to meaningfully engage citizens in political processes. What is presented here is not exhaustive or necessarily applicable in every context, but they illustrate the types of issues that need to be kept in mind when designing and implementing citizen participation programs worldwide.

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Using Participatory Processes in Turkey

Over the past twelve years of its presence in Turkey, NDI has been able to establish a unique and productive relationship with its partners. Through its dedication and creativity, NDI's small field office has developed a reputation amongst CSOs as a valuable resource for information and technical assistance. It was Turkish civil society's high regard for NDI that paved the way for the creation of an advocacy seminar series supported by the NED-funded program, "Enhancing Civic Participation: Citizen Engagement and Institutional Responsiveness."

What sets the program apart from others is that it evolved organically out of the NGO community's desire to develop their advocacy knowledge and skills. Though many CSOs in Turkey conduct issue-based advocacy campaigns, their efforts tend to be unsophisticated and confrontational. To address this, NDI seeks to help partners develop skills that enable them to engage with elected officials in a more constructive and targeted manner. By early 2008, NDI noticed through its work with NGO partners that there was a growing demand for advocacy training. This prompted the Institute to circulate the idea of an advocacy seminar series that would be designed with the NGOs' close collaboration. As word of this idea spread, several other organizations from across Turkey expressed interest in participating as well.

This enthusiasm led to the creation of the Advocacy Working Group, a diverse collection of leaders from nine coalitions representing 100 NGOs. In collaboration with NDI, the working group developed the agenda for the advocacy seminar series around the needs of their organizations and constituencies. Involvement in the program has always been voluntary, so those that choose to participate are genuinely committed to improving their advocacy skills.

By late 2008, the advocacy seminar series agenda was finalized. It had taken months of meetings and email exchanges between the Advocacy Working Group's core leaders to reach this point, but the process proved to be just as important as the end product. The NGOs were able to take ownership of the series in large part because NDI limited its assistance to providing guidance and comparative resources. The leaders' buy-in from the beginning allowed for a smooth and collaborative process that could otherwise have collapsed under the stress of opposing viewpoints.

On January 17 and 18, 2009, NDI facilitated the first seminar in the series – a roundtable discussion in Abant, Turkey that provided an opportunity for participants to

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Learning the Art of Collaboration in Uganda

In 2006, NDI implemented a program that sought to strengthen the relationships between women's CSOs and female parliamentarians in Uganda. A major result was the creation of the Common Women's Legislative Agenda (CWLA), which consisted of five shared agenda priorities - infant and maternal mortality, sexual offences, human trafficking, the Protocol on the East Africa Charter, and issues contained in the Domestic Relations Bill. In April 2008, NDI received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to implement a follow-up program entitled "Strengthening the Relationship between Women's CSOs and Local Government in northern Uganda." This program built off of the previous one by bringing CSOs and local governments in the Kitgum, Pader, and Lira districts together in a collaborative process to develop sound policy proposals.

As the first step in the process, NDI supported priority-setting meetings in all three districts where a total of 130 local government officials and CSO representatives discussed and debated the impact of CWLA issues on their communities. At the conclusion of these meetings, smaller committees were formed in each district to identify a priority issue and develop policy proposals. All three committees

focused on domestic violence, citing its far-reaching impact on their communities.

Because policy based on evidence is a rarity in Uganda, NDI provided training, logistical support and expert guidance so that the committees could conduct primary



An NDI policy development workshop in Pader

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Constructing Linkages in Jordan

It happens all too often that the information collected from political process monitoring programs is never utilized, but this has not been the case with NDI's Parliamentary Monitoring Project in Jordan. The project is part of the CEPPS program entitled "Strengthening Civil Society's Political Participation" that began in June 2008. NDI is implementing this project to nurture Jordanian citizens' trust in the country's political systems and institutions. The Project has contributed to this goal by engaging civil society and citizens in roundtables and online platforms, thus creating a two-way flow of information between the people and legislators.

NDI partnered with Al Quds Center for Political Studies (Al Quds) to increase their capacity to monitor the Fifteenth Parliament's second regular session and committee meetings that began on October 5, 2008. Through ongoing consultations, NDI helped Al Quds draft monitoring forms that trained monitors to collect statistically accurate information on MPs' attendance, voting records, participation, outreach to various stakeholders, and overall government oversight. Al Quds was then able to analyze this information utilizing computer software, previous monitoring experience, and NDI's guidance.

Al Quds is not just monitoring the MPs, however, it is also engaging them. In October 2008, Al Quds sent out official letters explaining the project to all 110 MPs. They also successfully reached out to ranking parliamentary members, such as the Speaker of the Lower House Mr. Abdel Hadi al Majali, who committed support and access to Al Quds monitors. By March 2009, Al Quds had interviewed all of the MPs about their work and accomplishments as elected officials. These interviews provided an important cross-reference to the monitoring data collected. Also, and perhaps more significantly, the interviews elicited a positive response from the MPs that solidified a constructive working relationship between the MPs, Al Quds and other CSOs. Instead of being seen as merely a watchdog organization, the MPs came to view Al Quds as an ally helping them to become better legislators.

Bridges cannot be built, however, with a solid foundation on one side and not the other. After it had commenced its monitoring activities, Al Quds held a series of roundtables in November and December 2008 to introduce the project to other CSOs and obtain their feedback on parliamentary performance and issues of national concern. All together the nine roundtables attracted more than 250 participants representing 45 CSOs, as well as current and former members of Parliament, senior government officials and media figures.

However, engaging civil society does not necessarily mean that citizens have a voice in political processes. To also ensure the inclusion of citizens, Al Quds worked with the

Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation to develop a questionnaire for a national survey to determine citizens' political and economic priorities, as well as their evaluation of Parliament's performance. The survey was distributed in January 2009 by a team of field workers to a sample of 1,200 respondents across Jordan. Findings on national priorities and citizens' concerns will be used as a reference point to assess the extent to which parliamentary policies and legislation address the issues raised in the survey. Through these activities, Al Quds and NDI have been able to build a solid relationship with Jordanian citizens and civil society in addition to parliamentarians.



An Al Quds roundtable introducing the parliamentary monitoring project to other Jordanian CSOs

Instead of ending the process at the data collection stage, NDI has assisted Al Quds in using both innovative and widely practiced methods for prompting a two-way flow of information between citizens and Parliament. Al Quds is soon to launch a website (www.alqudscenter.org) where they will post monitoring findings and reports, background documents, information on parliamentary committees, relevant news and studies, as well as MPs' biographies. The site will also provide contact information for MPs so as to open a channel for direct citizen contact with representatives. Though this tool has the potential to change the way that Jordanian citizens engage in political processes, the internet provides limited space for debate.

On January 6, 2009, Al Quds hosted a roundtable under the patronage of the Speaker of the Lower House Mr. Abdel Hadi Al Majali. Eighteen MPs and ministerial representatives were present to constructively engage in a debate with CSOs and the media about the need for civil society to engage in monitoring activities and decision-making processes. The event revealed that electoral reform is a necessity for improving the political process in Jordan

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Building on Past Experiences in Macedonia

Nine months after snap parliamentary elections in June 2008, Macedonia was again in the throes of another election cycle, this time to choose 85 mayors, about 1,000 municipal councilors, and a new president of the Republic. The first round took place on March 22 and run-offs on April 5. For the fourth time since 2001, NDI organized an innovative and nationwide Code of Conduct campaign for free and fair elections under the motto “Don’t Play with the Future!” in reference to Macedonia’s NATO and European Union aspirations.

The 2009 campaign built on the experiences and lessons learned during the 2008 parliamentary elections when NDI had organized a similar campaign to prevent election-related violence and raise awareness for the importance of free and fair elections for EU and NATO memberships. Though it did not prevent the violence on Election Day, it was agreed that the Code of Conduct did play an important mediation role among political opponents – especially those at the local level. The post-election analysis of the campaign revealed that after the initial well-publicized Code of Conduct signing ceremony, political leaders did not deliver on their promises to support the Code throughout the entire campaign. Consequently, NDI decided to complement the 2009 national media campaign with an intensive local level field campaign and to obtain firm commitments from party leaders to support the Code publicly throughout the campaign.

Through March, NDI staff spent over three weeks in the field working with constituency office assistants to raise awareness of the Code of Conduct and educate citizens and political leaders about Election Day procedures.

Community roundtable discussions and workshops also allowed NDI staff, CSO partners, and the constituency office assistants to engage in direct, face-to-face outreach with citizens, political parties, and other locally affiliated groups. Senior staff and Ambassadors from several EU countries and the U.S. also participated in numerous NDI meetings to reinforce the Code’s message.

The major success of this campaign was the continuous participation and commitment by all political parties and their leaders. True to their word, they upheld the Code of Conduct throughout their campaigns and the March 22 elections went by peacefully. Building off of NDI’s experience in organizing these campaigns since 2001, each with its unique approach, and by tailoring the 2009 campaign to the needs of Macedonia’s diverse ethnic and political communities, NDI’s 2009 Code of Conduct campaign was arguably the most successful to date. ■



Code of Conduct campaign 2009 stickers saying “Don’t Play with the Future!” in Albanian and Macedonian

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analyze the advocacy environment in the country; assess past advocacy experiences; and evaluate strengths, challenges, and opportunities for moving forward. Twenty-five civil society activists attended, not because they were given any financial incentive or because NDI specifically targeted them to participate, but simply because they were interested. The trusting relationships that NDI has cultivated with local NGOs allowed participants to provide honest insights into the obstacles they face in carrying out their work. The participants admitted that while they have been conducting advocacy initiatives in one form or another for several years, they still lack a comprehensive understanding of the overall process. Together, NDI and the NGOs used feedback from this initial roundtable to tailor the remaining seminars in the series.

On April 10 and 11, NDI held a second seminar that focused on the basic elements of effective advocacy campaigns. Focusing on real life examples from other

NGOs around the world, NDI led discussions about defining policy agenda, demonstrating expertise, shaping public opinion, building a constituency, monitoring the “opposition,” and influencing legislation and elections. Seeing the creativity of these other groups’ initiatives energized the Turkish NGOs to analyze their own activities and think about new ways in which to approach their advocacy campaigns.

The program’s initial success hinged upon the use of participatory processes that allowed partner NGOs to take ownership of the agenda, tailor it to their specific concerns, and make lasting connections with one another. NDI effectively assessed the needs of program participants and played a supportive role in the process. The program, therefore, provides NGOs with the skills and support that they want through a process they have largely designed for themselves. As a result, the program should help increase the NGOs’ capacity to represent their constituents’ concerns to elected officials in a more constructive, targeted manner. ■

Building Confidence in Kosovo

The UNDEF-funded Consortium on Strengthening Civil Society Advocacy in Kosovo began October 2008 in order to assist building local CSOs' capacity to advocate for a more transparent National Assembly. Since then NDI has worked in partnership with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and the Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI) according to the roles laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by each organization. BIRN has used the media to increase public awareness of legislators' activities through a weekly television program. KDI has conducted the monitoring, provided weekly updates and monthly analyses of the information gathered. NDI has also worked with KDI in developing the Kosovo Advisory group which consists of 21 representatives from a diverse group of CSOs selected to identify issues and lead advocacy efforts.



Members of the Kosovo Advisory Group during one of the first meetings

implemented its first successful advocacy campaign.

Once the Advisory Group had decided to advocate against Article 20, NDI helped them organize a letter writing campaign. This was followed up by a meeting between Consortium staff and members of parliament to discuss the issue. As a result of their advocacy efforts, the MP who had first proposed the article, Melihate Termkolli, called for its removal. This victory has given the Advisory Group and the Consortium the confidence they needed to kick start further advocacy efforts.

Building off of this first success, the Advocacy Group has taken on new challenges. In March, the Group successfully advocated for amendments to the Assembly Rules of Procedure draft ensuring that parliamentary votes are

publicized within three business days and clarifying the process for citizen-initiated legislation. The Advocacy Group is currently developing three policy papers with recommendations for the government and other stakeholders on how to address issues related to government & anti-corruption, the economy and education. The recommendations will be based on KDI monitoring and BIRN reporting. In order to come such a long way in such a short amount of time, the Advisory Group has built off of each advocacy experience to boost its level of skill and confidence for future initiatives. ■

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research on domestic violence within their districts. After the research was collected and analyzed, NDI facilitated several meetings with the groups to assist them in producing their policy proposals. Unfortunately the process in Lira did not go as smoothly as those in Kitgum and Pader.

Due to the limited interaction and a high level of mistrust between CSOs and government officials in Uganda, tension and unwillingness to collaborate with one another has developed. This became particularly evident when NDI provided the committees with limited financial assistance to fund primary research activities. District NGO boards were given the responsibility for managing the funds, but the Lira district committee was unable to move beyond money management disagreements. This and their unwillingness

to organize without additional funds compelled NDI to discontinue its assistance in the district. Fortunately the boards in Kitgum and Pader had both the capacity and willingness to successfully manage the funds, and the committees even met independently of NDI without requesting additional monetary support.

In order to develop this willingness by local government and civil society representatives in Kitgum and Pader to overcome tensions, NDI showed the committee members why collaboration is beneficial for all parties involved. Instead of giving trainings to build the committees' research capacity in a programmatic vacuum, NDI guided them through a research process as a means for developing a domestic policy proposal. The committee members were able to overcome their differences in order to work in collaborative relationships necessary for the policy initiatives' success, but rarely seen between Ugandan

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CSOs and local governments.

The achievements of the collaborations are illustrated by the success of the first ever policy proposals developed based on primary research in the Pader and Kitgum districts. The proposal created in Pader has been tabled for consideration before the district council and the committee in Kitgum is waiting to present its policy at their upcoming district council meeting. But the impact of the program has proven to be even greater. NDI not only transferred knowledge of the primary research and collaborative policymaking processes to the committees, it also instilled in them the value of collaboration and listening to what citizens identify as community priorities. Both CSO and local government representatives have stated that they are eager to use primary research in other policymaking processes. Ownership of the domestic violence issue, excitement over the research process, and commitment to collaborative policymaking proved powerful enough to cause a shift in the way that CSOs and local governments engage in the Pader and Kitgum districts. ■

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Contributions

Welcome!

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and that MPs and the government should become more proactive in reaching out to various stakeholders - including civil society - as part of their work in designing national policies. The event received significant media coverage and marked a major step in ushering along further constructive communication between civil society and Parliament.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Project has played, and continues to play, a major role in enhancing transparency and accountability in the Jordanian Parliament. It has done so by opening communication channels and fostering constructive relationships between citizens, CSOs, and MPs. Instead of viewing the monitoring data as the end result, AI Quds and NDI have engaged multiple stakeholders in the monitoring process to create widespread project buy-in. They also plan to further utilize the information to create a flow of information between MPs and their constituents. In a recent meeting with AI Quds, the Speaker of the Parliament has expressed interest in AI Quds' recommendations concerning efforts to enhance the legislative process by amending the Parliament's governing bylaws. The Parliamentary Monitoring Project has enabled AI Quds to build a bridge between citizens and their representatives that has the potential to sustain increased government openness, transparency and accountability. ■

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Thank You!

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The Speaker of the Parliament at an AI Quds roundtable