



CIVIC UPDATE

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A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

This issue features NDI’s work to support the political participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs). Over the years, the Institute has provided assistance to many different types of marginalized and disadvantaged populations in an effort to increase widespread citizen participation. In many cases, this has included PWDs and disabled persons organizations (DPOs). The specific cases explored in this Update demonstrate that NDI can effectively help “mainstream” people with disabilities as they look to take political action, such as political process monitoring, civic education, voting, and election observation.

PWDs around the world are often excluded from participation in many aspects of public life, including elections. At the same time, as the following examples highlight, PWDs are just as likely to already be organized through different types of support groups and networks, and can be mobilized politically as a dynamic and enthusiastic segment of civil society. NDI has found that mobilizing these existing groups and networks to action is not only possible, but also serves the two-fold purpose of creating important precedents for increasing political space and citizen voice, as well as helping people with disabilities influence issues related to equal opportunity and access.

The adoption of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the UN in 2006 and, more recently, President Obama’s statement upon signing the CRPD pledging support for disability rights initiatives abroad have created important opportunities to focus even greater attention on inclusion of PWDs. Also, USAID has a Disability

Inclusion Plan which calls for “the inclusion of PWDs both within USAID-funded programs and in host countries where USAID has programs.” For NDI, this process, known as mainstreaming, means the empowerment of PWDs to participate in political activities and the recognition of this group as a legitimate segment of society with a full set of rights and responsibilities. NDI and IFES are currently collaborating on a manual for USAID that explains how to support the inclusion of PWDs in elections and political processes.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

Aaron Azelton, Director

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Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CRPD definition of Persons
with Disabilities:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Article 1

*Convention on the Rights of
Persons with Disabilities ,
United Nations,
13 December 2006*



United Nations Enable is the official web portal of the Secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that provides information on topics related to disability and the work of the United Nations for persons with disabilities.

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@UN_Enable

In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This was a landmark convention for



President Barack Obama signs the CRPD

Source: Rehabilitation International

the UN as it represented the first comprehensive human rights treaty signed in the 21st century and also a large step toward moving PWDs from passive recipients of charity to fully empowered citizens who enjoy equal rights and protections under national and supranational laws. Currently, of the 153 signatories, 109 countries have ratified the CRPD. The Convention, monitored by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is focused on mainstreaming PWDs in society, including their political participa-

tion. Article 29 of the Convention outlines the obligations of signatories to ensure the full participation of PWDs in political and public life:

Article 29 - Participation in political and public life

States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake to:

Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:

Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;

Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;

Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;

Promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including: Participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and in the activities and administration of political parties;

Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels.

Mapping the DPO Landscape and Forging Partnerships in Serbia

Since 2010, NDI has received funding from USAID to increase the political participation of marginalized groups in Serbia, including rural populations, the LGBT community, and PWDs, following a USAID assessment that identified inclusion as a democratic deficit in Serbia. NDI's approach involves mainstreaming these populations so they can take full advantage of the political space that exists by exercising their fundamental rights. The Institute's efforts at mainstreaming these populations in political life are carried out in partnerships with Serbia's increasingly active civil society, which includes a number of DPOs. Working to ensure the full participation of marginalized communities is in line with NDI's overall goal of deepening democracy in Serbia by helping ensure that all citizens have a political voice and can participate in decisions that affect their lives.

NDI's initial outreach to potential DPO partners in Serbia focused on educating them about the benefits of using the political process to hold government accountable. Although Serbia has laws against discrimination based on disability and an active DPO community, members of parliament (MPs) and local officials did not pay attention to disability issues or to the implementation of existing policies. As a result, PWDs are disproportionately unemployed, discriminated against, and politically underrepresented. As NDI began to explore the needs of DPOs, the Institute discovered that the DPO partners had very little knowledge of political organizing and advocacy and lacked the necessary skills to effectively engage government officials on the needs of disabled constituents or ensure government funds were properly budgeted. To address these issues, NDI selected three DPO partners: the Youth Forum for Persons with Disabilities (YFPD), the Center for Inclusion and Learning (CIL), and the Serbian Association for the Promotion of Inclusion (SAPI). These are all cross-

disability organizations serving PWDs generally rather than serving only a



Participants take part in the DPO academy, held in Belgrade.

single subgroup of the community. Cross-disability organizations proved more open to engaging in political activism than the DPOs representing a singular constituency.

Lessons from the Institute's work in Serbia have included recognition that the landscape of existing DPOs can be complicated and challenging to maneuver. In seeking partners, NDI found DPOs were a divided group. One legacy from the previous socialist regime was that certain DPOs received disproportionate state favor and funding. The relationship between these groups and the state limited the space other groups had to engage the government, creating discord within the DPO community. Also, many DPOs represented specific segments of the disabled community and competed with other organizations for the limited pool of available state resources. DPOs were therefore wary of collaborating with other groups on overtly political activities, preferring to prioritize the provision of tangible services to their respective constituencies. Additionally, DPOs equated political participation with political parties and feared becoming pawns to parties and furthering a perception of PWDs as charity cases rather than full citizens with equal rights.

(Continued on page 4)

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Building on NDI's assistance, the program has seen considerable advancement in the capacities of the DPO partners. With support from the Institute, partner organizations are carrying out civic education programs for PWDs, improving their external communications and government outreach, and organizing roundtables with municipal-level officials to craft recommendations for how local governments can better utilize national funds designated for assistance to PWDs. The ability of DPO partners to get commitments from the local officials to attend the roundtable and discuss issues of importance to the DPO community represents a significant advancement.



Participants work together during the DPO workshop

Mainstreaming and Coalition Activities

Much of the NDI's mainstreaming work with PWDs has occurred during coalition-building efforts, where a variety of civil society organizations (CSOs) have come together around a shared interest. In these instances, DPOs become equal members of the coalition with corresponding rights and responsibilities. Coalition work also allows DPOs to acquire practices from fellow CSOs and encourages other coalition partners to take a more active approach to understanding and supporting the PWD community. As a result of coalition work, PWDs gain skills in identifying issues and creating campaigns and note an increase in self-esteem through work with peer organizations. NDI has also begun to see DPOs rise into positions of coalition leadership, even in coalitions not focused directly on disability issues. For example, DPO-led coalitions in Lebanon and Kenya are focused on budget monitoring and constitutional reform monitoring respectively. These DPOs have been chosen as leaders by peer organizations because they possess pre-existing experience in government cooperation, a positive public profile, and strong organizational structures. Specifically, they often already have set offices, leadership, communications teams, financial and

budget operations, and have been operating for a number of years. Coalition work also often inspires members to be introspective and view their internal efforts at inclusion. For example, a youth-focused CSO might find a deficiency in its understanding of disabled youth, or a DPO might recognize its need to expand its leadership to employ more women in top capacities in its activities. These types of developments have been noted in a number of programs in countries including Sudan and Lebanon, where DPOs have been included in broader coalitions focused on voter education and political process monitoring, and in new programs in Kenya and Mali, where DPOs are involved in monitoring constitutional drafting and elections.



Coalition Leadership in Lebanon

In Lebanon, members of the Lebanon Budget Project (LBP), a coalition focused on strengthening civil society's ability to understand, monitor and analyze the state budget, chose the Lebanon Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) as the lead organization in carrying out the LBP's initiatives. NDI's work with the LPHU dates back to 2000, during which time the Institute supported LPHU in carrying out advocacy campaigns, strengthening its organizational structures and building coalitions across civil society. Beginning in 2004, NDI brought together a group of Lebanese CSOs to provide training on the Lebanese budget process, which evolved into a formal coalition under the LBP. The LBP was created to improve government transparency and create accessible reports on the budgeting process for citizens. NDI continues to provide assistance to the coalition through budget analysis training and communications strategies.

LPHU was chosen by other coalition members to lead the LBP due to its existing relationships in parliament and experience in holding the government accountable on disability issues. Under LPHU leadership, the LBP has gained respect as the leading non-governmental authority in Lebanon on budget issues, thereby greatly increasing the profile of LPHU and expanding their work beyond disability issues. The LBP has become established as the go-to resource for organizations interested in finance reform and government monitoring.

While the LBP has benefitted from LPHU's leadership capacity, LPHU has also received benefits

from their participation. For example, increasing accessibility of polling places for the disabled was important for the LPHU. While providing analyses of budget expenditures of electoral reforms important to civil society, the LBP chose to address polling station accessibility at the suggestion of LPHU. In tailoring the budget monitoring project to polling accessibility, the LBP held activities on determining the cost of making stations accessible, while reiterating the regulations that require electoral accessibility. This demonstrates that DPOs do not have to abandon their core issue concerns to address greater government accountability.



Voter Education in South Sudan

In the lead-up to the Sudanese elections of April 2010, the first to take place following decades of conflict, NDI helped to establish the Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections (SuNDE), a network of over 70 nonpartisan Sudanese civil society organizations and faith-based groups. NDI assisted SuNDE in its initial organization and provided funding and training on carrying out voter education and election observation campaigns for these historic elections as part of the Institute's overall goal of enabling civic participation in key political processes. To help ensure broad social inclusion, SuNDE incorporated a DPO member, the Equatoria State Association of Physically Disabled (ESAD). As part of its broader voter education campaign, SuNDE included information on benefits guaranteed to vulnerable groups in the interim constitution of South Sudan. With guidance from ESAD, the coalition also conducted specific outreach to PWDs on voter education, resulting in an increase in mobilization of this community to participate in elections. Another result was the adaptability of the voter education outreach to other forms of participation by Sudan's marginalized population. ESAD found its advocacy materials and communications activities adaptable to other CSOs within the SuNDE network.

from GoSS spread the techniques pioneered by ESAD beyond the original coalition.

The results of this program clearly demonstrate the benefits of integrating PWDs into coalitions. In this case, participants not only learned from each other's shared experiences, but the increased self-confidence on the part of the DPO inspired them to greatly increase their voter education activities beyond the coalition. It also enlightened other SuNDE coalition members of the needs of the disabled and how increasing the voice of marginalized groups contributes to democratization. Inclusion of a DPO in this first-ever coalition for voter education and election monitoring served the dual purpose of providing PWDs a voice in these precedent-setting activities and establishing PWDs as active and engaged members of society to be included in all political processes.

“At first, disabled people didn't want to register or vote in elections, but the trainings helped many disabled to register and vote.” –Jokosule Lado, ESAD manager

Building on their experiences as part of the SuNDE coalition, ESAD conducted radio campaigns to expand their reach to populations they could not readily access and broadened their focus to general human rights education. These activities elicited interest from the South Sudan Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare (GoSS), who supported future voter education activities conducted by ESAD. This support



ESAD participants

“We are not disabled, but able members who can do everything like other members of the society.”

–Sebit Kabila Ebibon, ESAD Secretary General

Political Process Monitoring in Mexico

The Mexico Coalition for Disability Rights (COAMEX) is a case of how political process monitoring by a DPO can promote government accountability. Since 2009, NDI has provided technical and financial assistance to COAMEX as part of a broader USAID-funded program to increase the capacity of CSOs to engage with political parties and governments in policy formation. COAMEX was a strong candidate for partnership with NDI because of its well-defined interest in advocating for a specific policy, in this case CRPD implementation. Having a clearly defined issue is a common characteristic of DPOs and it often allows them to more easily develop a political agenda based on an issue they understand and care deeply about. By working with groups like COAMEX that have an issue and desire a change, it is easier for NDI to help introduce the practice of civil society oversight and political engagement in Mexico's political process.



Participants at the COAMEX presentation on October 25, 2011



COAMEX's presentation to the National Council for Inclusion and Development of Person's with Disability

As part of the assistance program, NDI has supported COAMEX in drafting and presenting shadow reports on the government's compliance with the CRPD before numerous domestic human rights bodies. Before an audience of over 300 representatives, COAMEX recently submitted their report to the National Council for Inclusion and Development of Person's with Disability. COAMEX used this event to educate citizens on their findings and methods used to monitor and evaluate the Mexican government's implementation of the CRPD. Not only does this promote government compliance on this issue, but it also represents a step toward establishing a system where

monitoring government actions is widely accepted and produces responses from government institutions.

Challenges that remain in mainstreaming

Despite initial strides in mainstreaming the political participation of PWDs, there are a number of challenges that remain. Primarily, eliciting the buy-in of DPOs is difficult, because they focus their outreach on service delivery versus political participation of constituents. This stems from a focus on the immediate and basic needs of the constituent group versus advocating for how these basic needs are met.

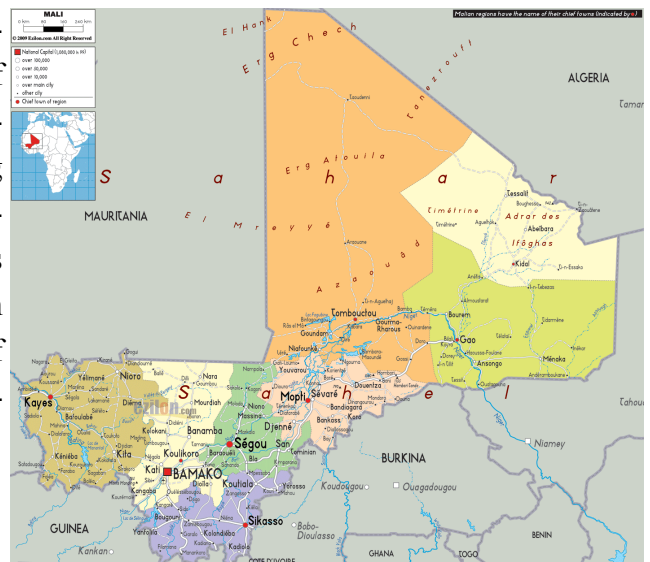
Assistance to DPOs is often inhibited by fears of political party associations because of previous experiences of feeling coopted or misused by political actors. This trepidation of what can come from cooperation with political parties can also decrease general participation of PWDs. DPOs remain wary of party motivations and establishing trust can be challenging. An important step is incorporating PWDs more into political parties and

making them fixtures in parties and elections. DPOs face a challenge in showing how their work in advocacy, process monitoring, or voter education will have an impact on the everyday lives of PWDs. The organizations garner support from their constituencies only if they can quantifiably show results in how their activities change lives. Although having the CRPD ratified and producing shadow reports on its implementation are important, DPOs have to learn how to translate their monitoring and advocacy work into tangible results.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that alongside mainstreaming PWDs in NDI programming, the overall goal remains mainstreaming this community in the political life of their country. Considerations such as accessibility of NDI offices or training locations are important first steps, but do not represent an end in themselves.

Election Monitoring in Mali

In the fall of 2011, NDI launched a new program in Mali with USAID funding that included building the capacity of domestic monitoring groups in the lead-up to the 2012 elections. The Institute is supporting the formation of an electoral observation coalition known as *Appui au Processus Électoral au Mali* (APEM), which brings together 49 CSOs from throughout the country, including two DPOs. As in the case of Sudan, inclusion of DPOs in this coalition sets an important precedent of involving PWDs in initiatives from the beginning, providing PWDs a voice political processes and ensuring these processes take into account the needs of PWDs. The elections will take place in April 2012, and the electoral observation missions will include PWDs as observers in the hopes of raising the profile of the disabled and encouraging more voter turnout and electoral participation among this population.





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NDI's Citizen Participation
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Additional Resources

USAID Disability Assessment Tool/Guide

www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/disability/disassessment_guide.pdf.

US Department of State- Department of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/sadr/index.htm>

United Nations Enable Website

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/>

United Nations Enable: Fact Sheet on Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/pwdfs.pdf>.

The World Bank and The World Health Organization: World Report on Disability

Geneva : World Health Organization, 2011.

USAID Disability and Development: Disability Initiatives

http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/disability/

Source International Information Support Center: Disability, inclusion and development library

http://www.asksource.info/res_library/disability.htm

Disability Rights International

<http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org/>

Inclusion International

<http://www.inclusion-international.org/>

Civil society participation in the implementation of the Convention

auth. United Nations Enable

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=359>.

CP Team Update

NDI is collaborating with IFES on drafting a manual for USAID on inclusion of PWDs in elections and political processes. The manual will guide USAID staff and democracy assistance practitioners in developing programs for mainstreaming PWDs. It will include case studies, lessons and practical tools to analyze the barriers faced by PWDs and design programs that take into account the needs of that community. The manual will focus on both inclusion of PWDs in USAID-funded programs and ensuring that programs aim to increase inclusion of PWDs in society at large. NDI and IFES will analyze the challenges and outcomes of past programming in this area and will distribute the manual to global disability rights activists and democracy and governance practitioners for peer review before finalization.

New Additions

Sydney Taylor is joining the Citizen Participation Team as the new Project Assistant. She received her B.A. in Political Science from Spelman College in 2008, and is a recent graduate of the Fletcher School at Tufts University, receiving her M.A. in Law and Diplomacy. While at Tufts, she studied law and development, as well as international organizations. Before arriving at Tufts, Sydney was awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Grant to Spain, where she conducted bilingual secondary school classes and a project on issues of Spanish youth and multiculturalism. She has previously worked in non-profit development, including at Right to Play. Additionally, she has held internships with a number of municipal government entities in her hometown of Memphis, TN. As a part of her international work and studies, Sydney has lived in Barcelona, Madrid, and Oaxaca, Mexico.