

"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government..." —Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Civil Society Practitioners Convene at Global Seminar

NDI's Citizen Participation Team conducted a three-day seminar on "Advocacy and Democratic Development" March 31 - April 3, 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. The Seminar brought together thirty-six civil society development practitioners, including NDI resident representatives working in nineteen countries, four NGO executive directors with whom NDI is working closely, and seven NDI senior program managers from the Washington office.

NDI was fortunate to bring together a group of people that obviously believe in their work and feel that they are making important contributions to democracy in their respective countries of operation. The seminar also benefitted greatly from the diversity of personal and professional experiences.

The participants worked to improve NDI's ability to organize, conduct and evaluate public policy advocacy programs as means of increasing citizen participation. NDI selected advocacy programs because they often include elements of other programs, such as civic education and domestic election monitoring. In plenary sessions, working groups and round table discussions, seminar participants exchanged experiences and insights from their program activities. All working groups comprised seven to nine participants

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Welcome to the eighth edition of the Civic Update. This edition of the newsletter presents perspectives on the work of and challenges faced by civil society in countries where NDI is currently conducting civic programs. The country articles are taken from background statements written by NDI participants in the *Global Seminar on Advocacy and Democratic Development*.

We hope you find this edition helpful, and look forward to hearing your comments, and any suggestions for future editions. Please send your remarks to the Citizen Participation Team: Keith Jennings (keith@ndi.org), Aaron Azelton (aaron@ndi.org) and Sylvia Panfil (sylviap@ndi.org).

Building an NGO Network

Political and Cultural Challenges

NDI works with Pollwatch Foundation, the largest election monitoring organization in Thailand. Pollwatch was founded in 1992 by the then-Prime Minister to combat corruption, vote buying and voter fraud. From 1992 through 1997, Pollwatch was only active during election periods and received direct funding from the government—though its volunteers came mostly from the NGO community.

With the establishment of an independent election commission, as mandated by the 1997 constitution, Pollwatch became an independent NGO. Without government support, Pollwatch searched for a new direction and funding. Responding to a proposal from

Pollwatch, NDI worked with the organization's new leadership to develop a broader mandate that would allow for activity between elections. Instead of being solely an election monitoring organization, Pollwatch has sought to become an advocate and catalyst for increased citizen participation in political processes.

Because Pollwatch did not have a strong membership base, NDI has focused on how Pollwatch could recruit members and develop an organizational structure at the regional, provincial and local levels. NDI also helped Pollwatch look at ways it could draw off its strengths, which are name recognition and credibility.

Last year, Pollwatch founded the People's Network (PNET)—a nationwide network of NGOs that will be involved in Pollwatch election-related activities—to link existing national, regional and local NGOs around a national monitoring effort. The NDI-Bangkok office has worked with the Pollwatch leadership to design a regional training program and recruitment strategy. The long-term goal of the program is to develop a sustained network of NGOs that can advocate for reform and increase civic participation.

Political context

With the devaluation of the Thai baht in 1997, the 'Asian Crisis' sparked reformist movements around the region. In Thailand, groups motivated primarily by economic concerns openly criticized the government. However, Thailand did not experience the same civil unrest as its neighbors. With the passage of a new constitution in September 1997, Thailand set in motion a move toward a more participatory and decentralized system. The new constitution changed

Experiment

Moving from Local to National Impact

NDI's civic programs can play an important role in seeing that local efforts move to a broader scale in order to achieve broader impacts. Local efforts, however, should not be emphasized at the expense of conducting national level work, for to do so would ignore the opportunity to effect systemic change at the national level.

In two countries within the CEE, NDI's civic programs began with local efforts and have moved (or have the opportunity to move) into the national arena of "politics." In both countries, there is an opportunity to move from local organizing and advocacy efforts to national level mobilizing of citizens for potential large-scale impact. In both of these countries, NDI is using advocacy techniques as a means of creating desired changes. Initially, organizing citizens at the local level does not lead to national issues, and has little if any national impact. Instead it focuses people on what is important in their communities and gives them the necessary confidence to act.

The Slovak experience

Since the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution in 1989, and since achieving independence in 1993, Slovakia has adopted political structures and processes characteristic of a democratic system, including the basic process of multiparty elections. Under former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar's administration (1993-1998) there were significant transgressions of standard democratic conduct that called into question the commitment of the country's political leadership to full democratization.

Examples of those transgressions included: restricting the

ability of independent media to disseminate information and opinions differing from official government policy; denying the rights of minority populations to conduct public discourse in their languages; and purging local officials from their nonpolitical positions because of their perceived affiliation with the opposition. Fortunately, however,

one of the positive features of Slovakia's post-communist political evolution has been a dynamic non-governmental sector. This sector, in response to the country's political difficulties, has developed a political awareness greater than that of its counterparts in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In recognition of that fact, NDI's programs in Slovakia have focused on the NGO sector.

In September 1998, the Slovak voters elected a new government, rejecting the increasingly authoritarian administration of Meciar. The change was catalyzed by thousands of citizens who mobilized to ensure free and fair elections, and additionally, who disseminated information to the citizenry to encourage informed decision-making.

In Slovakia, NDI is focusing on what ordinary citizens want to do to improve their lives by engaging in participatory politics in their hometowns.

Initially, NDI assisted in the establishment of organizations by building NGO coalitions in the cities of Presov and Trencin.¹ This work included several elements of Saul Alinsky's organizing approaches.

Oftentimes (as in Bosnia) this type of organizing was one of community building, and attempting to create something more stable, long-lasting and sustainable. The goal was to produce organization via issue organizing, develop local leadership, and forge strong partnerships and associations at the local

level.

For example, in Presov a group of representatives of local NGOs and citizens in this city of 90,000 people began to organize, conduct meetings and discuss problems in their city. These initial meetings were attended by anywhere between ten to thirty people, who identified what they believed to be the pressing issues in their city, and decided that they wanted to address those issues. They decided to conduct a large survey in order to see if more citizens felt the way they did; to learn what was important to citizens; and to promote their efforts on a broad basis.

They designed the survey and distributed 8,000 copies across the city using various methods. Eventually, more than 1,000 completed surveys were eventually collected and analyzed. Out of the survey results, the NGO representatives and other citizens had to go through a process of choosing the best issues on which to begin work. They selected three issues. One of the issues was to pressure city officials to commit to constructing new town information signboards. The group selected the most active participants as leaders or representatives, and conducted several face to face meetings with the public officials they identified as "targets." Although none of these meetings were adversarial in nature, they were a form of confrontation. That is, the citizens told officials what they were working on and what was important to them. The leaders also told officials what they wanted and how they thought the officials could help.

The group eventually received commitments from the officials to help, and, eventually, the city constructed and placed two new information signboards in town. This represented a victory to the NGO representatives and the citizens advocating for their issue.

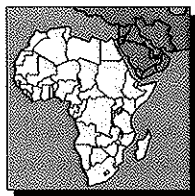
Furthermore, there was a real, visible, measurable improvement. People who were closely involved in the process were empowered by

¹ NDI is no longer conducting community organizing work in Trencin, however, it has expanded its community organizing program to include civic groups in the cities of Banska, Bystrica, Zvolen-zapad, Lucenec, Nitra and southern Slovakia.

—This article is an annotated version of a background statement regarding NDI's Slovakia and Bosnia programs, written by David Sip, NDI-Bosnia and former NDI-Slovakia resident representative, in preparation for the NDI Global Seminar on Advocacy and Democratic Development. For more information regarding the NDI-Slovakia program, please contact Claude Zullo (czullo@ndi.org) or Matt Baker (mbaker@ndi.org).

Nascent Civic Groups

Considerations for Local Capacity Building and Civic Programming



NDI first came to Malawi during the early stages of the country's transition to a multi-party democracy. In October 1992, facing worsening economic conditions and growing political unrest, Malawi's then President, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, yielded to the demands of domestic opposition groups and international donors, and agreed to hold a referendum on the future of one-party rule. The following year, in March 1993, NDI launched a survey mission to determine what help, if any, NDI could provide to Malawi's democracy activists. NDI determined it could help by training volunteers to monitor the referendum.

On June 14, 1993, Malawians voted in the referendum to end thirty years of one party rule. Following the ballot count, the government legalized opposition political parties. In addition, a National Executive Council

and a National Consultative Council, consisting of representatives of all parties, were formed to plan for the nation's first democratic election. NDI subsequently opened a field office in Malawi in October 1993, and has been in the country ever since.

The first Malawi multi-party elections were scheduled for May 17, 1994. During this period, NDI helped the nation's emerging political parties prepare for the polls by organizing workshops on how to conduct a political campaign, and provide election monitoring training to civic groups. Since 1994, NDI's election-related work has continued with the sponsorship of by-election candidates debates conducted throughout the country.

After the May 1994 elections, NDI launched an ambitious program to assist political parties in developing organizational skills and to enhance the organizational capabilities of local civic groups.

Working with local groups

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are a recent development in Malawi. In fact, most of the country's 150 NGOs are less than three years old. Of those 150, approximately fifteen organizations focus on democracy and governance issues. These NGOs have little experience in planning and advocacy, and have few resources. NDI has, therefore, worked with them on a broad range of matters to strengthen their administrative and programmatic capacities.

In earlier projects, NDI also worked with traditional leaders, such as chiefs, and women's groups to enhance their roles in Malawi's new constitutional order. Since then, NDI's efforts have expanded to help a wide range of NGOs develop advocacy skills and conduct civic education programs. Recent work with non-governmental organizations includes: training personnel to conduct training in civic and voter education; training personnel to develop educational materials; working with civic partners to organize constituency outreach fora; and, assisting groups in organizing fora to

discuss a proposed NGO law and in drafting an NGO code of conduct.

An initial assessment of local NGOs in the democracy and governance field paints a general picture of uncertainty, weakness and general lack of practical skills among non-governmental organizations in the areas of advocacy or civic education. This is not surprising considering the limited time in which most NGOs have had to develop both administratively and programmatically.

Most groups are still grappling with understanding democratic governance concepts, in addition to writing project proposals. Those that are not wanting in this respect are challenged in determining how to have their messages reach the grassroots in a sustainable manner. Perhaps with the exception of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), which relies heavily on religious networks, the outreach of NGOs to rural areas—about seventy-five percent of the population—is almost nil. As the findings from an NDI 1997 recent focus group survey show, the only way most villagers can recognize an advocacy NGO is if they heard an advertisement on the radio. But, apart from recognizing a group's name (or that of its director) few, if any, villagers can explain in what manner the group's work benefits the local community.

After the 1994, elections NDI's initial focus was to increase the capacity of local groups in the area of advocacy. NDI conducted training workshops and helped them develop strategies for local NGOs to apply in their lobbying efforts. By late 1996, however, this approach had to be changed because its impact was not as effective as expected. This was in part because:

- NGOs were still grappling with the basic concepts of democratic development and how these could be concretized in a practical Malawian sense. The advanced concepts of

government interference in the organizing of public meetings and debates. Situations such as these generally occur from ignorance on the part of many local government officials, who are unfamiliar with the Kyrgyz Constitution and the basic rights of its citizens. As a result, officials operate according to outdated understandings of Soviet practices.

The emergence of the NGO community

With the independence of Kyrgyzstan, the NGO community has grown and stimulated social interest in democratic reforms. There are approximately 1,000 registered non-governmental organizations in Kyrgyzstan due largely to foreign investment, as well as the development of governmental NGOs (also known as "yellow NGOs"). However, because the community of non-governmental organizations is still young, it lacks many strong, productive NGOs that are effectively working to solve social problems and build civil society. It would be generous to say that one-quarter of the NGOs are actually contributing concretely to society. The remaining three-fourths spend their time searching for funding with practically no sense of their own missions, direction or service to a constituency.

Even among the active non-governmental organizations, most do not have a sense of how they can be more actively involved in building civil society. There are many groups that are indirectly building civil society through their activities, even though they are unaware that their activities are contributing to society in such a manner.

This leaves the country with a small number of NGOs that actively work on developing civil society and democracy as a part of their mission.

Organizational development

Most recently, NDI helped its civic partner, the Forum of NGOs, to

restructure its organization and become an independent NGO from the Center Interbillim.² As the Forum of NGOs evolved, it became evident that it had the potential to become a strong organization that could have a significant impact of the emergence of democratic practices in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, on December 16, 1998, fifty-five Forum member organizations attended a General Assembly meeting and voted to become an independent nongovernmental organization that could pursue funding to help build and strengthen its organizational capacity and its member NGOs work in the areas of democracy and civil society development.

The Coalition of NGOs' mission is to strengthen democracy and to build civil society in the Kyrgyz Republic. It works to promote democratic political processes by involving citizens in public life and self-governance. It conducts election and referenda monitoring at all levels of government to protect the principles of legitimacy, fairness and objectivity; develops legislative recommendations; and advocates on behalf of citizens and NGOs.

With the establishment of a cooperative partnership, NDI has devoted time to working side by side with the Coalition. The Institute's goal is to help the Coalition develop a strong, solid organizational foundation, and second, to

Civic Highlights

Cross-Regional Exchange among Civic Program Staff

In follow-up to suggestions made by participants in the *NDI Global Seminar on Advocacy and Democratic Development*, the Citizen Participation Team produced a listserve to encourage further exchange among resident staff working on civic programs. NDI resident representatives can now communicate through the listserve Civic@webserver.ndi.org.

A special thanks to all civic program staff who provided input on the role of election commissions in voter education. Your comments were much appreciated by NDI Director of Citizen Participation Programs Keith Jennings, who recently spoke at a UNDP workshop on electoral management bodies as institutions of governance.

design and implement program activities. For instance, during the first three months of the Coalition's existence, NDI helped with capacity-building.

Furthermore, NDI helped the Coalition develop its first Board of Directors, a process that included organizing a nomination committee to help develop criteria for candidate selection. In terms of time and scope, the entire process took three months, and involved more than 350 NGO leaders and interested community

² Initially a domestic monitoring organization, Interbillim is a registered nonprofit organization that supports the community of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan through information, training and services.

programming in Egypt, please contact Margaret Zaknoen (margaret@ndi.org), Andreas Katsouris (akatsouris@ndi.org) or Wendy Baumert (wendyb@ndi.org).

Coalition's Efforts Help Democratic Transition

Nigeria's Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of more than sixty Nigerian civic organizations, received the 1999 Democracy Award of the National Endowment for Democracy at a Capitol Hill reception on Tuesday, May 25. The TMG was honored for its extraordinary efforts to mobilize civil society to defend Nigerian democracy in the country's recent elections. With NDI's assistance, the TMG trained and deployed nearly 11,000 Nigerians across the country to observe the voting on election day. It also monitored the pre-election period and organized campaigns of civic education to motivate and mobilize citizens' participation in the voting.

The award, which was presented by U.S. Representative Donald Payne (D-N.J.), was accepted on behalf of the TMG by Clement Nwankwo, the Chair of TMG's Coordinating Committee. Many other distinguished speakers were also on hand to offer congratulations to the TMG for its heroic and important work.

In his tribute to the TMG, Rep. Payne said, "Their struggle is far from over. If Nigeria is to meet the awesome challenge of building a democratic system that is lawful, just, transparent and genuinely inclusive of all ethnic and religious groups, it will depend in no small measure on the continued work of the TMG and the thousands of devoted Nigerian democrats who have already sacrificed so much for the cause of freedom."

"All of us here share a deep

satisfaction in Nigeria's remarkable reemergence as a democratic country; TMG deserves a tremendous amount of the credit," said Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering. "I am happy and proud...to see Clement Nwankwo and the TMG honored for their accomplishments and to offer my support and congratulations, and that of the entire U.S. Government, for their ongoing work."

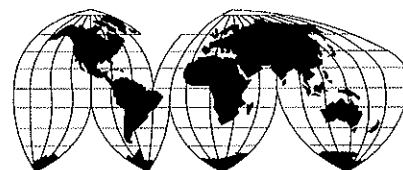
In his acceptance speech, Nwankwo thanked the NED for its long term commitment to the democratic struggle in Nigeria, adding that the struggle for "true democracy" was far from over.

He emphasized that the TMG will continue its work to root out corruption, to place greater emphasis on human rights, to ensure the continued growth of civil society and to work toward a Nigerian constitution which safeguards the values of democracy. □

During Nigeria's transition, NDI provided technical assistance to the TMG on conducting domestic election monitoring activities. NDI domestic monitoring experts also assisted Nigerian groups in developing and strengthening the broad-based national network among member organizations. Most recently, the Institute helped the TMG organize the post-election conference "Civil Society and Elections" to discuss the group's role during the transition period, and to begin to strategize about its role in the post-election process. Participating in the conference were representatives from former NDI civic partners. Alina Inyeh from Pro-Democracy Association (PDA) and Sergio Aguayo from Civic Alliance shared new, innovative program ideas that their respective organizations are undertaking, especially in the area of governance.

For more information on the NDI programs in Nigeria please contact Shari Bryan (sharib@ndi.org), Ryan McCannell (ryan@ndi.org) or Todd Dusenberry (todd@ndi.org).

NDI Resident Staff for Civic Programs



□ **Nick Green**, former resident representative for NDI-Bosnia Hercegovina (Tuzla), is now in Yemen, where he is conducting a program to strengthen civic organizations, the multiparty system and the Yemeni parliament, with the overall goal of increasing public confidence in the country's democracy.

□ **Eric Kessler** was recently hired as the new resident representative for Kazakhstan, where he will implement a program to increase citizen participation in democratic processes. Eric comes to NDI with a wealth of experience in such areas as press and citizen outreach, voter education and registration, and budget management.

□ **Ken Hashimoto** will be leaving NDI in July. Since January 1997, Ken has worked as a resident representative for NDI in Bosnia-Hercegovina, training and coaching civic organizers to increase citizens' participation in political processes. In addition, Ken helped design and manage three local, citizen actions that engaged networks of local NGOs in nationwide election monitoring. Most recently, Ken worked with NDI civic partner Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI), a three-site Bosnian NGO, to develop their organizational capacity and citizen participation programs.

□ **David Sip**, a senior field officer with NDI in Slovakia and currently in Bosnia-Herzegovina, will be leaving NDI this month of June. For the past

