



CIVIC UPDATE

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A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

Youth Programming

Welcome to this issue of Civic Update!

This issue focuses on involving young people in politics. Recognizing that they can play a critical role in building strong and vibrant democratic societies, NDI has long worked with youth in all forms of programming to empower them as mainstream political activists. Channeling this growing population’s talents and energies as a force for positive change represents a major democratic development opportunity.

Regrettably, young citizens are often considered part of the development problem and find themselves marginalized from mainstream politics. They seldom have the respect of public officials and are rarely viewed by adults as community members with a legitimate voice. When young people are ignored and marginalized, however, they can become prey for more extreme elements that exploit them and use them as political pawns and militants. On the other hand, young people can become a force that demands and defends democracy when they are given an opportunity to organize themselves, voice their opinions and engage in political decisionmaking.

NDI views the participation of young people (age 18-35) as fundamental to successful democratic transitions. Young people are part of the solution and have a critical role to play in advancing democracy. It is essential to help this large group develop and exercise democratic values, engage in constructive activism, promote greater government responsiveness, and become political leaders with a unique voice and goals.

NDI is currently working with young people in more than 20 countries and has carried out more than 120

such programs worldwide. Although the programs vary in size and focus, they share the underlying belief that youth are an integral part of the democratic development process. Whether it is work with civic groups, political parties, or governing institutions, NDI encourages the participation of young people to help ensure that they have an active stake in the political system. It is through meaningful participation that young people gain and sustain an underlying belief in the value of democratic political alternatives.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

Aaron Azelton, Director

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Why NDI Works with Youth



Young people make up an increasingly large percentage of the global population

There are a number of reasons that NDI works with young people. In many countries where NDI is active, youth make up a large percentage of the population. Over 3 billion people in the world today are under the age of 25, and almost 90 percent of young people live in developing countries. Despite this, they are provided few avenues for political participation and their needs and interests remain unrepresented. Major challenges for youth participation are resistance to change by entrenched elite and older generations and the cultural expectations that youth do not hold power in society. There can be a perception among some stakeholders that youth are not qualified or do not have the necessary skills, knowledge or expertise to participate. Some entrenched leaders and authority figures may also fear the new ideas and interests that youth

bring to their organizations (political parties, for examples), or to the governance system. However, democratic deepening cannot occur when a majority of the population is left behind.

It is when youth participate in political processes that they learn how to become active and productive members of a democratic society. By exercising their rights and responsibilities, they are more likely to internalize democratic values. NDI has found that when young people participate, they quickly become more confident and active community members. Furthermore, when youth participate, the whole of society benefits. They provide role models not only for other youth, but can also open up space for more participation as other segments of society become active.

In many countries where NDI works, older, entrenched elites are resistant to democratic opening and reform. In these settings, agents of change, such as youth, can be empowered and equipped with the tools to push for the change they would like to see. Compared to their older counterparts, young people are frequently more enthusiastic and are more willing to take initiative and risk. NDI's focus group research has demonstrated that young, first-time voters are more open to voting for new parties, more willing to change political allegiances, more idealistic in their goals, and less loyal to established traditions. Young people may also be more open to challenging undemocratic traditions, such as gender bias and limitations placed on people with disabilities.

Youth groups may be the best positioned to reach certain constituencies or have the most capacity to take action. In some cases where NDI works with local partners, youth-based organizations are already at the forefront of these efforts. They may be the most organized or have the trust of beneficiaries. For example, during the 2010 Haitian presidential elections, NDI worked with FEKOK, or the *Federasyon Komite Oganizate Kan* to carry out a qualitative election observation (e.g. opening and closing or polling places, the voting process, incidents of violence, etc.) in and near camps for internally displaced



FEKOK volunteers learn election observation skills

persons (IDPs) that resulted from the devastating 2010 earthquake. FEKOK is an informal youth organization that formed spontaneously within the camps in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince. FEKOK deployed 250 observers for the first round of elections and 300 in the second round in 58 IDP camps in and around Port-au-Prince. It was the only group, domestic or international, to carry out observation within camps. For both rounds of elections, FEKOK collected and analyzed 100 percent of the forms used by the observers in camps and polling places, a significant achievement for the first time observer group. For the second round, in addition to observation activities, FEKOK carried out voter education to inform IDP camp inhabitants about the importance of their vote, and help people who could not find their names on voter lists to register. FEKOK's observation provided a unique insight into the elec-



toral conditions in the camps, demonstrating that youth can play peaceful and productive roles in political processes, even under the most difficult circumstances.

USAID Developing New Youth Policy



Hillary Clinton speaks of the importance of engaging youth during a visit to Tunisia in February 2012

source: EPA

Donors are increasingly recognizing the importance of working with young people. USAID will soon be releasing a new policy entitled “Youth in Development,” which will emphasize mainstreaming young people in development processes. As one of the only bi-lateral donor agencies to have such a policy, USAID aims to maximize the positive impact that young people have in development by engaging them as problem solvers rather than passive recipients

of aid. USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah explains that, “Across the board, we see that as a major part of the engagement strategy... [the policy] recognizes explicitly that young people are important actors, partners and leaders in shaping their communities and economies.” The approach seeks to take advantage of the demographic dividend in many countries, referring to the positive impact that a large youth population can have on growth.

To help inform the new policy, USAID consulted with partners and youth around the world, including the Alliance for International Youth Development (AIYD), which is comprised of 25 US-based youth and community development organizations. Housed within InterAction, AIYD is a community of practice and an advocacy platform for promoting effective policies and programs worldwide.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Diversity Among Youth

Youth are not a homogenous group. Within and across countries, differences in areas such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family background, marital status, income, education level, ethnicity, socio-economic class and religion can create major variations among the needs and interests of youth. The opportunities and barriers that different segments of young people face also vary. Based on these differences within a youth population, it is important to consider which young people to involve in a given program.

NDI recognizes that there is sometimes the need and opportunity to partner with more marginalized young people that are not yet organized or aware of the possibility of political participation. It is these youth that often have the least access to public life. In Yemen, for example, NDI recognized that youth outside of the capital city did not have the same opportunities as other young people to take part in political life. In response, NDI began working with tribal sheikhs in two governorates in May 2010 to develop Yemen's first youth councils.

With the objective of helping young people become active in their communities on education and employment issues, NDI's program established two 46-member tribal youth councils in Mareb and Shabwa, representing all tribes and clans in the two governorates. In these governorates, tribal disputes and revenge killing rates are among the highest in Yemen. The youth that make up the councils have begun working with local government councils and tribal leadership to develop mechanisms to address conflict and raise awareness about the impact of conflict on education. These activities have offered youth outside of the capital, who have traditionally played a limited role in their communities, to take part in public life for the first time. This is not only empowering youth to be active citizens, but it is also making these communities safer places for all citizens.



Youth, Women and Other Marginalized Populations

Work with young people often requires different approaches than work with other marginalized populations, such as women or persons with disabilities. While these groups frequently face similar barriers to participation, the approaches to working with them need to take differences into account. It is equally important to consider groups that may face a double exclusion, such as young women, who are often left behind in programming. Youth programs that do not pay special attention to the needs of girls when considering participant selection, content of trainings, and in-group power dynamics may serve to further marginalize young women. For this reason, it is vital to ensure that a gender analysis is undertaken when working with youth, and that programming addresses these multiple layers of discrimination and exclusion. Deconstructing gender, youth, and other cross-cutting cleavages within a youth population is an important step to understanding the best approaches to work with each of them and designing effective programs.



Opening the Space for Political Participation

Youth organizations can play a role in reshaping politics and deepening democracy. NDI has learned that when young people are organized and active, they can help expand the political space available for meaningful participation and can set important precedents for broader citizen engagement.

In Macedonia, NDI's partner the Youth Educational Forum (MOF) has successfully engaged parliament and has pulled a wide range of young people into an advocacy campaign to democratize student organizing in state universities. Although NDI did not set out specifically to work on youth issues, NDI identified MOF as a viable partner because the group was already relatively well-organized and had a clear legislative proposal. With NDI assistance, MOF has taken steps to build a strong coalition of 18 student and youth organizations from across the country, undertake field research, promote their issue publicly, reach out to parliament and political parties and testify in parliament. As a result, MOF is more frequently engaging members of parliament, and is often fielding requests for information from government agencies. Individual MPs have also reached out to MOF for assistance on drafting legislation. Overall, the NDI program has not only empowered MOF to work on important youth issues, but it has helped convince MPs of the importance of bringing civil society and other stakeholders into the legislative process. Thanks to



Macedonian MPs listen to testimony at a public oversight hearing

MOF's efforts in this ongoing process, MPs are becoming more likely to consult with civil society in the future, thus opening doors for further democratic engagement by all citizens.

NDI's work with the Youth for Youth Association (AJJ) in Morocco also demonstrates how political engagement by young people can increase political space and promote government responsiveness. Although Moroccan youth have expressed their desire to play a meaningful role in political processes that affect their lives, few opportunities have existed for youth to become involved. With the announcement by King Mohamed VI of a reform process in March 2011, new entry points were created for Moroccan youth to engage in the political process.

NDI has partnered with AJJ to monitor and participate in several steps of the reform process currently underway. Established in 2005, AJJ is an initiative comprised of young students, graduates and civil servants, and is open to all young Moroccans to share ideas and exchange experiences. Since the announcement of reforms in early 2011, AJJ organized events to influence Morocco's constitutional reform process. Following the constitutional referendum vote in July 2011 mandating an Advisory Council on Youth and



Macedonian students take part in a MOF public event

(Continued on page 6)

programs further provide youth activists with skills and strategies to help them ascend to leadership positions and promote positive change within their political parties or civic organizations.

In Nicaragua, the politicization of government institutions and the lack of impartiality of the election administration have generated widespread public distrust and slowed progress toward democratic consolidation.



CLPM participants review a roleplay exercise

There is a need for more transparent and representative Nicaraguan political parties, and greater participation by underrepresented sectors, including youth. NDI, in partnership with a consortium of Nicaraguan and international universities and institutions, has created the Certificate on Leadership and Political Management (CLPM), an intensive program aimed at preparing a new generation of Nicaraguan political and civil society leaders. The CLPM equips emerging young leaders between the ages of 16 and 35 with political leadership skills and know how, including strategic planning, civic advocacy, effective communication, political negotiation and coalition building. The program is helping raise awareness about democratic values and dialogue by bringing individuals from all regions of the country and across ideological divides to work and study together.

Connecting with Young People

An NDI supported project in Nigeria has found an interesting way to reach out and engage young people in political life. In Nigeria, young people make up around 70 percent of the population, and therefore clearly have a large role to play in Nigeria's democratic development. During elections, however, youth have often played a negative role. In many cases, young people have been paid by political parties to stir up violence. Voter apathy and low voter turnout among youth are also the norm. NDI thus saw the need to engage young people to act as a positive force during elections.

For Nigeria's 2011 elections, NDI supported CSOs active in get-out-the-vote (GOTV) activities targeting youth. GOTV campaigns are important, as they can help young people develop democratic habits such as voting and encouraging others to vote, which are beneficial for long-term democratization. As part of this effort, NDI worked with the Youngstars Foundation, a Nigerian voter education group. With their main focus on youth, Youngstars encouraged Nigerians to be active in their communities and vote for good leaders. With NDI assistance, Youngstars produced a short film starring well-known Nollywood actors and musicians to encourage young Nigerians to take voting seriously. The 13-minute film was called "My Vote Fit Change Naija," or "My vote can change Nigeria," and was distributed across the country through a network of eight civil society groups specializing in voter education and played on numerous state-level television stations. Youngstars estimates that it was viewed by nearly 50 million people. Along with the film, Youngstars encouraged groups to hold



Promotional poster for the film "My Vote Fit Change Naija"

grassroots viewing parties in venues such as sporting events, salons, and schools across the country. As a result, young people learned about how voting relates to their lives and why it is an important responsibility. While it is hard to measure the direct impact of this video on youth behavior during elections and overall participation, there is anecdotal evidence that it contributed to an increase in youth participation.

The success of the first film led Youngstars to produce a second film, titled “I voted now wetin,” or “Aftercount.” The film focuses on how young people can get involved in the political process after elections are over. In partnership with NDI and IRI, Youngstars has developed a discussion guide to help organize viewing sessions and facilitate discussion. Like the first film, the second has been very well received, with plans for broad dissemination later this year. As Youngstar’s director Kingsley Bagwell noted, when the organization saw the success of the first film, “we realized that media and entertainment are areas where we could really scale up our work.” By collaborating with popular actors and musicians from Nollywood, the Foundation has succeeded in catching young people’s attention and transmitting these very important messages in an exciting way for young people. While working with famous movie stars is not always an option, the important lesson from the success of Youngstars is their ability to reach out to youth in ways that appeal to them and get them interested in being positive forces in their communities.

Encouraging an Enabling Environment for Youth Participation

When considering work with young people and the barriers that they may face, it is also important to engage the older generations. Gaining buy-in among authority figures can go a long way toward ensuring that young people find real opportunities for meaningful participation. If power holders do not accept or encourage the empowerment of youth, this can be frustrating or demoralizing for young people, and negatively impact the success of a program. Securing explicit approval from authority figures for work with youth also helps create conditions more conducive to overall program success as members of the older generation are more likely to take note of the increased capacity of the youth participants and less likely to feel threatened as they were involved from the outset. It is thus important to find champions among older authority figures who support youth and youth participation.

For example, in Jordan, NDI is implementing a program called *Ana Usharek* (“I participate”). This program is composed of a series of discussion groups at eight universities across Jordan. Groups meet to discuss the principles and importance of democracy, human rights and electoral processes. The aim is to

empower youth at universities to play a constructive role in Jordan's political and decisionmaking processes. There are approximately 1,257 students participating in the discussion groups—with 85 groups in total—and more students continue to show an interest in taking part. While the enthusiasm and engagement of the student participants is the driving force behind the program, NDI also secured formal approval from university administrators. After receiving consent, NDI became the first organization allowed to work with university students on political participation. Although they do not participate in the discussion groups themselves, the deans of the participating universities continue to provide support, offer advice and meet regularly with the youth team.

In other countries, gaining support from political party and civil society organization leadership has also been crucial for programs that work with young members through leadership training. There is a need to engage parties and CSOs more, because if there is no party or CSO support when participants return from trainings, young people can become discouraged and the skills they acquired will not be put to use. Work to encouraging greater enabling environments is thus key.



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Additional Resources

- *ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLITICS IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS*, NDI
 - ◇ AVAILABLE ON THE NDI PORTAL
- *YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT: A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES AND POLICYMAKERS*, DFID
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: <http://www.ygproject.org/>
- INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION LIBRARY
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: <http://www.iyfnet.org/library>

CP Team Update

New Additions

Gabrielle Kaprielian is joining the Citizen Participation Team as the new Project Assistant. She received her B.A. in Political Science and French from the University of Arizona in 2006. She is currently working toward her Master of Arts at the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University, concentrating in conflict and conflict resolution. Prior to her graduate studies, Gabrielle worked as a teacher in the Dominican Republic, in an international relations think tank in Paris, and on a civic advocacy project in Armenia. In Armenia she began as a volunteer and later became the outreach and reporting officer on the program, which focused on supporting civic advocacy campaigns, election programming and civil society empowerment. She returned to the US for her master's degree in 2010, and will be graduating in May 2012.